

Fast Fashion Emerging-Market Approach-Consumer Consciousness of Services through the Paradoxical Lens of Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Purpose—This research aims to investigate the relationship between customer consciousness, customer empowerment, utilitarian value, and word-of-mouth behavior in the fast fashion omnichannel industry in Pakistan.

Study Design/methodology/approach—The study has employed Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm to validate and explain the relationships. The study has employed a time-lagged survey method and collected data from 392 customers using omnichannel. The research has used SmartPLS version 4.1.1.1 for the study.

Findings— Empirical research has shown that Customer consciousness is a key predictor of utilitarian value and word-of-mouth. Utilitarian value mediates this relationship. The results have also shown insignificant moderation due to differences in the circumstances of emerging markets and customer mindsets, indicating that empowerment is situation-specific and does not necessarily amplify its effects in all situations.

Practical Implications— The results indicate that the retailers must create consistent and empowering service journeys that create explanatory agency. Perceptions of risk, digital fluency, as well as service transparency need to respond to personalization and empowerment strategies in new markets.

Originality/value—The current study addresses the knowledge gap by introducing the concept of empowerment within the SOR Model and its correlation with SDL. It positions the efficacy of a conscious consumer and empirically tests within the framework of fragmented omnichannel retail in Pakistan, providing new insights into consumer agency and value fulfillment.

Limitations/Future research—The limitations have led to the future suggestions that further research be conducted to encompass a multi-group comparison of income and digital literacy groups, as well as longitudinal and ethnographic studies to develop more insightful information on how empowerment is applied in different consumer contexts. Other structural factors should also be investigated.

Keywords: Fast fashion marketing, customer empowerment, SOR Model, Customer Consciousness of service experiences, Digital transformation in retail, Word of mouth, Service Dominant Logic

JEL Classification Codes: M31, D91, L81, O33

1 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 | Background and Context

Customer-centric conscious service development is the key to curating experiences based on data-driven algorithms ([H. Liu et al., 2024](#)). The knowledge gained from them has become a crucial aspect of value generation and relationship formation in the new retail landscape of touchpoints. In these environments, consumers and businesses engage on a one-on-one basis ([Askari et al., 2024](#)). Moreover, with the formed consciousness, people can receive service signals, evaluate the ethical dimension of personalization, and consider brand responsiveness in omnichannel situations of fast fashion, where consumers are involved in numerous fragmented touchpoints that are digital and physical ([Ergin et al., 2024](#)). Infrastructural drawbacks, digital illiteracy, and economic insecurity also contribute to fragmentation in emerging markets such as Pakistan([Asif, 2025](#)). This enhances the service experience, making it more cognitive and even psychologically improved. The paper addresses the gap in critical theory by offering a unification model that incorporates both stimulus-occurring psychological processing and resource-based agency activation, facilitating the creation of values within complex service environments. Although previous studies ([Kurt & Kircova, 2023](#)) have discussed customer consciousness as an evaluative awareness of service quality and customer empowerment as a consumer agency resource, the relationship between the two has not received much theoretical consideration. In addition, the majority of the literature has treated and discussed these constructs separately. It does not explain how empowered cognition contributes to transforming awareness into functional value and advocacy.

The omnichannel service experiences in the fast fashion industry of Pakistan are becoming increasingly sophisticated, although they remain fragmented, algorithmically edited, and psychologically incongruent ([Adula & Kant, 2025](#); [Mishra et al., 2023](#)). These discrepancies are amplified by digital asymmetries and personalization, which create a situation of contextual gap as consumers are exposed to service offerings that demand too much of their interpretive powers and brand beliefs. Even though service experiences can be meta-cognitive stimuli, leading to self-examination and functional judgment ([Catherine et al., 2024](#)), they are dependent on the consumer's psychological desire to act and think. This alone constitutes a conceptual disconnection that existing models cannot describe how the role is adequate, of customer consciousness (CC), critical knowledge of the quality of services, and how it is possible to change. To utilitarian value (UV) and eventually lead to word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior, especially in new, developing markets.

In theory, such a study will merge the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm ([Russell & Mehrabian, 1977](#)) with Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) ([Vargo & Lusch, 2004](#)) to fill this gap. S-O-R illustrates CC in the form of an activating stimulus (UV), which leads to WOM (response). This is enhanced by SDL, which considers customer empowerment (CEm) as an operant resource, operationalized as a systemic influencing factor that moderates the CC-UV pathway. The greater the power of a consumer, the more connotative value they are likely to receive regarding the elements of service cues and convert that awareness into functional value ([Aw et al., 2024](#)). However, in developing markets, empowerment is not distributed equally ([Kini & Basri, 2023](#)); it is influenced by digital fluency, income stability, and the perceived risk associated with the service. This paper presents a critical assessment of the statement that, under a limited set of conditions, empowerment either positively or neutrally increases the value realization.

UV is reconsidered not as a transactional consequence, but as a cognitive translator, a process that transforms abstract awareness into rationalized brand support. The UV is a mandatory filter of advocacy ([Majeed et al., 2024](#)) in the context of fast fashion in Pakistan, where price sensitivity and digital diversity are considered the main trends ([Daniyal et al., 2025](#)). WOM, in turn, is reconceptualized as an activity of endorsing behavior, which is influenced by cognitive evaluation and psychological agency. This paper presents a comprehensive model of the relationship between meta-cognitive awareness and conditional empowerment in influencing consumer advocacy in digitally fragmented, non-Western retail environments by linking CC, UV, and CEm to WOM.

1.2 | Study Gap.

Although the adoption of omnichannel services in the fast fashion sector in Pakistan is growing ([Amir et al., 2023](#)), these services continue to be disjointed, sequential, and cognitively fragmented ([Mishra et al., 2025](#)). It indicates a contextual disjunction: consumers have experienced uneven service experiences, characterized by digital asymmetries and an overload of individualization. In theory, the current models are not meta-cognitively based to describe how consumers perceive such experiences and translate the awareness to advocacy. The paper will fill this gap by exploring how empowerment, operationalized via customer empowerment, interacts with omnichannel service experience consciousness to affect utilitarian value. The study provides a dual-theoretical account of the development of fragmented service awareness into word-of-mouth advocacy, characterizing empowerment as the conditional amplifier and utilitarian value as the cognitive translator.

1.3 | Theoretical Mapping

In this paper, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework ([Russell & Mehrabian, 1977](#)) and Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) ([Vargo & Lusch, 2004](#)) are employed as two conceptual perspectives to describe the influence of customer consciousness and customer empowerment on value and advocacy within the omnichannel fast fashion sector. S-O-R models behavior as a sequence: Customer Consciousness (CC) is the stimulus, which drives Utilitarian Value (UV) as the organism, thus resulting in Word of Mouth (WOM) as the response. UV is a mental bridge that converts awareness into action. SDL builds upon it by viewing Customer Empowerment (CEm) as a resource that is operant, and which comes into play when consumers are capable of interpreting and personalizing service cues. This empowerment is conditional in the emerging markets, which is informed by digital fluency and perceived risk. S-O-R and SDL, together, describe psychological flow and inculcate consumer agency, respectively. Such a dual-theory model encompasses the process by which consumers process service experiences, as well as the moment at which they are enabled to act on those experiences.

In newer markets such as Pakistan, digital inequality, the lack of personalization literacy, and economic precarity make it challenging to read and act on service experiences of the consumer ([Daniyal et al., 2025](#)). Customer Consciousness (CC) - the evaluative mindfulness of service quality - is disproportionately allocated because of discontinuous omnichannel exposure. Utilitarian Value (UV) is conceptually universal, but a construct of cognition, where customers justify service coherence before taking advocacy action ([Teo et al., 2024](#)). Customer Empowerment (CEm), operationalized with the help of individual influence differentiation, is not an element of character but an activated resource ([Kini & Basri, 2023](#)). Empowerment cannot boost value

realization in the low digital fluency or high service risk contexts. Such conditionality is the main feature of SDL, which considers empowerment as an operant resource that becomes efficient only when consumers have the interpretive potential and contextual preparedness to co-create value.

This study employs a combination of S-O-R and SDL to describe the psychological process (how CC causes UV and WOM) and the agency mechanism (when and how CEm augments this pathway). It is a two-theory model that suits emerging markets exceptionally well, in which the structural constraints and service asymmetries are the elements of consumer cognition and empowerment.

1.4 | Research Questions

RQ1: To what degree does customer empowerment, as a metacognitive construct, influence the relationship between customer consciousness and utilitarian value, and how can this interaction contribute to a dual-theory model (S-O-R and SDL) of consumer relationship development in digitally fragmented service contexts?

RQ2: How does consumer awareness, shaped by evaluative service experiences based on service performance consciousness across omnichannel touchpoints, affect utilitarian value and word-of-mouth behavior in retail ecosystems in emerging markets?

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Customer Consciousness of Services (CC)

Consciousness, formerly defined as the evaluative awareness of service quality at touchpoints ([Grewal et al., 2017](#)), has evolved into a more sophisticated concept known as Service Experience Consciousness. Service Experiences Consciousness (SEC) involves being sensitive to the service delivery process, as well as the consumer's ability to interpret, reflect, and have emotional reactions to the entire service experience ([Osakwe & Chovancová, 2015](#)). It is a meta-cognitive construct that transcends awareness, combining cognitive appraisal, affective resonance, and ethical contemplation. Synthesizing these experiences into a consistent brand story within the omnichannel fast fashion model, where customers engage with fragmented interfaces, mobile applications, social media, physical storefronts, and e-commerce platforms, is the key concept behind CC ([Kurt & Kircova, 2023](#)). More importantly, it is the interpretive agency of the consumer, their capacity to define aspects of personalization, test service reliability, and measure brand responsiveness, that determines the customer's experience consciousness. In a country with low digital literacy rates and personalization, such as Pakistan, the psychological, but not technological, access condition is one of the reasons why CC only occurs under conditions of psychological readiness ([Younus et al., 2024](#)). This question challenges the hypothesis that omnichannel access invariably raises awareness, but, in fact, it makes consciousness formation visible; it is not homogeneous, but differentiated by circumstance and capacity to form, is limited by structural asymmetries, and is usually so as well.

CC is one of the stimuli in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model ([Russell & Mehrabian, 1977](#)), and thus it is a fundamental element in stimulating internal psychological conditions. It activates Utilitarian Value (UV) within the organism, prompting consumers to consider the functional advantages of their service interactions. CC is a more powerful antecedent of behavioral consequences than price or convenience, as it is an experience-rich and psychologically loaded stimulus compared to generic stimuli

([Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2011](#)). It is also supported by a combination of Customer Empowerment (CEm), which enables consumers to translate their conscious awareness into action by making decisive choices and navigating within the channel. The contribution of the CC to such customer satisfaction, brand trust, and advocacy behavior has already been empirically tested ([Kurt & Kircova, 2023](#); [Soesanto, 2024](#)), albeit there is limited literature on its relationship testing with the constructs of UV and Word of Mouth (WOM) in the fast fashion industry. The paper not only situates CC as a perceptual variable but also as a strategic stimulus, the one that causes the psychological/behavioral cascade of value creation and consumer advocacy. The article situates the CC in a dual-theory context (S-O-R and SDL) to encourage a more critical and context-sensitive approach to how consumers in emerging markets perceive, evaluate, and respond to their experiences with omnichannel services.

H1: *Customer consciousness of customer service experiences has a positive impact on word-of-mouth behavior.*

2.2 | Utilitarian Value (UV)

Utilitarian Value (UV) is a logical evaluation of the contacts between the consumers to the services, and their productivity, convenience, and the capacity to resolve problems ([Babin et al., 1994](#)). To define UV in omnichannel fast fashion, it involves not only aggregating all consumer transactions to attain coherence and utility for the discontinuous services that consumers receive, but also encompasses the ecosystem of the service process ([Dam, 2025](#)). The concept of UV is reflected in smooth checkouts, accurate product information, and timely delivery; however, its underlying meaning is that it establishes a cognitive link between the Service Experience Consciousness and the behavioral consequences that follow. Most importantly, UV is a result of the consumer's interpretive activity in response to service cues. High CC consumers (or those who carefully consider personalization, channel consistency, and responsiveness) are not necessarily brand advocates, even though they are the consumers who show high CC. Instead, they should first transform their awareness into a required value recognition, to which their inclinations to act suffice, conversely. This shift aligns with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, where CC is the stimulus, UV is the organism, and Word-of-Mouth (WoM) is the response.

Empirical data from the retail sector support the centrality of UV in motivating loyalty and advocacy ([Alzayat & Lee, 2021](#)), as well as in e-commerce ([Dam, 2025](#)), healthcare ([Teo et al., 2024](#)), and hospitality ([Chaulagain, 2024](#)) sectors. Within the fast fashion industry, where consumers are both highly price-sensitive and digitally savvy, UV becomes a mental screen: consumers only exhibit WoM behavior during service experiences that they find valuable and coherent. Therefore, UV is not a passive result but a tactical intermediary, transforming abstract consciousness into practical brand support.

H2: *Utilitarian value is positively affected by customer consciousness as far as services are concerned.*

H3: *The utilitarian value has a positive impact on word-of-mouth behavior.*

2.3 | Word of Mouth (WOM): Passive Outcomes to Empowered Advocacy

Word of Mouth (WoM) has traditionally been viewed as informal interpersonal communication, motivated by consumer satisfaction, trust, and affective investment ([Akturan & Kuter, 2024](#)). Early service literature referred to WoM as a by-product of good experiences, organic, reactive ([Taylor & Todd, 1995](#)). However, in the omnichannel era, Word of Mouth (WoM) has emerged as a key strategic behavior, shaped by the consumer's evaluative awareness and practical assessment of service interactions that inform ([Akturan & Kuter, 2024](#)). Activity on social media, peer reviews, and trend circulation are also some of the ways in which social media enhances the power of WoM in fast fashion. Social media consequence is also an indicator of consumer agency ([Tja & Widjaja, 2024](#)). Customers are no longer simply sharing experiences; today, they are creating stories of perceived value and embedding them into their delivery channels. This shift makes WoM a deliberate action, similar to advocacy, which is based on deeper mental activities. More importantly, the first trigger in this chain of behavior is Service Experience Consciousness (CC). Highly service-conscious consumers (across mobile applications, brick-and-mortar stores, and web platforms) are more likely to engage in reflective assessment ([Natarajan & Veera Raghavan, 2024](#)). However, this knowledge alone is not enough to make someone an advocate. It must be translated into Utilitarian Value (UV), a component of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, which reflects the practical usefulness of service interactions.

UV is used as a psychological mediator, which changes abstract awareness to rationalization of brand support. The hypothesis that UV mediates the relationship between consciousness and WoM (as well as in fragmented service environments) is supported by empirical studies in the hospitality ([Ali et al., 2021](#)), e-commerce ([Harisandi et al., 2023](#)), and fintech ([Dehghani et al., 2024](#)) fields. The fast fashion industry in Pakistan faces a problem of asymmetry in service emulsions and digital divides, so UV is a critical filter option for this sector ([Raza et al., 2025](#)). Only when consumers see specific benefits in their omnichannel experiences do they express the behavior of WoM. Therefore, WoM in this research is not only a communicative action but a behavioral endorsement, which is a product of a complex psychological action ([Kim et al., 2024](#)). CC, UV, and WoM, respectively, initiate, prove, and finalize the evaluation process. This channel emphasizes the importance of creating service experiences that are not only memorable but also functionally significant, enabling consumers to progress from awareness to empowered advocacy.

H4: *Consumer Utilitarian value mediates the association between customer consciousness and word-of-mouth behavior*

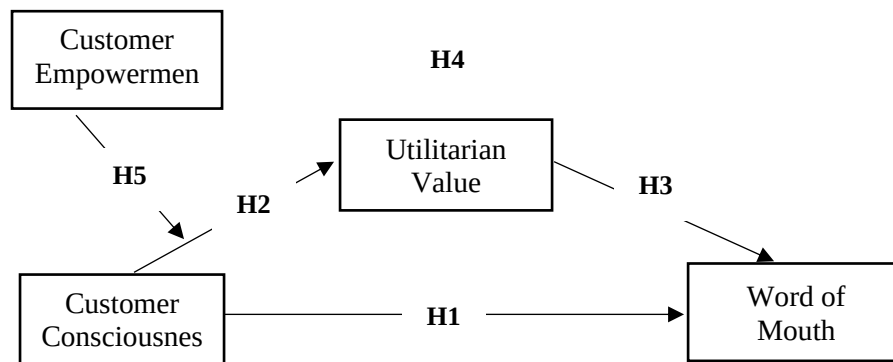
2.4 | Moderation: Conditional Amplifier, Customer Empowerment.

The initiator of consumer agency and value creation in interventions is traditionally placed on Customer Empowerment (CEm), which is a metacognitive concept that involves a sense of meaning, competency, self-determination, and impact ([Hunter & Garnefeld, 2008](#)). CEm in omnichannel fast fashion allows consumers to experience service cues, cross-platform navigation, and functional utility. In theory, CEm superimposes the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) pathway to enhance the correlation between Service Experience Consciousness (CC) and Utilitarian Value (UV). It is also related to Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), which assumes that consumers are operant resources that can influence service results ([Vargo et al., 2020](#)).

Nevertheless, CEm has a paradoxical nature when implemented in emerging markets such as Pakistan ([Itani et al., 2023](#)). As consumers become more demanding in terms of customized offers and adaptive service journeys, they are frequently limited in their empowerment due to the financial precarities of economic inequality, asymmetries on the Internet, and the risk-aversion phenomenon. In these situations, there is no homogeneous liberation of empowerment; it is contingent. It is possible that consumers need to be in control of their service experiences; however, they also value functional reliability and risk reduction, particularly in fast fashion stores, where products are sold quickly and service failures are a common occurrence ([Y. Liu et al., 2024](#)). This paradox undermines the notion of greater empowerment, which is intended to lead to increased value realization. The fast fashion industry in Pakistan demonstrates that customer payment is high in terms of CC-attentiveness to quality of service and personality; however, customers are more likely to turn their attention to UV when they feel safe, informed, and able to pay. Empowerment without utility is just air to many; they are not after autonomy per se, but rather as a utility-generating tool to maximize value and minimize uncertainties. Therefore, CEm does not work as a universal amplifier, but rather as a conditional moderator, which has varying effects depending on circumstances, including income stability, digital fluency, and perceived service risk.

Empowered consumers in Pakistan may still be required to follow utilitarian logic in their purchasing decisions. They want to feel control, but they need efficiency, clarity, and the ability to solve problems, which UV has ([Majeed et al., 2024](#)). This duality implies that empowerment and utility are not competing constructs but interdependent levels of consumer cognition. CEm enhances the consumer's ability to derive value from service experiences when the service environment facilitates informed decision-making and reduces perceived risk. CEm is thus not considered in this work as a fixed phenomenon ([Maier & Baccarella, 2025](#)), but rather as a contradictory variable ([Yang et al., 2025](#)), one that can facilitate as well as prevent the formation of values, although in a contextually ready situation of the consumer. Its moderating position in the CC-UV pathway is important for understanding how the desire to feel autonomous and the need for functional assurance interact in a way that creates a moderating role for the consumer in emerging markets. Such a subtle approach advances both S-O-R and SDL by situating the issue of empowerment within the concrete circumstances of economically disadvantaged, digitally shifting consumer groups.

H5: *Customer consciousness and utilitarian value are moderated by customer empowerment.*

Figure 1*Theoretical Model***Table 1***Theoretical Mapping*

Dimension	S-O-R Framework	Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)
Core Focus	Psychological sequencing: how stimuli trigger internal states and behavior	Value co-creation through consumer agency and operant resources
Key Constructs in Study	CC (Stimulus), UV (Organism), WOM (Response)	CEm (Operant Resource), UV (Value Outcome), WOM (Advocacy Output)
Mechanism of Action	Linear: Stimulus → Evaluation → Behavior	Interactive: Resource Activation → Interpretation → Value
Role of Empowerment	Moderates CC–UV link by enhancing evaluative capacity	Enables interpretive agency and contextual value realization
Contextual Sensitivity	Assumes psychological readiness	Recognizes empowerment as situational and contingent
Strengths	Captures cognitive flow from awareness to advocacy	Embeds consumer agency and explains conditional amplification
Limitations	Limited treatment of autonomy and resource activation	Less emphasis on psychological sequencing and stimulus processing

3 | METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

3.1 | Research Design and Sampling

Customer Empowerment (CEm), Customer Consciousness (CC), Utilitarian Value (UV), and Word of Mouth (WOM) were examined in Pakistan's fast fashion omnichannel industry using a quantitative, time-lagged survey design. With CC and CEm acting as stimuli, UV acting as the organism, and WOM acting as the response, the design was influenced by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and Service-Dominant Logic (SDL). Data were gathered in three waves (with two weeks in between) in accordance with the procedures as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to strengthen causal inference. Additionally, this also helps reduce common method bias (CMB). This time gap made it possible to isolate predictor, moderator, mediator, and outcome variables with time. The sampling was done using a purposive sampling technique in the three major fast fashion retail hubs in Pakistan: Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore. To be eligible, the

applicant must have interacted with fast fashion brands online and offline within the last three months or more. Following the screening of the cross-waves, 392 out of the 417 questionnaires were retained, resulting in a response rate of 94%. The sample, which constituted the focal population of fast fashion consumers in Pakistan, was gender-balanced (54% females), and most of them were individuals aged 18-35, including professionals, freelancers, and students.

To achieve relevance and contextual congruence, the purposive sampling method was adopted; therefore, only consumers with recent experience using fast fashion brands that employ omnichannel strategies in Pakistan were included. The stated decision was explained by the fact that the study should involve measuring evaluative service consciousness and empowerment. Nevertheless, these phenomena require the involvement of respondents who have been exposed to both online and offline service environments appropriately. The sample would be selected from Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore, the major fast fashion hubs in Pakistan, which would provide a diverse range of digital fluency, income, and expectations of the services. The sample included freelancers, professionals, and students aged 18 to 35, an age bracket that is the most active in omnichannel retail ([Raza et al., 2025](#)). These increases characterize the representativeness of the behavioral constructs being studied.

3.2 | Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board at the university where the research was conducted approved the ethics protocol. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, who were assured of confidentiality and provided informed consent. Further licenses were obtained regarding brand-specific feedback.

4 | RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 | Analytical Approach.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS v4.1.1.1. PLS-SEM was chosen over CB-SEM because it provides the best fit for developing theories, prediction-focused models, and complex models of mediation, particularly when the data are non-normalized and the sample size is moderate ([Hair Jr et al., 2017](#)).

4.2 | Common Method Bias and Collinearity Diagnostics.

To determine the CMB, a single-factor test by Harman was used, which revealed that no single factor could explain more than 35 percent of the variance. Additionally, a full collinearity test revealed that all VIFs were less than 3.3, including the interaction term ($VIF = 1.00$), indicating no multicollinearity or CMB issues.

4.3 | Scales and Measures Modification.

All measures of the constructs were the items of a validated multi-item scale, which were adapted to the fast fashion omnichannel environment. The answers were provided in a 5-point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) ([Gullone et al., 2000](#); [Mirahmadizadeh et al., 2018](#); [Wyatt & Meyers, 1987](#)). Customer Consciousness (CC) items were adapted from [Osakwe and Chovancová \(2015\)](#), Utilitarian Value (UV) items were evaluated based on [Babin et al. \(1994\)](#), and Customer Empowerment is contextualized in terms of consumer confidence in managing omnichannel services, which enables retailers to involve and empower customers. The scale was modified according to [Hunter and Garnefeld \(2008\)](#). Word of Mouth (WOM) was quantified using a scale provided by [Taylor and Todd \(1995\)](#). All scales demonstrated acceptable

internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to assess construct validity using SmartPLS 4.1.1.1. Convergent and discriminant validity were both established, and good fit indices were obtained (CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08). All the items were forwardly coded and discussed by three domain experts. Semantic equivalence was achieved through the processes of back-translation. The language clarity and background relevance were validated through a pilot test involving 262 respondents. Expert consensus eliminated items that had low item-total correlation and reliability.

4.4 | Results Section

Based on Tables 2 and 3, demographic differences had a slight impact on consumer behavior in Pakistan's fast fashion industry. Younger consumers were more customer-conscious and prone to using word-of-mouth, which implies that they are actively engaged in omnichannel service experiences. More education - Education has always been linked with increased advocacy, customer empowerment, and utilitarian value - all of which are predictors of more self-confident and judgmental customers in the service environment. The increased level of income, on the other hand, was associated with a lower level of involvement in these constructs, which could be explained by a lack of awareness of the specifics of the services. The type of job also influenced since professionals had reported more customer consciousness and WoM, whereas the freelancers and part-timers had lower numbers.

Table 2

Demographic Analysis (N=392)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	212	54.1%
	Male	180	45.9%
Age Group	18–24	168	42.9%
	25–35	144	36.7%
	36–45	56	14.3%
	46+	24	6.1%
Education Level	Undergraduate	132	33.7%
	Graduate	180	45.9%
	Postgraduate+	80	20.4%
Monthly Income	< PKR 50,000	104	26.5%
	PKR 50,000–100,000	168	42.9%
	> PKR 100,000	120	30.6%
Employment Type	Student	96	24.5%
	Freelancer/Part-time	88	22.4%
	Full-time Professional	208	53.1%

*Note: Demographic data with percentages and frequency

Table 3*Non-Response Bias Test via Independent Sample t-Test*

Construct	Early Respondents (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Late Respondents (Mean $\pm$ SD)	t-value	p-value	Conclusion
Customer Consciousness (CC)	3.87 $\pm$ 0.71	3.84 $\pm$ 0.69	0.412	0.681	No significant difference
Utilitarian Value (UV)	3.92 $\pm$ 0.68	3.89 $\pm$ 0.70	0.376	0.707	No significant difference
Word of Mouth (WOM)	3.95 $\pm$ 0.66	3.91 $\pm$ 0.68	0.328	0.743	No noticeable difference

**Note: Early respondents = the first 30 percent of the sample; Late respondents = the last 30 percent of the sample. There were no statistically significant differences, which showed that there was no non-response bias.*

4.5 | Reason behind the Two-Week interval between waves.

Time-lagged survey design with a two-week interval between waves was employed to minimize common method bias (CMB). This spacing, as proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003), is supported, and temporal separation is proposed as a process solution to lessen demand character and consistency artifact. Particularly in dynamic service environments, attitudes and perceptions can change significantly in as little as 10 to 14 days, according to empirical research in consumer behavior and service research ([Bendoly et al., 2006](#); [Scholze et al., 2022](#)). Perceptual variability in empowerment and value constructs was observed over two weeks in a pilot study involving 262 Pakistani consumers of fast fashion. This validated the interval chosen to capture attitudinal change without causing fatigue or recall bias. Shown in Table 4 is the attrition analysis for the wave retention rate and the baseline comparison model, which tests the differences presented in Table 5.

Table 4*Attrition Analysis Across Waves*

Wave	Distributed	Valid Responses	Retention Rate
Wave 1	417	392	94%
Wave 2	392	368	93.90%
Wave 3	368	356	96.70%

Table 5*Comparison of baseline customer consciousness between retained and dropped respondents*

Mean CC Score	SD	t-value	p-value	Conclusion
3.87	0.71	0.41	0.68	No significant difference
3.84	0.69			

**Note: The baseline comparison showed no significant difference*

4.6 | Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed using SmartPLS 4.1.1.1, following reflective specification for all constructs. Based on a pilot study, item CEm3 was removed from the Customer Empowerment (CEm) construct to correct rho_a, which initially showed inflation due to overloading. Following the removal, the constructs had good psychometric properties.

During the scale validation, one item of empowerment (CEm3: I feel I have full control over service outcomes) was eliminated because it did not load high on the scale (<0.60) and was cross-loading with other constructs (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Both the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses warranted the omission and suggested that it could be removed more effectively from the model, which would lead to improved construct reliability. The remaining items were also effective in capturing the competency and decision-making aspects of empowerment. Even though CEm3 was a perceived control measure, it might have been a weakness because it is distributed in the context of omnichannel, and algorithms can mediate control. Therefore, its elimination does not affect construct validity but contributes to the psychometric strength measure.

Table 6

Psychometric properties of the CEm construct were demonstrated (N=392)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	rho_a	AVE
CEm (after removal)	0.93	0.93	0.85	0.82
CEm (before removal)	0.95	0.92	-0.48	0.74

**Note: Customer Consciousness (CC), Utilitarian Value (UV), and Word of Mouth (WoM) exceeded recommended thresholds ($\alpha > 0.70$, $CR > 0.70$, $AVE > 0.50$), confirming reliability and convergent validity*

4.7 | Measurement Model

Table 7

Descriptive (N=392)

	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Excess kurtosis	Skewness	Cramér-von Mises test statistic	Cramér-von Mises p value
CC	0.00	-0.28	1.00	0.73	0.68	1.05	0.00
CEm	0.00	0.48	1.00	0.09	0.11	4.65	0.00
UV	0.00	-0.06	1.00	0.49	0.63	0.71	0.00
WoM	0.00	-0.09	1.00	0.63	0.73	0.65	0.00

**Note: CC=Customer Consciousness, UV=Utilitarian Value, WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm= Customer Empowerment*

4.8 | Reliability and Validity

Table 8

Reliability and validity (N=392)

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CC	0.81	0.82	0.89	0.73
CEm	0.93	0.85	0.93	0.82
UV	0.88	0.88	0.92	0.74
WoM	0.87	0.89	0.92	0.80

**Note: CC=Customer Consciousness, UV=Utilitarian Value, WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm= Customer Empowerment*

**Note: CR > 0.70, AVE > 0.50 indicate acceptable reliability and convergence (Hair et al., 2019).*

4.9 | Discriminant Validity

Table 9

Discriminant validity, Heterotrait-Monotrait Matrix HTMT(N=392)

	CC	CEm	UV	WoM
CC				
CEm	0.06			
UV	0.71	0.03		
WoM	0.80	0.05	0.67	

**Note: CC=Customer Consciousness, UV=Utilitarian Value, WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm= Customer Empowerment*

Table 10

Fornell & Larcker criterion (N=392)

	CC	CEm	UV	WoM
CC	0.85			
CEm	0.02	0.91		
UV	0.60	-0.03	0.86	
WoM	0.68	0.00	0.59	0.89

**Note: CC=Customer Consciousness, UV=Utilitarian Value, WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm= Customer Empowerment*

The HTMT and Fornell & Larcker criteria were used to determine discriminant validity. The Fornell-Larcker test revealed that the $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ of each of the constructs exceeded their inter-construct correlations (Table 8), indicating distinctiveness among the constructs. The HTMT ratio was also used to overcome its shortcomings. The HTMT values were all less than 0.90, and the 95% confidence intervals did not include 1 (Table 7), indicating strong discriminant validity.

4.10 | Common Method Bias

Table 11 shows the Variance inflation factor that is within the acceptable range.

Table 11

Common Method Bias (VIF, N=392)

Indicator	VIF
CEm1	4.11
CEm2	3.57
CEm3	4.18
CSEC1	1.78
CSEC2	1.82
CSEC3	1.77
UV1	1.83
UV2	2.21
UV3	1.73
UV4	2.27
WOM1	3.30
WOM2	3.72
WOM3	1.79
CEm × CC	1.00

***Note:** WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm=Customer Empowerment, UV=Utilitarian Value, CC=Customer consciousness of experience

Table 12

Common Latent Factor Test Results (N=392)

Indicator	Loading Without CLF	Loading With CLF	Loading
CSEC1	0.87	0.86	0.01
CSEC2	0.85	0.84	0.01
CSEC3	0.84	0.83	0.01
CEm1	0.98	0.98	0.01
CEm2	0.81	0.80	0.01
CEm4	0.92	0.91	0.01
UV1	0.81	0.80	0.01
UV2	0.93	0.92	0.01
UV3	0.81	0.80	0.01
UV4	0.90	0.89	0.01
WOM1	0.92	0.91	0.01
WOM2	0.94	0.93	0.01
WOM3	0.91	0.90	0.01

***Note:** WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm=Customer Empowerment, UV=Utilitarian Value, CC=Customer consciousness of experience

Table 12 shows the test results of the standard latent factor test. The CLF factor analysis has shown that the percentage of variance explained is less than 25.0%, specifically 18.7%. This indicates that common method bias is not a concern in this study.

4.11 | Structural Equation Modeling

To test the hypothesized relationships between Customer Consciousness (CC), Customer Empowerment (CEm), Utilitarian Value (UV), and Word of Mouth (WOM), structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.1.1.1. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is well-suited for handling non-normal data with moderate sample sizes, facilitating theory development, and prediction-oriented modeling. With R^2 values of 0.365 for UV and 0.516 for WOM, the model showed a moderate level of explanatory power and an acceptable fit (SRMR = 0.056, NFI = 0.847). The robustness of the structural model was validated through bootstrapping (5,000 samples), which confirmed the significance of direct, mediating, and moderating paths. Additionally, complete collinearity diagnostics showed no issues with multicollinearity (VIFs < 3.3).

Figure 2

Structural Equation Model

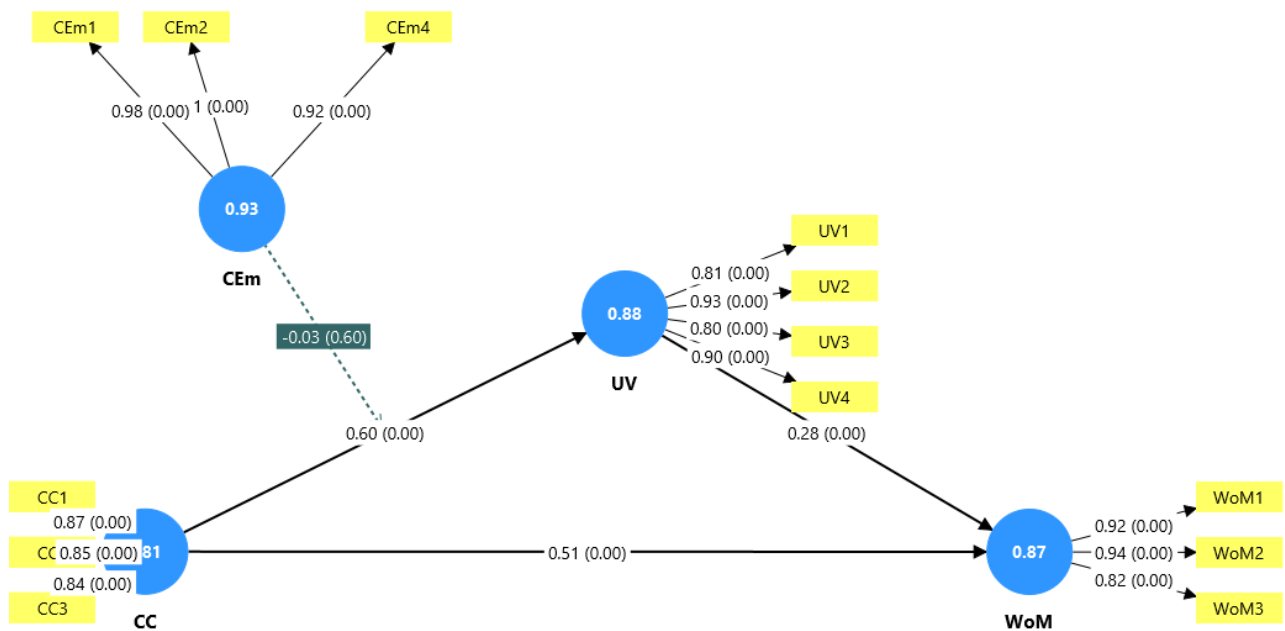


Figure 2 illustrates the structural equation modeling for the current research, as modeled through SmartPLS 4.1.1.1.

4.12 | Regression Equation

Direct effect of CC on WOM

$$\text{WoM} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{CC} + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Where:

$$\beta_1 = 0.68, t = 19.21, p < .00$$

Mediation Equation

Indirect effect of CC on WOM via UV

$$\text{WoM} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{UV} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{CC} + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

Where:

$$\beta_1 = 0.28(\text{UV} \rightarrow \text{WOM}),$$

$$\beta_2 = 0.60(\text{CC} \rightarrow \text{UV}),$$

Indirect effect = 0.16, VAF = 24.6%, partial mediation

Moderation Equation

Interaction of CC and CEm on UV

$$\text{UV} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{CC} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{CEm} + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{CEm} \times \text{CC}) + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

Where:

$$\beta_3 = -0.03, t = 0.53, p = 0.60 \rightarrow \text{not significant}$$

Customer consciousness is a cognitive driver of advocacy and evaluative behavior, as demonstrated by Table 13, which shows that it significantly affects both utilitarian value and word-of-mouth.

Table 13

Direct Effects (N=392)

Path	β	t-value	p-value	SD	Lower CI (0.5%)	Upper CI (95%)	Decision
CC $\rightarrow$ UV	0.60	13.48	<0 .00	0.04	0.51	0.68	Accepted
CC $\rightarrow$ WOM	0.68	19.21	<0.00	0.04	0.61	0.75	Accepted
UV $\rightarrow$ WOM	0.28	4.90	<0.00	0.06	0.17	0.39	Accepted

***Note:** WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm+ Customer Empowerment, UV=Utilitarian Value, CC=Customer consciousness of experience

Utilitarian Value partially mediates the relationship between Customer Consciousness and Word of Mouth, acting as a psychological bridge that translates awareness into action (Table 14).

Table 14

Mediation Analysis (N=392)

Indirect Path	β	t-value	p-value	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	Mediation Type
CC $\rightarrow$ UV $\rightarrow$ WoM	0.17	4.52	<0.00	0.10	0.24	Partial Mediation

***Note:** WoM=Word of Mouth, UV=Utilitarian Value, CC=Customer consciousness of experience

According to Table 15, customer empowerment enhances the effect of customer consciousness on utilitarian value, suggesting that empowered customers derive more valuable benefits from their service encounters.

Table 15

Moderation Analysis (N=392)

Interaction Term	β	t-value	p-value	Lower CI (95%)	Upper CI (95%)	Interpretation
CEm $\rightarrow$ UV	-0.04	0.75	0.46	-0.12	0.08	No moderation
CEm $\times$ CC $\rightarrow$ UV	-0.03	0.53	0.60	-0.12	0.09	

**Note: WoM=Word of Mouth, CEm+ Customer Empowerment, CC=Customer consciousness of experience*

The interaction term created using the product indicator approach in SmartPLS was employed to examine the moderating role of Customer Empowerment (CEm) in the correlation between Customer Consciousness (CC) and Utilitarian Value (UV). According to Hair Jr et al. (2021b), all predictor constructs were mean-centered, after which an interaction term was created to mitigate the presence of multicollinearity. Since the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of the interaction term (CEm $\times$ CC) was 1.00, the issue of multicollinearity was not a factor. Since the analysis was not supported by moderation, simple slopes analysis and Johnson-Neyman region of significance were not sought since the interaction effect was statistically insignificant ($b = 0.03$, $t = 0.53$, $p = 0.60$) (Dawson, 2014). These results imply that CEm does not significantly moderate the relationship between CC and UV in this case. Predictive analytics, as depicted in Table 16, utilizes both past and present data to forecast future consumer patterns, preferences, and service performance. Omnichannel retailing enables brands to tailor experiences, streamline inventory, and accurately predict advocacy trends.

The utilitarian value is mediated to some extent, meaning that customer consciousness not only has a direct effect on advocacy but also has an indirect effect through the achievement of rational value. The insignificance of empowerment, however, adds to the concept that in the case of emerging markets, psychological agency will never be able to consistently create value without readiness in context, which encompasses digital literacy and the openness of the service. This underscores the contingency of empowerment and the importance of service methods to suit digitally discontinuous environments.

Table 16

Predictive Power of the model (N=392)

Construct	Q ² Predict	RMSE	MAE
UV	0.35	0.81	0.62
WOM	0.46	0.74	0.56

**Note: Q² values above 0 suggest predictive relevance, with 0.35, 0.15, and 0.02 denoting large, medium, and small predictive strength.*

R^2 and f^2 effect sizes were within the threshold levels and showed substantial effect sizes in Table 17.

Table 17

R^2 and f^2 effect sizes ($N=392$)

Construct	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	f^2 (CC $\rightarrow$ UV) (CC $\rightarrow$ WoM)	f^2 (UV $\rightarrow$ WOM)
UV	0.37	0.36	0.57	-
WOM	0.52	0.51	0.35	0.10

**Note:* R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 indicate substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power; f^2 values of 0.35, 0.15, and 0.02 reflect large, medium, and small effect sizes.

5 | DISCUSSION

The results indicate that customer consciousness (CC) has a significant impact on utilitarian value (UV) and word-of-mouth (WOM), with UV playing a moderate role. This facilitates the psychological movement of the S-O-R framework, stimulus-response element, and it corresponds with previous research in the hospitality and e-commerce ([Ali et al., 2021](#); [Harisandi et al., 2023](#)), where evaluative awareness was converted into functional and advocacy value ([Natarajan & Veera Raghavan, 2024](#)). The partial mediation, however, implies that although UV can help to bridge the gap between awareness and behavior, it does not entirely explain the pathway, suggesting that CC can also have a direct effect on WOM, possibly through affective or ethical resonance, which is not explained by UV alone.

More importantly, the nonsignificant moderation by customer empowerment (CEm) challenges assumptions internalized in SDL that empowerment is a universally increasing operant resource ([Vargo et al., 2020](#)). This finding is contrary to those obtained in Western settings ([Hunter & Garnefeld, 2008](#); [Teo et al., 2024](#)), where empowerment had a positive and consistent effect on value realization. Within the fast fashion industry in Pakistan, empowerment is, however, context and situation-specific ([Daniyal et al., 2025](#)). Consumers might have self-efficacy, yet their behavioral capacity towards service cues is limited by digital fragmentation, economic precarity, and risk aversion ([Ashiq & Hussain, 2024](#)). This is a structural asymmetry: empowerment that is not supported by infrastructures and transparency regarding the services lacks behavioral traction.

In theory, this discovery allows redefining SDL by considering empowerment to be a resource that can be activated in situations, rather than being a consistent characteristic ([Katsifaraki & Theodosiou, 2024](#)). It also narrows down S-O-R by demonstrating that pathways of stimulus-response are mediated by agency differently ([Roshdy et al., 2025](#)). Cognitive processing can be improved by empowerment only when consumers sense control, clarity, and coherence in the service delivery ([Jaakkola & Terho, 2021](#)). This is particularly useful when working in emerging markets, where empowerment is often not a practical action, but a dream ([El Hajj & Farran, 2024](#)). In practice, the findings suggest that retailers cannot rely on the assumption that the implemented empowerment strategies, such as personalization or choice architecture, will automatically lead to advocacy. Instead, they should consider the preparedness of consumers, such as digital fluency, perceived risk, and service consistency. When the service environment is such that the meaning of an

abstract awareness can be rationalized and thus translated into a more concrete understanding, then UV will serve as a cognitive translator. In general, this study outlines a two-theory model, which explains psychological sequencing (S-O-R) and conditional agency (SDL) in consumer advocacy. It further emphasizes the need for empowerment strategies that are contextually specific and the importance of identifying with service journeys as unique, open, and steady.

5.1 | Practical Implication

This research paper acknowledges that the customer consciousness experienced by the fast fashion omnichannel business in Pakistan is not merely perceptual, but also a strategic cognitive stimulus that enables customers to recognize the value and become promoters. Retailers should plan service journeys that prompt evaluative reflection, such as providing a continuous stream of transparent and ethically personalized experiences, particularly across disaggregated digital and physical touchpoints. Utilitarian value can be used as a psychological filter, which is not only a KPI but also a tool to enable consumers to rationalize service coherence in a digitally unequal market ([Bai et al., 2024](#)). Better still, empowerment should not be a one-size-fits-all booster. However, it needs to be framed within the context of explainable AI, opt-in personalization, and feedback loops to encourage more interpretive agency. The cultivation of consumer control should not deny consumer control, but rather make it possible so that such empowerment can be translated into a valuable experience ([Partarakis & Zabulis, 2024](#)). In this respect, word of mouth is not a reactive behavior. However, a cognitively mediated phenomenon and needs to be considered as a strategic measure of service coherence and consumer agency.

5.2 | Theoretical Implications

In theory, this research redefines customer consciousness as a meta-cognitive stimulus in the S-O-R model, broadening its functionality beyond passive awareness to an active psychological stimulus that promotes value and advocacy ([Natarajan & Veera Raghavan, 2024](#)). Utilitarian value is laid between as an intervening organism that cognitively maps service awareness into behavioral outcomes in the advancement of S-O-R by focusing on internal rationalization rather than automatic response. In SDL, the research questions the notion of empowerment as a fixed operant resource. It demonstrates that it is activated by situations and limited by a state of infrastructural and psychological preparedness. The integration of S-O-R ([Russell & Mehrabian, 1977](#)) and SDL ([Vargo & Lusch, 2017](#)) provides the study with a two-theory model that encompasses the psychological processing of service stimuli and the logic of value co-creation based on resources, which is especially applicable to emerging markets where digital asymmetries and socio-economic situations influence consumer agency. This introduces a contextual, earthy model of cognition that explores the interaction between consciousness, value, and empowerment, influencing advocacy in the fast fashion retail sector.

5.3 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although a time-lagged design helps exclude common method bias, the research is cross-sectional in its behavioral trajectory and, therefore, requires more in-depth experiential analysis to establish causality. The weakening influence of empowerment can be further investigated, as it is activated more in specific situations related to individualized triggers ([Uzunbacak & Karagöz, 2025](#)). It is possible to suggest that experience sampling or a diary should be used to record the empowerment processes in motion ([Shandil & Sharma, 2024](#)).

The research questions should be further investigated in the future to explore the division of empowerment profiles (e.g., digital natives vs. risk-averse consumers) and to learn about conditional agency ([Ashrafi et al., 2025](#)). The futuristic new technologies, such as AI Explainability and Consumer Trust as Mediators in personalized service environments, should also be worked on. Moreover, comparative studies are to be conducted in emerging markets with a comparable level of digital divides (e.g., Bangladesh, Nigeria) to observe the portability of the CC-UV-WOM pathway. Therefore, to further contribute to the study, experimental designs are required to control for service coherence and empowerment cues ([Malodia et al., 2023](#)), allowing the psychological triggers of advocacy to be isolated.

6 | CONCLUSION

Through the combination of S-O-R and SDL, the study can be promoted as a dual-theory model, with psychological advocacy in the direction of awareness and the conditional role of consumer agency. It redefines the value of utilitarianism as a cognitive translator and the power of empowerment as a situational amplifier—questioning the principles of universal agency in new markets. The time-lagged survey design and the PLS-SEM modelling enhance causal inference and reduce the bias in the standard methods. The deletion of a low-loading empowerment item signifies an act of pledging commitment to construct validity. This is indicative of the difficulty in operationalizing agency in service settings that are disaggregated. Retailers should not assume that empowering strategies will consistently increase advocacy. Instead, they have to differentiate service journeys based on consumer readiness—including digital fluency, perceived risk, and service coherence. Empowerment should be facilitated by interpretability and fit in context. Further elaborating on the concept of conditional empowerment, the following research will employ multi-group analysis, which will be conducted based on segments defined by income level, digital literacy, and perceived risk. The longitudinal designs, as well as the qualitative follow-ups, could also help distinguish variations in empowerment across different periods and service situations.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Outer loadings Item-wise (N=392)

ITEMS	CC	CEm	UV	WoM
CPE1		0.98		
CPE2		0.81		
CPE4		0.92		
CSEC1	0.87			
CSEC2	0.85			
CSEC3	0.84			
UV1			0.81	
UV2			0.93	
UV3			0.80	
UV4			0.90	
WoM1				0.92
WoM2				0.94
WoM3				0.82