
Camera-On Pressure and Emotional Exhaustion: The Mediating Role of Impression-Management Effort

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A B S T R A C T

The normative expectation of sustained camera visibility in organisational videoconferencing constitutes an emergent category of social-evaluative work demand whose psychological consequences remain theoretically underspecified and empirically underexamined, particularly within non-Western organisational settings. Drawing on Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory and the ego depletion framework, this study conceptualises impression management effort as the primary resource-depleting mechanism through which Camera-on pressure is associated with emotional exhaustion among corporate executives. The inquiry is situated within the Sri Lankan organisational context, extending examination of these relationships to a non-Western corporate setting. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data gathered from 217 corporate executives operating within virtual and hybrid work arrangements across Sri Lankan organisations. Hypothesised relationships were tested using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS. Structural estimates revealed that Camera-on pressure significantly and positively predicted impression management effort, which in turn significantly and positively predicted emotional exhaustion. The specific indirect effect was statistically significant, providing support for partial mediation. Collectively, these findings identify impression management effort as a proximal resource-depleting pathway linking Camera-on pressure to emotional exhaustion, thereby extending JD-R and ego depletion theorising to technology-mediated professional work. The study advances understanding of videoconference-related strain mechanisms while generating implications for human resource policy and virtual work governance. Limitations, boundary conditions, and directions for future longitudinal and cross-cultural inquiry are discussed.

Keywords: Camera-on pressure, Ego depletion, Emotional exhaustion, Impression management effort, Job Demands Resources theory

1. Introduction

Imagine a senior executive beginning her workday not in a physical boardroom but in front of a laptop camera, acutely aware that her facial expressions, background environment, posture,

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and professional appearance are continuous and simultaneous scrutiny from colleagues, subordinates, and superiors alike. This scene, which has become unremarkable in contemporary organisational life, encapsulates a transformation in professional communication that carries consequences far deeper than mere technological adaptation. The rapid institutionalisation of videoconferencing as a primary medium of organisational work has not simply relocated professional interaction from physical to digital space (Bailenson, 2021). It has fundamentally restructured the psychological and behavioral conditions under which that work occurs, giving rise to a novel category of work-related demand whose costs for employee well-being remain insufficiently understood.

Among the most consequential norms to emerge from this transformation is the organisational expectation that employees maintain continuous camera visibility throughout virtual meetings as a signal of engagement, professional presence, and hierarchical commitment (Nikolic & Holster, 2025; Tekle, 2024). While this expectation is rarely formalized in policy, it is powerfully enforced through the informal mechanisms of organisational culture, managerial surveillance, and social conformity pressure. For employees across organisational levels, switching off the camera during a virtual meeting has come to carry an implicit communicative burden, suggesting disengagement, lack of professionalism, or indifference to collective norms. The result is a self-presentational demand that is structurally embedded in the conditions of virtual work rather than chosen by the individual, and one whose psychological costs accumulate alongside rather than in place of the conventional cognitive demands of professional interaction (Bakker et al., 2007; Döring et al., 2022).

It is here that the focus on corporate executives becomes theoretically significant. Executives occupy highly visible organisational positions and are expected to communicate competence, authority, and confidence across multiple hierarchical relationships (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Bolino et al., 2016). These expectations may become particularly salient in videoconferencing, where facial expressions, appearance, and aspects of the surrounding environment become visible to others and may increase self-monitoring and impression-management demands (Bailenson, 2021). For executives, such pressures may have implications for perceptions of leadership credibility, competence, and trustworthiness (Härtel et al., 2025). Camera-on pressure can therefore be understood as more than a technological inconvenience; it represents an evaluative demand requiring ongoing self-regulation and professional self-presentation. This makes corporate executives a theoretically important population for examining Camera-on pressure as a technology-mediated occupational stressor.

The downstream outcome of central concern in this study is emotional exhaustion, the affective core of occupational burnout. Emotional exhaustion refers to a state of depleted psychological and emotional resources resulting from prolonged exposure to demanding work conditions (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It can adversely affect employees' well-being, work engagement, and individual job performance, which may subsequently have implications for organisational performance (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). If Camera-on pressure constitutes a meaningful antecedent of emotional exhaustion among executives, its consequences may therefore extend beyond individual discomfort to affect how effectively executives perform their roles and contribute to organisational functioning. This makes the investigation of Camera-on pressure particularly relevant within rapidly digitalizing corporate environments such as the Sri Lankan executive context.

Existing research has begun to illuminate the relationship between videoconferencing and fatigue-related outcomes. Shockley et al. (2021) found that camera use during virtual meetings significantly predicted fatigue beyond the effects of meeting duration and frequency,

attributing this effect partly to self-presentational burden. Bailenson (2021) theorized that structural conditions of videoconferencing, including continuous self-view, asymmetric gaze, and compressed interpersonal distance, create a form of nonverbal overload whose cumulative costs distinguish camera-enabled fatigue from conventional meeting fatigue. Bennett et al. (2021) further found that fatigue following videoconference meetings was significantly greater than fatigue following equivalent face-to-face interactions, even when controlling for meeting length and content. Döring et al. (2022) identified appearance management as an important fatigue-generating dimension of virtual meeting participation, suggesting that maintaining a professionally credible appearance under sustained visual scrutiny can impose additional affective and cognitive demands. Within the broader framework of Job Demands–Resources theory, Demerouti et al. (2001) and Chawla et al. (2021) provide a basis for understanding such evaluative and self-regulatory demands as potential sources of resource depletion, through which sustained demands may contribute to exhaustion.

Despite this emerging body of evidence, literature is characterized by two fundamental limitations that constrain both its theoretical development and its practical applicability. The first concerns psychological mechanism. Existing studies identify associations between camera use and fatigue outcomes but do not formally operationalize or test the psychological mechanism through which this relationship operates (Shockley et al., 2021; Ratan et al., 2022). Impression management effort, understood as the deliberate and resource-consuming self-regulatory process through which executives curate their professional self-presentation under conditions of sustained visual scrutiny, has been repeatedly invoked as a theoretically plausible mediating pathway (Vohs et al., 2005; Bolino et al., 2016) but has never been formally modeled as a mediator within a demand resource or ego depletion framework. The consequence is a literature in which the mechanism is consistently theorized but not systematically tested, leaving the causal architecture of the relationship between Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion empirically unresolved.

The second limitation concerns contextual scope. Extant videoconferencing wellbeing literature has been developed almost exclusively within Western, individualist organisational settings, with findings generalized across cultural contexts based on assumption rather than evidence (Kirkman et al., 2006; Taras et al., 2010). This limitation matters because culture is not a peripheral variable in the study of self-presentational pressure. It is constitutive of the meaning, stakes, and psychological cost of impression management itself. In collectivist, high power distance organisational environments, the failure to present oneself appropriately under conditions of hierarchical visibility carries consequences that extend beyond individual reputational damage into the domains of group harmony, relational trust, and face, the socially regulated system of esteem and moral standing that governs professional interaction in such contexts (Earley, 1997; Leung & Cohen, 2011). The applicability of findings developed in Western individualist settings to such environments cannot be assumed, yet no existing study has examined this question.

The cultural context provides a backdrop for examining these dynamics in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has been characterized in prior literature as a relatively collectivist and high-power-distance context (Hofstede, 2001). In the present study, these characteristics are treated only as contextual features of the research setting and are not modeled as predictors or moderators. Within this context, Camera-on settings during virtual meetings do not merely create conditions for self-presentation. They create conditions for high-stakes social evaluation in which professional identity, hierarchical standing, and relational integrity are simultaneously implicated. For Sri Lankan executives, the management of appearance under the Camera-on

condition is not simply a matter of looking professional. It is a matter of performing the relational and hierarchical obligations that define their organisational standing. This cultural amplification of self-presentational stakes provides compelling theoretical grounds to expect that the proposed relationship between Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion, mediated by impression management effort, will manifest with particular intensity in this population, and that its study will contribute insights with implications beyond the Sri Lankan context to the broader cross-cultural development of videoconferencing wellbeing research

1.1 Research Problem

The core research problem addressed by this study is the absence of a formally tested, theoretically grounded account of the psychological process through which Camera-on pressure is associated with emotional exhaustion among corporate executives, and the complete absence of any such account within the Sri Lankan organisational context. While the direct relationship between camera use and fatigue has been empirically documented in Western samples (Shockley et al., 2021; Bailenson, 2021; Bennett et al., 2021), the mediating mechanism through which this relationship operates has not been isolated, operationalized, or tested in any existing study. Impression management effort, as the theoretically coherent candidate mechanism rooted in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory and Baumeister et al.'s (1998) ego depletion framework, remains unexamined as a formal mediator despite its repeated theoretical invocation in the literature (Vohs et al., 2005; Bolino et al., 2016; Ratan et al., 2022). This constitutes a fundamental gap in the causal understanding of Camera-on pressure as an occupational stressor and represents the primary theoretical problem that the present study is designed to address.

The decision to study this phenomenon specifically among corporate executives is grounded in both theoretical necessity and practical urgency. Executives are not simply a convenient or accessible population. They represent the organisational stratum in which Camera-on pressure is most structurally amplified, most sustained, and most consequential. Virtual meetings constitute a primary medium of leadership communication for executives, who participate in high-frequency, high-stakes virtual interactions across hierarchical levels on a daily basis. The self-presentational demands incumbent upon this population during Camera-on meetings are qualitatively distinct from those facing employees at other organisational levels, given the simultaneous management of downward, lateral, and upward professional image, and the organisational consequences of any perceived lapse in composure, authority, or presence. If impression management effort mediates the relationship between Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion, its effects should be most visible and most severe in this population. Studying executives, therefore, provides not only the most theoretically informative test of the proposed mechanism but also the most organisationally consequential one, given that executive well-being is directly linked to the leadership capacity and strategic functioning of the organisations within which they serve.

The omission of non-Western organisational contexts from this literature constitutes an equally consequential empirical gap. Previous studies have failed to examine the Camera-on pressure, impression management effort, and emotional exhaustion within any collectivist or high-power distance organisational context, despite compelling theoretical reasons to expect that cultural dimensions significantly shape both the magnitude and the pathway of the proposed effects. Within Sri Lanka's collectivist and hierarchically structured corporate environment, self-presentation under Camera-on pressures carries social, relational, and hierarchical stakes that are categorically more complex than those present in Western individualist settings. The concept of face, as a central regulative force in professional interaction within this context (Earley, 1997; Leung & Cohen, 2011), renders impression

management a more effortful, more consequential, and more resource-consuming process than the existing literature, developed without reference to such dynamics, has thus far recognized. The absence of Sri Lankan corporate executives from the videoconferencing wellbeing literature, therefore, represents not merely a geographic omission but a substantive theoretical gap, one that limits the cross-cultural validity of existing findings and constrains the applicability of evidence-based guidance to a growing population of executives operating within digitalized and hybrid corporate environments.

The need for this study is therefore justified at three levels. Theoretically, a formally tested mediation model is required to advance understanding of the precise psychological pathway through which Camera-on pressure generates emotional exhaustion, moving the literature from the identification of association to the specification of mechanism and thereby enabling theoretically grounded intervention design. Empirically, the Sri Lankan corporate executive population represents an unexamined context whose cultural and organisational characteristics render it both theoretically significant and practically important for the development of a cross-culturally valid evidence base on videoconferencing wellbeing. Practically, organisations operating within Sri Lanka's expanding corporate sectors, including banking, financial services, information technology, and multinational subsidiary operations, require evidence-based guidance regarding the well-being costs of Camera-on norms at the executive level, guidance that the existing literature is currently unable to provide.

The present study addresses these theoretical, empirical, and practical imperatives by formally examining the mediating role of impression management effort in the relationship between Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion among corporate executives in Sri Lanka. In doing so, it provides the statistically tested, theoretically grounded mediation model of this relationship within a collectivist organisational context, contributing an original empirical account that advances both the occupational health and cross-cultural organisational behavior literatures while generating actionable evidence for Sri Lankan corporate practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Camera-on Pressure as an Occupational Demand

Camera-on pressure refers to the perceived organisational and social pressure to maintain visual visibility during virtual meetings, irrespective of individual preference. Research on videoconferencing has identified camera use and camera-related demands as relevant sources of fatigue and strain in virtual work environments (Shockley et al., 2021; Bailenson, 2021). Unlike conventional meeting workload, Camera-on pressure contains a social-evaluative component because employees remain visibly present to superiors, peers, and subordinates throughout the interaction. Consequently, participation involves not only attending to meeting content but also maintaining an appropriate visible professional presence. Such conditions may create additional self-regulatory demands that are distinct from the cognitive requirements of the meeting itself (Bennett et al., 2021; Döring et al., 2022).

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory provides a basis for conceptualizing Camera-on pressure as an occupational demand. Within the JD-R framework, job demands refer to physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of work that require sustained effort and may contribute to employee strain when the associated resource expenditure is prolonged (Bakker et al., 2007). Camera-on pressure can be understood within this framework because maintaining visible professional participation requires employees to devote psychological effort to managing how they appear and behave during virtual interactions. The demand

therefore extends beyond the technical requirement of using a camera and concerns the perceived expectation to remain continuously visible and professionally presentable.

The characteristics of videoconferencing may further intensify these demands. Bailenson (2021) argued that continuous self-view, asymmetric gaze, and reduced interpersonal distance create forms of nonverbal overload that distinguish videoconferencing from conventional face-to-face interaction. Bennett et al. (2021) similarly found greater fatigue following videoconference meetings than equivalent face-to-face interactions. Döring et al. (2022) and Ratan et al. (2022) further highlighted appearance-related concerns and self-presentation as relevant dimensions of virtual meeting experiences. These findings suggest that visual participation can introduce demands beyond meeting duration and content.

Importantly, Camera-on pressure is conceptually distinct from videoconference fatigue. Videoconference fatigue refers broadly to fatigue experienced during or following virtual meeting participation, whereas Camera-on pressure represents a perceived social-evaluative demand associated specifically with being expected to remain visibly present and professionally presentable. Thus, Camera-on pressure is positioned as an antecedent demand rather than as a fatigue outcome. Although prior studies have examined camera use, self-presentation, and videoconference-related fatigue, the psychological process through which perceived Camera-on pressure may be associated with emotional exhaustion remains insufficiently specified. The present study addresses this gap by examining impression-management effort as the mediating process linking Camera-on pressure with emotional exhaustion.

2.2. Impression Management Effort in Organisational and Virtual Work Contexts

Impression management is rooted in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, which conceptualises social interaction as involving the presentation of the self to an audience. Individuals regulate aspects of their behavior and appearance in accordance with the impressions they seek to create in particular social situations. In organisational contexts, impression management involves deliberate self-presentational behaviors intended to influence how individuals are perceived by others, including perceptions of competence, credibility, and professionalism (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Bolino et al., 2016).

The distinction between frontstage and back-stage behavior is particularly relevant to camera mediated workplace interaction. Front-stage behavior involves presentation of the self in situations where individuals are subject to audience observation, whereas back-stage contexts provide greater opportunity to relax or modify such presentation (Goffman, 1959). Camera-enabled workplace interactions can extend front-stage expectations into virtual settings because employees remain visually accessible to other participants throughout the interaction. Consequently, employees may devote greater attention to how they appear, behave, and respond while being observed by others.

Impression-management effort is therefore distinguished from impression-management behavior itself. The former concerns the psychological and self-regulatory effort involved in monitoring and controlling one's self-presentation. From the perspective of the strength model of self-regulation, deliberate self-presentation requires regulatory resources because individuals must regulate thoughts, emotions, and observable behavior in accordance with situational expectations (Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs et al., 2005). The amount of effort required may increase when self-presentation is perceived as obligatory, socially consequential, and subject to sustained evaluation (Bolino et al., 2016).

Camera-on interactions may create precisely these conditions. When employees perceive that maintaining camera visibility is expected, they may monitor their facial expressions, appearance, posture, attentiveness, and other visible behaviors to maintain a professionally appropriate image. The camera therefore does not merely make participation visible; it may increase the perceived need to regulate one's visible presentation. In this sense, Camera-on pressure represents the perceived demand, whereas impression-management effort represents the effort expended in responding to that demand.

The cultural context provides a setting within which these organisational processes can be examined. Sri Lanka has been characterized in prior literature as a relatively collectivist and high-power-distance context (Hofstede, 2001). Such characteristics provide relevant contextual background for examining professional interaction and hierarchical relationships in Sri Lankan organisations. However, the present study does not treat collectivism or power distance as explanatory variables, predictors, or moderators. They are considered contextual characteristics of the setting in which the proposed relationships are examined. Accordingly, no assumption is made that these cultural characteristics strengthen or weaken the relationships specified in the research model.

2.3. Emotional Exhaustion and the Self-Regulatory Resource Mechanism

Emotional exhaustion represents a state of depleted psychological and emotional resources associated with prolonged exposure to demanding work conditions and is widely recognized as a central dimension of occupational burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Within the present framework, emotional exhaustion is positioned as the downstream strain outcome. It is therefore conceptually distinct from both Camera-on pressure and impression-management effort. Camera-on pressure represents the perceived occupational demand, impression-management effort represents the effort expended in response to that demand, and emotional exhaustion represents the resulting state of psychological and emotional resource depletion.

The ego depletion framework provides the specific theoretical explanation for the relationship between impression-management effort and emotional exhaustion. The strength model of self-regulation proposes that deliberate regulation of thoughts, emotions, and behavior requires the expenditure of self-regulatory resources (Baumeister et al., 1998). Vohs et al. (2005) provided evidence that effortful self-presentation involves self-regulatory demands. From this perspective, employees who continuously regulate how they appear and behave in front of others must devote psychological resources to monitoring and controlling their visible presentation.

In Camera-on workplace interactions, this process may involve monitoring facial expressions, appearance, posture, attentiveness, emotional reactions, and other observable behaviors. Such monitoring requires employees to compare their ongoing behavior with situational expectations and make adjustments when necessary. The resulting self-regulatory activity represents an expenditure of psychological resources. When impression-management demands are sustained, repeated expenditure of these resources may reduce the resources available for subsequent emotional and behavioral regulation.

This provides the theoretical basis for the proposed relationship between impression-management effort and emotional exhaustion. Sustained self-regulatory effort may leave fewer resources available to manage subsequent emotional and cognitive demands, increasing the likelihood of psychological resource depletion. When demanding conditions persist and adequate recovery is limited, accumulated resource expenditure may be associated with greater emotional exhaustion (Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs et al., 2005). The proposed mechanism

can therefore be expressed as a sequence in which impression-management effort requires monitoring and self-regulation, sustained regulation requires psychological resource expenditure, and reduced availability of regulatory resources may contribute to emotional exhaustion.

The role of ego depletion in the present study is theoretical rather than empirical. Ego depletion is not included as a measured construct in the statistical model and is not proposed as an additional mediator. Instead, the framework is used to explain why impression-management effort may function as the resource-consuming mechanism through which an occupational demand is associated with emotional exhaustion. This distinction also clarifies the respective contribution of the theories used in the study. JD-R theory explains why Camera-on pressure can be conceptualized as an occupational demand; Goffman's dramaturgical framework explains the self-presentational context associated with visible workplace interaction; and the ego depletion framework explains how sustained impression-management effort may consume self-regulatory resources and contribute to exhaustion.

2.4. Hypothesis Development

2.4.1. Camera-on pressure and impression-management effort

Camera-on pressure increases the perceived requirement to remain visibly present and professionally presentable during virtual workplace interactions. When employees perceive that camera visibility is expected, they may devote greater effort to monitoring and regulating their visible self-presentation. This expectation is consistent with the organisational impression-management literature, which suggests that self-presentational effort becomes more relevant when individuals perceive strong social-evaluative expectations and greater consequences associated with how they are perceived by others (Bolino et al., 2016).

The relationship can also be understood from Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective. Camera-on interactions place employees in a continuously visible interactional setting in which aspects of their professional presentation remain accessible to an audience. Maintaining an appropriate professional image under these conditions may require greater attention to observable behavior and appearance. Thus, Camera-on pressure represents a perceived social-evaluative demand that may increase the effort employees devote to impression management.

Accordingly, Camera-on pressure is expected to be positively associated with impression-management effort. Based on this theoretical reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Camera-on pressure positively influences impression-management effort among corporate executives in Sri Lanka.

2.4.2. Impression-management effort and emotional exhaustion

The proposed relationship between impression-management effort and emotional exhaustion is grounded primarily in the ego depletion framework. Impression management requires individuals to monitor their behavior and regulate their presentation in accordance with situational expectations. In Camera-on interactions, this may involve continuous attention to facial expressions, appearance, posture, attentiveness, and other visible behaviors. Such deliberate monitoring and regulation require self-regulatory effort (Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs et al., 2005).

The expenditure of self-regulatory resources becomes theoretically important when impression-management effort is sustained. Repeated regulation may consume resources that are also required for subsequent emotional and behavioral regulation. From the ego depletion perspective, reduced availability of these resources may make subsequent self-regulation more

difficult and may contribute to psychological resource depletion. When employees remain exposed to demanding conditions over time, accumulated resource depletion may be associated with emotional exhaustion (Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs et al., 2005).

This mechanism distinguishes impression-management effort from emotional exhaustion. Impression-management effort refers to the regulatory effort expended to maintain a desired professional presentation, whereas emotional exhaustion refers to the subsequent state of depleted psychological and emotional resources. The proposed relationship therefore does not treat impression management and exhaustion as equivalent manifestations of videoconference fatigue. Instead, impression-management effort is positioned as a resource-consuming process that may contribute to a distinct strain outcome.

Accordingly, the proposed relationship is based on the theoretical sequence whereby impression-management effort requires continuous monitoring and self-regulation, sustained regulation consumes psychological resources, and reduced availability of such resources may contribute to emotional exhaustion. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Impression-management effort positively influences emotional exhaustion among corporate executives in Sri Lanka.

2.4.3. The mediating role of impression-management effort

The proposed mediation reflects a sequential theoretical process rather than merely a statistical association among the three constructs. Camera-on pressure represents the occupational demand that creates pressure for visible professional self-presentation. This demand is expected to increase impression-management effort because employees may need to devote greater attention to monitoring and regulating their visible presentation. The resulting effort requires self-regulatory resources, and sustained expenditure of these resources may reduce the resources available for subsequent emotional and behavioral regulation. From the ego depletion perspective, this resource-consuming process provides a theoretical explanation for how impression-management effort may contribute to emotional exhaustion.

The mediation mechanism therefore integrates the distinct explanatory roles of the theoretical perspectives employed in the study. JD-R theory conceptualises Camera-on pressure as the occupational demand; Goffman's dramaturgical framework explains why visible workplace interaction creates self-presentational expectations; and the ego depletion framework explains why the resulting impression-management effort may consume self-regulatory resources. Impression-management effort consequently represents the proximal resource-consuming mechanism through which Camera-on pressure may be associated with emotional exhaustion.

Importantly, Camera-on pressure is not conceptualized as a relabeling of general videoconference fatigue. Whereas videoconference fatigue represents a broad fatigue-related outcome associated with virtual meeting participation, Camera-on pressure captures the perceived social-evaluative demand associated with maintaining visible professional participation. Similarly, impression-management effort is distinct from Camera-on pressure because it represents the effort expended in response to the perceived demand. Emotional exhaustion is distinct from both because it represents the downstream state of psychological and emotional resource depletion. The proposed model therefore specifies three conceptually differentiated stages: perceived demand, resource-consuming self-regulatory effort, strain outcome.

Based on this theoretical reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Impression-management effort mediates the relationship between Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion among corporate executives in Sri Lanka.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

The three hypotheses are integrated within a mediation framework drawing on Job Demands–Resources theory (Bakker et al., 2007), Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical framework, and Baumeister et al.’s (1998) strength model of self-regulation. Each theoretical perspective serves a distinct explanatory role within the proposed model. JD-R theory conceptualises Camera-on pressure as an occupational demand that requires sustained psychological effort. Goffman’s dramaturgical framework explains the self-presentational context in which employees seek to maintain professionally appropriate impressions during visible workplace interactions. The ego depletion framework explains how impression-management effort may consume self-regulatory resources and contribute to emotional exhaustion.

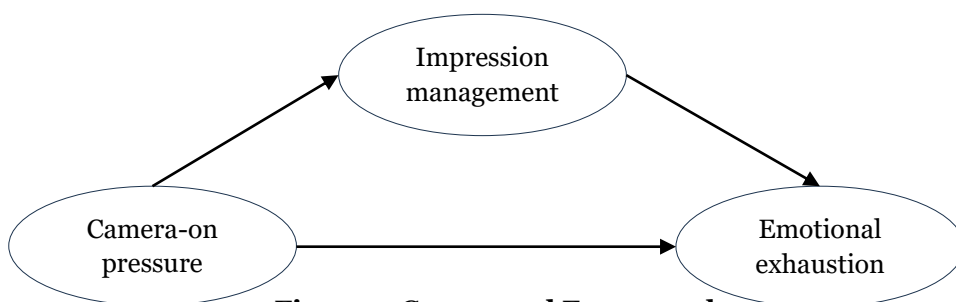


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Literature survey, 2026

Accordingly, Camera-on pressure represents the antecedent occupational demand, impression-management effort represents the resource-consuming mediating process, and emotional exhaustion represents the downstream strain outcome. The Sri Lankan organisational context provides the setting in which these relationships are examined, while cultural characteristics are treated as contextual features rather than explanatory variables within the model. Based on this theoretical integration, the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 was developed.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among Camera-on pressure, impression-management effort, and emotional exhaustion among corporate executives in Sri Lanka. Given the theory-driven nature of the study and its focus on examining relationships among latent constructs, variance-based structural equation modeling using SmartPLS was employed (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

The target population consisted of corporate executives working in virtual or hybrid work settings in organisations in Sri Lanka. For the purpose of this study, corporate executives were defined as employees occupying formal executive, supervisory, or managerial positions involving responsibility for supervising employees, coordinating work activities, and making or contributing to organisational decisions. Participants were required to have regular exposure to video-mediated workplace interactions. Purposive sampling was employed to reach respondents who met these criteria. Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms through professional and organisational

networks. The minimum sample size was determined based on Cohen's (1992) power analysis guidelines, considering the significance level, desired statistical power, anticipated effect size, and number of predictors in the model. The analysis indicated a minimum sample size of 180 respondents. A total of 217 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the recommended minimum and providing an adequate sample for the planned PLS-SEM analysis. Participation was voluntary, and respondent anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

All constructs were measured using previously validated scales with minor contextual adaptations to reflect the videoconferencing and organisational context of the study. Camera-on pressure was measured using six items adapted from Shockley et al. (2021). Impression management effort was measured using a 12-item scale adapted from Bolino and Turnley (1999), supplemented with self-regulatory effort items from Vohs et al. (2005). Emotional exhaustion was assessed using the five-item emotional exhaustion dimension of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey developed by Schaufeli et al. (1996). The dimensionality and measurement quality of the constructs were assessed by examining the outer loadings of individual items, internal consistency reliability, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. The outer loadings of the retained items were within acceptable levels, supporting the measurement of the constructs as specified in the model. The structural model and mediation effects were examined using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS, with bootstrapping based on 5,000 resamples. The analysis was used to test the hypothesised direct and indirect relationships among Camera-on pressure, impression-management effort, and emotional exhaustion.

4. Data Analysis

The present study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using Smart PLS 4.0 to test the proposed mediation model. PLS-SEM was selected over covariance-based structural equation modeling based on its established suitability for predictive research models, its robustness with reflective measurement structures, and its capacity to simultaneously evaluate measurement and structural model properties without imposing multivariate normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2019). The analytical procedure followed the two-stage assessment protocol recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), whereby the reliability and validity of the measurement model were fully established before the examination of structural relationships and hypothesis testing.

4.1. Sample Characteristics

The total sample of the present study comprised 217 respondents, of whom 109 were female (50.2%), and 108 were male (49.8%). In terms of age distribution, 34 respondents (15.7%) were below 25 years, 98 (45.2%) were between 25–30 years, 74 (34.1%) were between 31–35 years, and the remaining 11 (5.1%) were aged 36 years or above. Regarding work arrangement, 97 respondents (44.7%) were remote workers, while the remaining 120 (55.3%) were hybrid workers. With respect to functional department, 64 respondents (29.5%) were from Human Resource Management, 61 (28.1%) from Sales and Marketing, 39 (18.0%) from Finance, 21 (9.7%) from accounting, 4 (1.8%) from Supply Chain Management, and the remaining 28 (12.9%) represented other functional areas. In terms of provincial representation, the majority of respondents were from the Western Province ($n = 141$, 65.0%), followed by the Central Province ($n = 43$, 19.8%), Southern Province ($n = 21$, 9.7%), and Sabaragamuwa Province ($n = 12$, 5.5%).

4.2. Assessment of the Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated through four sequential criteria: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Following the outer loading refinement procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2019), two indicators with loadings below the 0.70 threshold, namely IME2 and COP6, were removed from the final measurement model. Their removal did not compromise construct content coverage, given the breadth of the remaining indicator pools, and it produced marginal improvements in convergent validity estimates across the affected constructs. All retained outer loadings exceeded 0.70, ranging from 0.711 to 0.889 for Camera-on pressure (COP), 0.702 to 0.885 for emotional exhaustion (EE), and 0.711 to 0.860 for impression management effort (IME), confirming satisfactory indicator reliability throughout (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1: Outer Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (rho_c), and AVE

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
COP	0.900	0.915	0.924	0.672
EE	0.886	0.902	0.918	0.695
IME	0.943	0.948	0.951	0.621

Internal consistency reliability was confirmed across all three constructs. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.900 for COP, 0.943 for IME, and 0.886 for EE, all substantially exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Composite reliability values (rho c) of 0.924, 0.951, and 0.918 for COP, IME, and EE, respectively, further corroborated the internal consistency of all constructs, surpassing the 0.70 benchmark recommended by Hair et al. (2019). Convergent validity was supported by average variance extracted (AVE) values of 0.672, 0.621, and 0.695 for COP, IME, and EE, respectively, all exceeding the 0.50 threshold.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), which is recognized in contemporary PLS-SEM literature as a more rigorous criterion than the traditional Fornell-Larcker approach (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT values for the three constructs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: HTMT Matrix

Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)	
EE <-> COP	0.650
IME <-> COP	0.563
IME <-> EE	0.611

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), which is recognized in the contemporary PLS-SEM literature as a more statistically rigorous criterion than the traditional Fornell-Larcker approach (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT values were well within the stringent threshold of 0.85 recommended for conceptually distinct constructs (Henseler et al., 2015), with EE and COP returning 0.650, IME and COP returning 0.563, and IME and EE returning 0.611. These values provide strong evidence that the three constructs are empirically distinct from one another and that responses to the measurement items were not driven by a single common methodological source. Common method bias was further assessed through examination of the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all retained indicators, all of which fell below the threshold of 5.0, confirming the absence of problematic collinearity within the measurement model (Kock, 2015).

Model fit was evaluated using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which returned a value of 0.068 for both the saturated and estimated models, falling within the acceptable threshold of 0.08 recommended for PLS-SEM applications (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Taken collectively, the measurement model results provide robust support for the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of all three constructs, establishing a sound foundation for the subsequent evaluation of the structural model.

4.3. Assessment of the Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

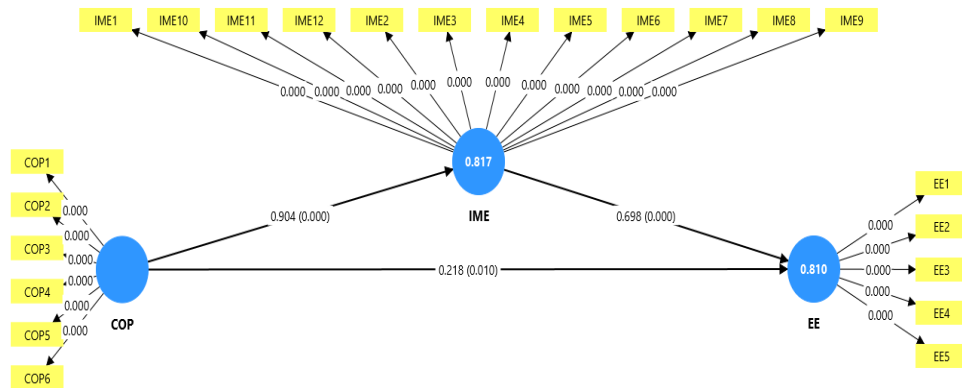


Figure 2: Structural Model

Figure 2 presents the hypothesised relationships among Camera-on pressure (COP), impression-management effort (IME), and emotional exhaustion (EE). The path coefficients (β) indicate the strength and direction of the structural relationships, while the R^2 values indicate the proportion of variance explained in the endogenous constructs. The model specifies the direct effects of COP on IME and EE, as well as the effect of IME on EE.

Table 3: Structural Model Assessment

Structural assessment	Value
R^2 – Impression-Management Effort (IME)	0.817
R^2 – Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.741
f^2 – COP $\rightarrow$ IME	4.46
f^2 – COP $\rightarrow$ EE	0.12
f^2 – IME $\rightarrow$ EE	0.48
Q^2 – Impression-Management Effort (IME)	0.802
Q^2 – Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.716

Before hypothesis testing, the structural model was assessed for collinearity using the inner VIF values. All VIF values were below 3.3, indicating that collinearity among the predictor constructs was unlikely to substantially affect the path estimates (Kock, 2015). The explanatory power of the structural model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), while f^2 was used to assess the effect sizes of the predictor constructs and Q^2 was used to assess predictive relevance. The model explained 81.7% of the variance in impression-management effort ($R^2 = 0.817$) and 74.1% of the variance in emotional exhaustion ($R^2 = 0.741$). The corresponding f^2 and Q^2 values are presented in Table 3.

The positive Q^2 values indicate predictive relevance for both endogenous constructs, while the R^2 and f^2 values provide evidence of the model's explanatory power and the effect sizes of the structural relationships, respectively.

With respect to H1, Camera-on pressure was found to be a strong and statistically significant positive predictor of impression-management effort ($\beta = 0.904$, $t = 43.845$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H1. Given the unusually high coefficient, the measurement items were reviewed for potential overlap, while discriminant validity was supported by the HTMT value of 0.563. Harman's single-factor test indicated that the first factor accounted for 37% of the total variance, below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to be a major concern. Nevertheless, the unusually high coefficient for the relationship between Camera-on pressure and impression-management effort warrants cautious interpretation.

Table 4: Direct and Indirect Effects

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values	2.5% CI	97.5% CI
COP → IME	0.904	0.902	0.021	43.845	0.001	0.86	0.94
IME → EE	0.698	0.701	0.083	8.443	0.001	0.53	0.86
COP → IME	0.631	0.633	0.075	8.364	0.001	0.48	0.77
IME → EE							

With respect to H2, impression-management effort significantly and positively predicted emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.698$, $t = 8.443$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H2. This finding indicates that higher levels of impression-management effort are associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion among the respondents. The result is consistent with the proposed resource-depletion explanation, whereby sustained self-regulatory effort may contribute to the depletion of psychological resources and subsequent emotional exhaustion (Baumeister et al., 1998; Bakker et al., 2007). The result is consistent with the proposed resource-depletion explanation, whereby sustained self-regulatory effort may contribute to the depletion of psychological resources and subsequent emotional exhaustion (Baumeister et al., 1998; Bakker et al., 2007).

The mediation hypothesis (H3) was examined through the specific indirect effect of Camera-on pressure on emotional exhaustion through impression-management effort using bootstrapped confidence intervals. The specific indirect effect was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.631$, $t = 8.364$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H3. This result indicates that impression-management effort represents a significant mediating pathway linking Camera-on pressure with emotional exhaustion.

The direct effect of Camera-on pressure on emotional exhaustion, estimated to be with impression-management effort included in the model, was also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.218$, $t = 2.581$, $p = 0.010$). Since both the indirect and direct effects were statistically significant and positive, the results indicate partial mediation. Thus, impression-management effort accounts for part of the association between Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion, while the remaining direct association suggests that other mechanisms may also contribute to the relationship. The total effect of Camera-on pressure on emotional exhaustion was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.849$, $t = 29.036$, $p < 0.001$), further supporting the overall relationship between Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion.

5. Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the present study advance the theoretical and empirical understanding of how Camera-on pressure produces emotional exhaustion among corporate executives, by formally establishing impression management effort as a significant mediating mechanism within a collectivist organisational context. The results provide robust support for all three hypotheses and collectively confirm that the psychological cost of Camera-on norms in virtual executive work is neither trivial nor direct in its entirety but operates through a theoretically coherent resource depletion pathway that carries meaningful implications for both scholarship and organisational practice.

The finding that Camera-on pressure positively predicts impression management effort ($\beta = 0.904, p < 0.001$) is consistent with and extends the theoretical arguments advanced by Shockley et al. (2021) and Bailenson (2021), who identified self-presentational burden as a theoretically plausible but empirically untested consequence of camera visibility in virtual meetings. The present study provides empirical confirmation of this relationship, establishing Camera-on pressure as a potent social evaluative job demand that compels executives to invest substantial self-regulatory resources in the deliberate curation of their professional self-presentation. The magnitude of this path coefficient is particularly notable and aligns with Goffman's (1959) theoretical proposition that the inescapability of front-stage conditions intensifies impression management effort, a condition that the videoconference screen constructs with particular force for executives whose professional authority and organisational standing are continuously visible and evaluable by all meeting participants simultaneously. This finding also resonates with Bolino et al. (2016), who demonstrated that obligatory rather than discretionary impression management is experienced as significantly more psychologically taxing, confirming that the normative compulsion embedded in Camera-on organisational cultures constitutes precisely the kind of demand most likely to activate sustained self-regulatory expenditure.

The significant positive relationship between impression management effort and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.698, p < 0.001$) corroborates the theoretical predictions of Baumeister et al.'s (1998) ego depletion framework and extends their application to the domain of technology-mediated professional work. This finding is consistent with Vohs et al. (2005), who established that effortful self-presentation and emotional regulation draw from the same finite self-regulatory resource pool, and with Grandey (2003), whose examination of surface acting in service work demonstrated that sustained audience-directed self-presentation independently predicts emotional exhaustion beyond conventional workload demands. The present study replicates and extends this logic to the executive videoconferencing context, demonstrating that the continuous effort of maintaining a professionally credible visual presentation across extended virtual interactions depletes the same affective resources whose exhaustion defines occupational burnout. The Sri Lankan executive context lends additional theoretical significance to this finding. Within a high power distance, collectivist organisational culture where self-presentation failure carries not only individual reputational but also relational and hierarchical consequences (Hofstede, 2001), the effortfulness of impression management under camera observation is theoretically amplified, rendering the depletion pathway toward emotional exhaustion more pronounced than would be expected in individualist organisational settings, a prediction borne out by the strength of the observed relationship.

The confirmation of partial mediation through the significant specific indirect effect ($\beta = 0.631$, $p < 0.001$) represents the study's most theoretically consequential contribution. While impression management effort accounts for a substantial portion of the total effect of Camera-on pressure on emotional exhaustion, the retention of a significant direct effect ($\beta = 0.218$, $p = 0.010$) indicates that additional mediating mechanisms are operative in this relationship and remain unspecified by the current model. This partial mediation finding is consistent with the broader JD-R literature, in which single mediators rarely exhaust the total effect of complex social evaluative demands on well-being outcomes (Bakker et al., 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and it opens productive theoretical space for future inquiry into complementary mediating pathways such as cognitive load, privacy invasion concerns, and reduced autonomy perceptions that may further specify the Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion relationship.

The practical implications of these findings are directly actionable at the organisational and human resource management levels. Organisations operating within Sri Lanka's corporate sectors are encouraged to critically examine the normative structures that institutionalize Camera-on expectations, recognizing that such norms impose a resource-depleting self-regulatory burden that accumulates across the working day and translates into higher levels of emotional exhaustion over time. Human resource managers should consider developing explicit and evidence-based virtual meeting policies that introduce camera optionality as a default rather than an exception, permitting executives to exercise judgment regarding camera use based on meeting purpose, audience composition, and personal resource availability. Structured camera off intervals during extended virtual interactions, reduced meeting frequency through asynchronous communication alternatives, and clear organisational messaging that decouples camera visibility from perceptions of professional commitment and engagement would constitute meaningful well-being protective interventions grounded in the present findings. Furthermore, executive well-being programs should be expanded to incorporate psychological recovery support specifically targeting self-regulatory depletion arising from virtual work demands, including mindfulness-based recovery practices, workload monitoring protocols, and peer supervision structures that normalize the acknowledgment of presentational fatigue in hierarchical organisational cultures where such disclosure may otherwise be constrained by power distance norms.

5.2. Conclusion

The present study set out to examine the psychological mechanism through which Camera-on pressure produces emotional exhaustion among corporate executives in Sri Lanka, proposing and testing impression management effort as a theoretically grounded mediating pathway within an integrated Job Demands Resources and ego depletion framework. The findings confirm all three hypothesised relationships, establishing that Camera-on pressure constitutes a potent social evaluative job demand that activates sustained and resource-depleting impression management effort, which in turn produces significant levels of emotional exhaustion among the sampled executives. The partial mediation result further establishes that impression management effort, while a primary and substantive mediating mechanism, does not fully account for the total effect of Camera-on pressure on emotional exhaustion, signaling the operation of additional pathways that future research is positioned to identify and test. By situating this inquiry within the Sri Lankan corporate executive context, the study demonstrates that cultural dimensions of collectivism and power distance are not merely background conditions but theoretically active amplifiers of the resource depletion process at the core of the proposed model, lending the findings both theoretical specificity and cross-cultural significance. The study's contributions to the occupational health, virtual work, and

cross-cultural organisational behavior literatures are complemented by its practical implications for human resource management practice in Sri Lankan organisations navigating the challenges and well-being costs of increasingly normalized virtual and hybrid work infrastructures. It is hoped that the present findings will stimulate further theoretically grounded and contextually sensitive scholarship on the psychological consequences of Camera-on norms, ultimately contributing to evidence-based organisational policies that protect the well-being and sustainable performance of executive populations in digitally mediated professional environments.

5.3. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The present study makes several distinct theoretical contributions to the organisational behavior, occupational health, and cross-cultural management literatures. First, it provides a formally tested mediation model in which impression management effort is operationalized as a resource-depleting mechanism within the JD-R health impairment pathway, extending both JD-R theorising and Baumeister et al.'s (1998) ego depletion framework to the domain of technology-mediated executive work. This extension is theoretically significant because it moves the videoconferencing well-being literature from the documentation of associations to the specification of mechanisms, enabling theoretically grounded rather than descriptively motivated intervention design. Second, the study examines the Sri Lankan corporate management context as a setting for organisational well-being research and considers how collectivism and power distance may provide contextual conditions for understanding the resource depletion processes proposed by the Job Demands–Resources and ego depletion frameworks. This finding contributes to the growing body of cross-cultural organisational behavior scholarship calling for the systematic examination of Western-derived theoretical frameworks in non-Western organisational contexts (Kirkman et al., 2006; Taras et al., 2010). Third, the partial mediation result generates a theoretically important research agenda by signaling that the Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion relationship is multiply mediated, inviting future theoretical elaboration of the additional pathways through which camera visibility produces psychological harm in executive populations.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings carry direct implications for human resource policy design, executive leadership development, and organisational culture management in Sri Lankan corporate environments. The strong total effect of Camera-on pressure on emotional exhaustion signals that current virtual meeting norms carry a substantially higher psychological cost for executives than organisations may recognize or account for in their well-being management frameworks. HR practitioners are specifically advised to incorporate measures of virtual work-related strain, including impression management burden and emotional exhaustion, into their existing employee well-being assessment instruments, and to treat elevated scores on these dimensions as early indicators of burnout risk requiring proactive rather than reactive organisational response.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged and inform the design of future investigations. The cross-sectional survey design, while appropriate for an initial examination of the proposed mediation model, precludes causal inference and cannot rule out reverse causality or reciprocal relationships among the study variables. Future research should employ longitudinal or experience sampling methodologies to capture the temporal dynamics of resource depletion across repeated Camera-on interactions and to establish the directionality of the observed relationships with greater confidence. The reliance on self-reported data from a single measurement occasion introduces the possibility of common

method variance, which, while addressed through VIF assessment, cannot be entirely eliminated without multi-source or objective measurement approaches. Future studies would benefit from supplementing self-report data with physiological indicators of self-regulatory depletion, such as cortisol or heart rate variability measures, to provide convergent validity for the impression management effort construct.

The purposive sampling strategy, while appropriate for targeting executives with relevant Camera-on exposure, limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the sampled organisational sectors and may introduce selection bias toward respondents with particularly salient experiences of Camera-on pressure. Future research should employ probability-based sampling frames across a broader range of Sri Lankan organisational sectors, including public sector and small and medium enterprise contexts, to establish the boundary conditions of the present findings. Additionally, the study examined impression management effort as the sole mediating mechanism in the Camera-on pressure and emotional exhaustion relationship, despite the partial mediation finding suggesting the operation of additional pathways. Future research should develop theoretically grounded models incorporating multiple concurrent mediators, including cognitive load, perceived autonomy loss, and privacy invasion appraisals, to more fully specify the psychological process architecture connecting Camera-on norms to executive well-being outcomes. Finally, comparative studies examining the proposed model across cultural contexts varying systematically in collectivism and power distance would contribute substantially to the theoretical generalizability of the present findings and to the development of a cross-culturally valid evidence base for virtual work well-being scholarship.

5.5. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles applicable to research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw from participation. No personally identifiable information was collected, and participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

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