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Learning Agility and Career Growth: The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract

In the current changing work world, where technology is evolving, and work requirements are shifting. The ability to learn from experiences is crucial to a successful career. This ability to learn from experiences is referred to as learning agility. Existing studies indicate that learning agility improves employee performance. However, the effects of psychological empowerment on career growth remain underexplored. This paper examines psychological empowerment as a mediator linking learning agility and career growth. The study contends that learning-agile employees develop greater perceptions of competence, autonomy, and significance, which support their career advancement, drawing on Human Capital Theory and Self-Determination Theory. The study examines relevant literature, identifies research gaps, and suggests directions for future empirical studies.

Keywords: Learning Agility, Career Growth, Psychological Empowerment, Human Capital Theory, Self-Determination Theory

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1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations function in extremely dynamic and unpredictable environments, requiring employees to constantly adjust and acquire new skills. Conventional measures of career success, like technical skills and work experience, are inadequate to account for enduring career sustainability. Consequently, learning agility has gained recognition as a crucial skill for thriving in dynamic work settings (DeRue et al., 2012). Learning agility is the capacity and readiness of a person to learn from experiences and to utilize that knowledge effectively in new circumstances (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). In contrast to cognitive ability, which primarily concentrates on the processing of knowledge, learning agility highlights adaptability, reflection, and the real-world application of knowledge (Burke & Smith, 2019). In the current adaptable work setting, it serves as a critical skill for career advancement.

Previous studies have presented that learning agility is connected positively to employee performance, leadership effectiveness, and adaptability in dynamic work settings (Burke & Smith, 2019; DeRue et al., 2012). However, limited studies have investigated its direct impact on long-term career growth. Moreover, the fundamental processes by which learning agility aids in career progression are still not well comprehended. Specifically, there is inadequate empirical evidence describing how learning agility leads to career growth outcomes through psychological and behavioral mechanisms. This gap underscores the necessity for further exploration into the connection between learning agility and career growth.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the impact of learning agility on career growth. In addition, the research intends to investigate the processes by which learning agility affects career growth, thus enhancing the comprehension of sustainable career progression in modern organizations.

1.1. Learning Agility

Learning agility refers to the capacity to rapidly acquire knowledge, adjust, and thrive in difficult circumstances (De Meuse, 2017). It encompasses five dimensions, namely mental agility, people agility, change agility, results agility, and self-awareness (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). Studies show that learning agility predicts leadership effectiveness, adaptability, innovation, and organizational results (Dries et al., 2012). Agile learners show greater resilience in the face of organizational changes and improved capacity for role adjustment in environments disrupted by digital technology (Harvey et al., 2021). Recent

studies suggest that learning agility could be a more important indicator of future potential than performance metrics based only on past achievements (De Meuse et al., 2010).

1.2. Career Growth

Career growth indicates how employees view their progress toward professional goals and opportunities for advancement within or between organizations (Weng & Hu, 2009). It encompasses four aspects such as progress on career goals, development of professional skills, speed of promotions, and increase in compensation. Career advancement improves employee retention, motivation, commitment to the organization, and long-term job security (Ng et al., 2005). In unstable labor markets, career advancement relies more on adaptability and ongoing education than on organizational tenure (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

1.3. Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment is defined as intrinsic task motivation represented through four core beliefs, such as meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). Employees who feel empowered show enhanced initiative, engagement, creativity, and resolve (Seibert et al., 2011). Psychological empowerment encourages proactive career behaviors and enhances self-management skills in one's career (Kim & Beehr, 2018).

1.4. Human Capital Theory

Gary Becker suggested that investing in knowledge and skills improves personal productivity and economic value. Learning agility signifies a dynamic form of human capital as it facilitates ongoing capability enhancement. In contrast to fixed competencies, learning agility enables employees to gain skills relevant for the future, enhancing their employability and career advancement. Consequently, Human Capital Theory endorses the idea that learning agility is a positive predictor of career advancement (Becker, 1964).

1.5. Self-Determination Theory

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan stated that intrinsic motivation relies on fulfilling three psychological needs, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Employees who are agile in learning often face and overcome new challenges, enhancing their skills and independence. This realization fosters psychological empowerment, which encourages sustained developmental behaviors and career advancement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Employees can no longer depend exclusively on their tenure or technical skills for promotion. Instead, professional advancement relies on the capacity to consistently learn, adapt, and respond to evolving job requirements (Hall, 2004). Individuals who are learning-agile apply learnings from their experiences and utilize those insights in new circumstances. These employees are more capable of gaining new skills, managing complex tasks, and adjusting to changes in the organization, all of which support career growth (DeRue et al., 2012). Nevertheless, even with learning agility, not every employee attains comparable degrees of career growth. This indicates that other factors might affect the way learning agility leads to career progression.

Employees who engage in ongoing learning and effectively handle obstacles frequently cultivate heightened senses of competence and self-assurance. They grow more adept at performing their tasks, making choices autonomously, and recognizing the importance of their input. These insights correspond with the aspects of psychological empowerment outlined by Spreitzer (1995), specifically meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact.

Consequently, learning agility can enhance psychological empowerment by boosting employees' confidence in their capacity to effectively execute and impact their work surroundings. As a result, psychological empowerment acts as a significant psychological asset that can promote career growth. The aforementioned points indicate that learning agility might impact career growth indirectly via psychological empowerment. Employees who are learning-agile gain knowledge and adapt well, boosting their sense of competence, autonomy, and influence. These strengthened perceptions subsequently promote actions that facilitate career advancement. As a result, psychological empowerment could act as an intermediary that clarifies how learning agility translates into career growth.

Employees who demonstrate high learning agility are better equipped to handle workplace challenges and cultivate the skills necessary for career progression. As a result, organizations are more inclined to offer such individuals enhanced career opportunities and growth. Therefore, Human Capital Theory serves as a solid basis for understanding the positive connection between learning agility and career progression.

Learning agile employees tend to feel more empowered as they effectively gain and utilize new skills, which boosts their confidence and sense of control. This psychological empowerment, in turn, drives individuals to seek out developmental opportunities and attain career advancement. Consequently, Self-Determination Theory supports the idea that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between learning agility and career growth

2. Conceptualization

Learning agility enhances psychological empowerment by promoting mastery experiences and self-directed problem-solving. Psychological empowerment fosters career growth via proactive career management, increased persistence, developmental initiatives, and adaptability to job opportunities. Therefore, psychological empowerment serves as a mediator between learning agility and career growth. As a result, this paper suggests the following conceptual relationship and propositions.

Learning Agility → Psychological Empowerment → Career Growth

H1: Learning agility positively influences career growth.

H2: Learning agility positively influences psychological empowerment.

H3: Psychological empowerment positively influences career growth.

H4: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between learning agility and career growth.

3. Proposed Methodology

This research can utilize a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The structured questionnaire would gather quantitative data. An appropriate sampling method, such as purposive or stratified sampling, can be utilized to choose participants. Qualitative data can be collected via semi-structured interviews with chosen participants to obtain a more in-depth understanding. The results from the questionnaire would yield broadly applicable evidence, whereas the interview data would deliver a deeper insight into participants' viewpoints. Combining both approaches would improve the validity and depth of the study results.

4. Further Research Directions

Future studies can explore the impact of AI-driven learning systems on agility enhancement, which leads to career growth.

5. Practical Implications

HR professionals are required to acquire individuals who are eager and capable of learning swiftly and ensure to provide challenging tasks and various job experiences to make them feel valued. It allows organizations to pinpoint, cultivate, and keep high-potential employees who can flourish in evolving career environments.

6. Conclusion

Learning agility is crucial for maintaining a career in unpredictable workplace settings. Nonetheless, its impact on career growth is largely dependent on psychological empowerment. This paper offers a strong conceptual basis by merging Human Capital Theory with Self-Determination Theory, illustrating how learning-agile employees transform adaptive capability into career progression.

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Beyond Technology Acceptance: Digital Fatigue as an Emerging Explanation for Consumer Resistance to Self-Service Banking Technologies

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Abstract

Banking industry has rapidly undergone digitalization, and this has supported the progress of self-service technologies (SSTs) like Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), mobile banking applications, internet banking platforms and self-service kiosks. While these technologies offer greater convenience, efficiency and accessibility, there are new psychological issues that are emerging for consumers. A new worry is digital fatigue, an emotional, mental and cognitive state that happens when you're constantly exposed to digital technologies. In this conceptual paper, digital fatigue a major reason behind consumers' resistance to self-service banking technologies in post adoption stage is examined. The paper covers the term, theoretical underpinning, conceptualization, contextual use of digital fatigue in the banking context. Finally, the study offers suggestions for future research on digital well-being, sustainable adoption of digital banking, and responsible technological transformation.

Keywords: Banking sector, Consumer resistance, Digital fatigue, Self-service technologies, Technostress

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1. Introduction

The past 20 years have seen a huge transformation in the banking industry, with digital technologies transforming financial service provision. Services which were required to perform through a staff member are now can be completed through self-service technologies such as automated teller machines (ATMs), internet banking platforms and mobile banking applications. This change has enhanced operational efficiency and cut operating expenses for banks and has provided quicker and more convenient access to financial services for customers (Bitner et al., 2000; Meuter et al., 2000).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2012) have been observed to be widely used to explain technology adoption and factors such as perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, and facilitating conditions have been highlighted. Later, more recent studies have added to the debate regarding the factors that influence the adoption of digital banking including, but not limited to, trust, security, technology readiness, and service quality (Blut et al., 2016; Fernandes & Oliveira, 2021). These research efforts have certainly helped to reinforce our understanding of the reasons for consumer acceptance of digital banking technologies.

Many of the consumers embrace digital banking services, but not all of them sustain over a long period. In reality, many customers are visiting physical branches, asking for help from bank staff, or even forgoing some of their digital banking options. This implies that technology adoption and sustained technology use are not a similar phenomenon. While the general theories that account for adoption decisions do offer some insight into what factors would affect a decision to adopt, they offer relatively little insight into what factors might significantly make consumers less willing to continue using these technologies.

One possible explanation is the overall psychological requirements of digital technologies. Digital banking is no longer about simply performing a transaction. Users have to cope with multiple banking applications while they have to recall their login credentials by navigating the authentication processes and most of the time coping with alerts about security issues and adapting to regular system updates which are not familiar and understood by most of the users. These activities, on their own, might appear fairly minor. However, over time, they can add to a feeling of mental fatigue that slowly redefines the consumer experience of digital banking. The overall burden is not taken into account in the majority of existing technology adoption

models, as such models are centered on consumer reviews before or during adoption, rather than what they have experienced after long-term use.

An alternative way of thinking regarding this matter is digital fatigue. Digital fatigue occurs due to repeated digital engagement, while technology anxiety is often triggered by uncertainty before using technology. Therefore, it is a result of the continued use of the technology for a long period, rather than an obstacle to its initial adoption. Although there is growing interest in the concept within information systems, organizational conduct, and digital well-being research, its application to typical customer behavior especially within the context of self-service banking technologies is limited.

This paper suggests a significant, but rarely recognized, explanation for consumer resistance to self-service banking technologies is digital fatigue. So, this paper reviews the existing literature on digital fatigue, discusses its theoretical foundations and conceptual development, and evaluates the contribution of the concept to a broader understanding of post-adoption consumer behavior in digital banking.

2. Understanding Digital Fatigue: Evolution and Current Perspectives

The growing dependence on technological advances has transformed the way in which individuals live, work and engage with services. As digital interaction becomes a part of daily life, studies are now beginning to question if continuous interaction with technological devices results in unforeseen psychological effects. A term that has received increased interest in this discourse is digital fatigue.

Digital fatigue is a feeling of emotional, psychological, and cognitive burnout from extended engagement with digital technologies and online systems (Lee et al., 2021). Digital transformation has transformed the way consumers communicate, shop, learn, work and access financial services. Within the banking industry, self-service technologies (SSTs) like ATMs, mobile banking applications, Internet banking systems and self-service kiosks are vital part of the service delivery process (Meuter et al., 2000). These technologies offer a number of benefits such as ease of use, ease of access, quickness, and cost to both the bank and the consumer (Bitner, et al., 2000). But the need to constantly engage with digital platforms has also put pressure on users' minds.

Technology related challenges have been examined in previous research using concepts such as technostress. Technostress is defined as the stress people face when they have difficulty coping with the requirements of communication and information technologies (Tarafdar et al.,

2007). At the time, most research was conducted in the workplace, where staff members were anticipated to get used to new technological advances and progressively more complex information systems. As digital technologies grew integrated into routine tasks, investigators discovered that these issues were not restricted to organizational settings. Consumers were continuously exposed to digital environments via shopping on the internet, social media platforms, electronic payments, and banking services so digital lifestyle began to shift the focus away from work-place stress and towards the broader psychological consequences of long-term digital engagement.

According to Lee et al. (2021), digital technostress has a strong impact on consumers' intention to use fintech services. Fernandes and Oliveira (2021) revealed that consumers may suffer from stress and discomfort when engaging with automated technologies and digital service systems. As well, research indicates that digital transformation has both positive and negative implications for customers. Digital banking technologies can provide efficiency and convenience but at the same time can also raise cognitive pressures and emotional strain (Verhoef et al., 2015). Psychological barriers also play an important role in consumers' acceptance of SSTs, as noted by Blut et al. (2016), particularly when technology is perceived as mentally challenging or emotionally taxing.

Furthermore, Rahi et al. (2021) noted that when the technological stress and emotional fatigue of consumers increase, the dependence on the internet banking systems can have a negative impact on their post-adoption experiences. Ayyagari et al. (2011) found technological overload and constant connectivity as the two leading stressors in digital environments. The demand for digital well-being and healthier relationships with technology is also a goal that consumers are seeking more recently (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). With consumers becoming more aware of digital burnout and dependence, there is likely to be an uptick in resistance to over-consuming digital interaction in banking settings.

One point that can be made from the available literature is the fact that digital fatigue is frequently addressed together with several related concepts, and the boundaries between these are less clear. For example, technology anxiety is defined as the fear or uncertainty that is experienced before or while using technology (Meuter et al., 2003). On the other hand, digital fatigue is a slow process that accumulates with constant use and long-term exposure. Similarly, technostress refers to stress caused by technological expectations, particularly in organizational settings (Tarafdar et al., 2007). Although there are some similarities between the two concepts,

digital fatigue seems to be a more general concept that goes beyond the work context and encompasses the general impact that comes with digital engagement across various aspects of life.

3. Limitations of Existing Technology Acceptance Perspectives

Some of the most popular theories developed to explain the consumer adoption of self-service banking technologies are Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Technostress Theory and Consumer Resistance Theory. While such perspectives have provided significant contributions toward understanding digital technology adoption, they mainly focus on why consumers initiate digital technology use, instead of why people may eventually decrease or stop digital technology use.

The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) identifies perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key determinants of the willingness of consumers to adopt new technologies. Similarly, UTAUT reinforces this view with factors such as social impact and favorable circumstances (Venkatesh et al., 2012). These models have been widely used in digital banking research because they accurately predict technology acceptance. However, both frameworks primarily focus on consumers' intentions before or at the point of adoption, rather than on how consumers' experiences evolve once technology becomes part of their everyday routines.

Another perspective is provided by Technostress Theory that explains the ways technology related demands can cause stress and decrease user satisfaction (Tarafdar et al., 2007). However, the majority of technostress research studies have been carried out in organizational contexts and on employees, rather than on consumers. Similar to that, Consumer Resistance Theory is concerned with the rejection of innovations by consumers arising from perceived risk, disruption of habits or uncertainty (Ram & Sheth, 1989). But resistance is often seen as a quick response to new technology, not as a reaction that grows over time through continued use.

Together, these theories help clarify key elements of technology adoption and resistance, yet they give little consideration to the prolonged psychological reactions of consumers. As digital banking becomes a part of everyday life, it is just as important to understand what happens after adoption. This suggests that we need a broader viewpoint that examines how regular digital engagement might gradually shift consumers' willingness to keep using self-service banking technologies.

4. Reconceptualizing Digital Fatigue in Post-Adoption Consumer Resistance

The discussion mentioned above indicates that current theories of technology acceptance explain how customers behave in digital banking to a specific extent. While these models demonstrate why consumers choose to adopt self-service technologies, it is less concerned with what happens after the technology becomes a part of consumers' daily lives. This is a key difference, as adoption is not the last stage of technology use. Consumers are in contact with digital banking systems even after the initial adoption decision has been made, and ongoing interactions may gradually shape their attitudes and behaviors in ways not fully clarified by traditional adoption models.

In this paper we suggest that digital fatigue should be conceptualized as a psychological procedure that emerges through continuous interaction with digital technology rather than a simple emotional response to technology. Technology anxiety is mostly experienced before or during the use of technology, whereas digital fatigue is a term that develops over time as a result of consumers' repeated use of digital systems. Some of these activities such as logging into banking apps, going through authentication, reacting to security alerts, dealing with multiple digital platforms, and adjusting to frequent upgrades to software might appear simple when viewed in isolation. However, the long-term impact can slowly lead to mental tiredness, decrease motivation, and change consumers' willingness to continue to engage with SSTs.

This way of thinking about digital fatigue further clarifies a drawback of current technology acceptance research. From this perspective, digital fatigue can be conceptualized as a post-adoption cognitive mechanism linking constant online engagement with consumer resistance. This perspective supports rather than replaces existing technology acceptance theories by shifting the emphasis from initial adopting choices to consumers' long-term experiences.

So, the paper suggests constant engagement with self-service banking technologies enhances the cognitive and emotional demands on consumers, which may eventually lead to digital fatigue. The paper defines digital fatigue as a long-term psychological process rather than a new technology variable to address the issue of post-adoption consumer resistance in an increasingly digital banking environment.

5. Discussion

The framework suggested in this paper offers a new viewpoint on consumer refusal to adopt self-service banking technologies. Prior studies have clarified technology adoption mainly by perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust and facilitating conditions (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et

al., 2012). However, these theories do not focus much on the consumers' experience after a long period of using technology. From the digital fatigue view, findings that have been interpreted as technostress or consumer resistance (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Ram & Sheth, 1989) can also be seen as developed psychological effects of continuous digital engagement. This theoretical framework implies that objections could be developed after adoption has occurred rather than before, thus extending the existing technology acceptance theories and providing a broader explanation of post adoption consumer behavior.

6. Future directions of the study

The conceptual framework outlined in this study provides many opportunities for future research. Most significantly, empirical data is required to explore whether digital fatigue is the psychological mechanism through which constant digital involvement translates to post-adoption consumer resistance. Examining this relationship would give some important insights into the extent to which digital fatigue explains changes in behavior that are not entirely clarified by current technology acceptance models.

Future research should also examine whether digital fatigue grows over time. Unlike technology anxiety, which is typically pre-existing prior to utilizing technology, digital fatigue is anticipated to gradually emerge in the process of continuous digital interactions. Thus, longitudinal studies would be especially helpful to figure out how consumers' experiences change as digital banking gets integrated into their daily routines.

Given that this paper is about self-service banking technologies, the framework suggested may be applicable to various other digital service environments where consumers regularly interact with technology. Testing the framework in sectors like traditional retail, healthcare or public sector would be useful to see if digital fatigue is a broader reason for post-adoption consumer resistance in growing digital environments.

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Investigating the Impact of Consumer Ethnocentrism on Purchase Intention of Imported Nutritional Supplements in Sri Lanka: The Mediating Effect of Purchase Attitude

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines consumer ethnocentrism and its influence on purchase intention toward imported nutritional supplements, highlighting the mediating role of purchase attitude. It defines the key constructs and explains their relationships using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Additionally, the paper reviews recent literature related to ethnocentrism, purchase attitudes, and consumer decision-making across different contexts. It further discusses the conceptual framework, operationalization of variables, and proposed hypotheses to guide future empirical research. Finally, the study outlines directions for future research while emphasizing the importance of understanding ethnocentric tendencies in shaping consumer behavior within developing markets.

Keywords: Consumer Ethnocentrism (CE), Purchase Attitude (PA), Purchase Intention (PI), Theory of planned behavior (TPB), Imported Nutritional Supplements

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Introduction

Nutritional supplements, a subset of functional foods, are positioned between conventional foods and pharmaceuticals (Siró et al., 2008). Functional foods are defined as foods that provide health benefits beyond their basic nutritional value, potentially reducing the risk of disease or enhancing physiological performance (Martirosyan & Singh, 2015). Nutritional supplements, also known as dietary supplements, are products designed to add to or supplement the diet. They typically contain one or more dietary ingredients such as vitamins, minerals, herbs, botanicals, amino acids, enzymes, probiotics, and other substances intended to provide nutritional support or health benefits (Office of the Commissioner, 2022).

The nutritional supplement industry has experienced remarkable global growth over the past decade, driven by increasing consumer awareness of health and wellness, the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), population ageing, and the shift towards preventive healthcare. According to *Grand View Research* (2024), the global dietary supplements market was valued at approximately USD 177.5 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.1% between 2024 and 2030. This global expansion has also extended to emerging South Asian markets, where increasing urbanization, changing lifestyles, and heightened health awareness have accelerated demand for nutritional supplements. In Sri Lanka, the vitamins and minerals segment is projected to generate approximately US$46.24 million in revenue in 2025, with an expected CAGR of 7.08% from 2025 to 2029 (Statista, 2025). Furthermore, the growing burden of NCDs, including diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, together with increasing consumer interest in preventive healthcare, has encouraged the adoption of nutritional supplements among both the general population and specific consumer groups such as athletes (Gunathilake et al., 2014; Shirani et al., 2010).

Unlike conventional fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs), nutritional supplements represent a high-involvement and health-sensitive product category because their consumption is directly associated with consumers' physical well-being and long-term health outcomes. Purchasing decisions therefore involve greater perceived financial, functional, and health-related risks, encouraging consumers to carefully evaluate product quality, ingredient safety, manufacturing standards, and brand credibility before making a purchase. Consumers often rely on trusted

brands, country-of-origin cues, expert recommendations, and product certifications to reduce uncertainty when selecting nutritional supplements.

The importance of country of origin becomes particularly evident in markets where imported supplements are generally perceived as possessing superior quality and stricter manufacturing standards than locally produced alternatives. Consequently, consumers frequently associate foreign brands with greater effectiveness, reliability, and safety, especially for products intended to improve health and physical performance. At the same time, these evaluations may be influenced by consumer ethnocentrism, which reflects the belief that purchasing domestic products is more appropriate because it supports the local economy and national interests (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Consequently, consumers may experience a trade-off between their preference for trusted imported brands and their desire to support domestic products, making nutritional supplements a particularly relevant product category for examining consumer ethnocentrism.

Consumer ethnocentrism has been extensively examined in consumer behavior research, particularly in understanding its influence on consumer preference for domestic products over foreign alternatives (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentric consumers often view the purchase of foreign goods as economically and morally inappropriate, which significantly affects their decision-making across various product categories (Sharma et al., 1995). Several studies have highlighted the impact of consumer ethnocentrism on purchase intentions, emphasizing its role in shaping attitudes toward imported goods and influencing consumer behavior (González-Cabrera & Trelles-Arteaga, 2021; Haniffa et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Despite the extensive body of research on consumer ethnocentrism, three significant and intersecting gaps remain in the existing literature, which this study seeks to address.

First, a product category gap: While consumer ethnocentrism has been examined across durable goods, general food products, and apparel (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Josiassen, 2011), its influence on the nutritional supplement market remains critically underexplored, particularly in Sri Lanka. Although adjacent product categories such as dairy products (Farid et al., 2023), functional foods (Akhtar, 2021; Xin & Seo, 2019), and dietary supplements in selected markets (Liu et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2012) have received attention, nutritional supplements as a distinct consumer category have not been the subject of dedicated ethnocentrism research. This

gap is not merely contextual. Nutritional supplements occupy a unique psychological space for consumers; they are simultaneously perceived as health and wellness products (generating quality-based trust) and as foreign imports (potentially triggering ethnocentric resistance). This dual identity makes the ethnocentrism–attitude–intention pathway in this category theoretically richer and empirically distinct from other food product categories.

Second, a mediation mechanism gap: While prior studies have examined the direct relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; González-Cabrera & Trelles-Arteaga, 2021), the specific role of purchase attitude as a formal mediating mechanism in this relationship remains inadequately established, particularly in the nutritional supplement domain. A review of the existing literature reveals that while attitude related variables have been included in ethnocentrism studies, they have not been positioned as the primary mediating mechanism: Zhang et al. (2024) tested perceived quality and perceived behavioral control as mediators; Liu et al. (2021) employed fear of COVID-19 and health motivations; and Xin and Seo (2019) treated country image and subjective knowledge as moderating variables rather than mediators. Studies applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to ethnocentrism contexts, such as Maksan et al. (2019) for domestic wine and Miguel et al. (2022) for domestic fruits and vegetables, included attitude as a variable in the model but did not isolate it as a formal mediating pathway between ethnocentrism and purchase intention. Similarly, Sharma et al. (1995) noted that ethnocentric consumers are less likely to develop positive attitudes toward foreign products, which in turn reduces purchase intention; however, this mediation pathway has not been empirically tested in the context of imported nutritional supplements. This gap is theoretically significant: within the TPB framework, attitude is the primary mechanism through which beliefs (such as ethnocentric dispositions) translate into behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Its explicit mediation role remains empirically unverified in this domain.

Third, a geographic and contextual gap: The existing consumer ethnocentrism literature exhibits a notable geographic concentration. The foundational works originate from Western, developed economies (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Josiassen, 2011), with more recent extensions primarily focusing on East Asian markets such as China (Xin & Seo, 2019; Liu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024), Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2023), and Mongolia (Gantulga & Ganbold, 2022). South Asian developing economies, particularly Sri Lanka, remain significantly underrepresented in this stream of research (Haniffa et al., 2023;

Karunaratne & Wanninayake, 2019). Sri Lanka presents a contextually distinct environment: it is a developing economy with documented import dependency for nutritional products, rising post-pandemic health consciousness, recent economic volatility that may intensify ethnocentric sensitivities (Haniffa et al., 2023), and a cultural orientation shaped by post-independence national identity and collectivist social norms. These characteristics suggest that ethnocentrism in Sri Lanka may operate differently from previously studied contexts, generating dynamics not yet captured in existing theory.

To address these gaps, the present study aims to investigate the impact of consumer ethnocentrism on the purchase intention of imported nutritional supplements in Sri Lanka, with purchase attitude as a formal mediating variable.

Research Questions:

1. What is the impact of consumer ethnocentrism on the purchase intention of imported nutritional supplements?
2. What is the mediating effect of purchase attitude on the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and the purchase intention of imported nutritional supplements?

Research Objectives:

1. To determine the impact of consumer ethnocentrism on the purchase intention of imported nutritional supplements
2. To determine the mediating effect of purchase attitude on the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and the purchase intention of imported nutritional supplements

Significance of Study

This study contributes to existing literature in three important ways. First, it advances the theoretical application of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by explicitly modeling purchase attitude as the mediating mechanism through which consumer ethnocentrism influences purchase intention. While TPB (Ajzen, 1991) has been widely applied to food-related consumer behaviors (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Paul et al., 2016), and ethnocentrism studies have incorporated TPB components (Maksan et al., 2019; Miguel et al., 2022), no prior study has formally and empirically examined the attitude-mediated relationship between

consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention in the context of imported nutritional supplements. This study therefore extends TPB by operationalizing its core attitude-intention proposition within the consumer ethnocentrism literature and moves beyond direct-effect models to explain the psychological mechanism linking ethnocentric beliefs with purchasing behavior.

Second, this study extends consumer ethnocentrism research to the imported nutritional supplement category, a product domain that has received limited scholarly attention despite the rapid growth of the global nutritional supplement market (Grand View Research, 2023) and the established role of ethnocentrism in related food product categories (Xin & Seo, 2019; Farid et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021). Nutritional supplements provide a distinctive empirical context because consumers simultaneously evaluate product quality, health benefits, and country of origin, creating a setting in which quality-driven motivations and ethnocentric preferences interact during the purchase decision process.

Finally, by focusing on Sri Lanka, this study addresses the geographical imbalance in the consumer ethnocentrism literature, which has been dominated by research conducted in developed economies. The findings will enhance the cross-cultural applicability of both the Theory of Planned Behavior and consumer ethnocentrism theory by providing evidence from a South Asian developing country with unique cultural, economic, and historical characteristics. In addition, the study offers practical implications for importers, marketers, and policymakers seeking to understand consumer responses to imported nutritional supplements in developing markets where increasing health consciousness coexists with growing consumer nationalism.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen (1991) proposed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to explain how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions. Widely applied in consumer research (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Paul et al., 2016), TPB highlights the mediating role of purchase attitude between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention (Han, 1988; Vida & Reardon, 2008). It has been applied across food markets, including functional foods, dietary supplements, and dairy products (Chung et al., 2012; Farid et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Toorani et al., 2024).

The three constructs of TPB work collectively to guide consumer decisions (Ajzen, 2002). Attitude reflects positive or negative evaluations of a behavior, such as buying domestic versus imported goods. Ethnocentric consumers often favor domestic products (Maksan et al., 2019; Miguel et al., 2022), whereas those perceiving foreign goods as high quality and healthy may adopt favorable purchase attitudes (Chung et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2021). Subjective norms capture social influence, which is particularly strong in collectivist cultures such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, where family and cultural expectations reinforce preferences for local goods (Akhtar, 2021; Farid et al., 2023; Hansen et al., 2004). Perceived behavioral control reflects consumers' belief in their ability to perform a purchase, shaped by factors like affordability, access, and information. Even with positive attitudes, external barriers can suppress intentions (Chung et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2021; Toorani et al., 2024; Yadav & Pathak, 2017).

According to TPB, stronger control increases behavioral intention, the immediate antecedent of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991; Xin & Seo, 2019). Studies confirm its predictive value for food-related behaviors, including wine, fruits, vegetables, dairy, and functional foods (Maksan et al., 2019; Miguel et al., 2022; Farid et al., 2023). For example, Akhtar (2021) found attitudes and control shaped functional food purchases in Pakistan, while Toorani et al. (2024) showed that attitudes and social influence determined fortified drink consumption.

Extensions of TPB strengthen its relevance. Maksan et al. (2019) and Miguel et al. (2022) demonstrated ethnocentrism as an added determinant of domestic product preference. Liu et al. (2021) combined TPB with Protection Motivation Theory, showing how fear during COVID-19 influenced supplement purchases via risk perception and control. Chung et al. (2012) similarly applied TPB to Chinese consumers' soy-based supplement purchases, confirming that attitudes, norms, and control significantly drive intentions.

Overall, TPB remains a robust framework for predicting consumer behavior, particularly in food-related contexts such as functional and imported foods (Liu et al., 2011; Lorenz et al., 2015; Paul et al., 2016; Xin & Seo, 2019).

Consumer Ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism, which has its roots in sociology (Sumner, 1906), was later adopted into consumer behavior research to better understand economic decision-making. Shimp and Sharma (1987) defined consumer ethnocentrism as "consumers' beliefs regarding the validity and morality of purchasing foreign products" (p. 280). Ethnocentric consumers typically hold

negative attitudes toward imported products while maintaining positive cognitive, emotional, and normative attitudes toward products made domestically. They perceive purchasing foreign goods as unpatriotic, believing it negatively impacts the local economy and employment (Haniffa et al., 2023; Xin & Seo, 2019).

Highly ethnocentric consumers tend to overvalue domestic products while underestimating foreign alternatives, even when the latter may offer better quality or value (Sharma et al., 1994; Ding, 2017). This bias can result in resistance to purchasing imported products due to nationalistic sentiments, cultural attachment, or economic concerns. In contrast, consumers with weak ethnocentrism prioritize product benefits, such as price and quality, over their country of origin (Sharma et al., 1994). Nakos and Hajidimitriou (2007) demonstrated that ethnocentrism negatively affects Greek consumers' perceptions of foreign products, while Han and Guo (2018) found a similar influence among Chinese consumers, where ethnocentric tendencies reduced the likelihood of purchasing imported brands (Xin & Seo, 2019).

Several studies have examined consumer ethnocentrism across different industries and cultural contexts. Boyagoda and Weerasekera (2024) investigated how consumer ethnocentrism moderates the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer purchase intentions. Their findings suggest that ethnocentric consumers may resist foreign brands, regardless of CSR efforts. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2023) found that Vietnamese consumers with strong ethnocentric tendencies were reluctant to purchase Chinese products, highlighting how ethnocentrism shapes cross-border purchasing decisions.

In the Sri Lankan market, Karunaratne and Wanninayake (2019) explored the role of ethnocentrism in impulsive buying behavior within the milk powder industry. Their findings revealed that highly ethnocentric consumers were less likely to engage in impulsive purchases of foreign brands, particularly when local alternatives were available. Haniffa et al. (2023) further analyzed consumer ethnocentrism among Sri Lankan millennials in the food industry, concluding that economic downturns intensify ethnocentric tendencies, leading to a stronger preference for domestic brands.

Beyond food and beverage markets, Gantulga and Ganbold (2022) examined the influence of consumer ethnocentrism on purchase intention toward imported products, incorporating factors such as country of origin and social influence. Their study found that consumers with strong ethnocentric tendencies resisted foreign goods, even when they recognized their quality

advantages. Similarly, Qing et al. (2012) found that Chinese consumer ethnocentrism positively influenced attitudes toward purchasing local fruits.

From a theoretical perspective, several studies have applied the extended theory of planned behavior (TPB) to understand consumer ethnocentrism. Maksan et al. (2019) explored how ethnocentrism influences domestic wine purchases, while Miguel et al. (2022) studied its effect on buying domestic fruits and vegetables. These studies emphasize how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape ethnocentric buying preferences.

In the context of infant nutrition, Zhang et al. (2024) investigated ethnocentric tendencies in the infant milk formula industry in China. Their research revealed that perceived quality and behavioral control mediate the relationship between ethnocentrism and purchase intention, suggesting that quality perceptions can sometimes override ethnocentric biases.

In Sri Lanka, consumer ethnocentrism may play a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions regarding imported nutritional supplements. Karunaratne and Wanninayake (2019) suggested that ethnocentric consumers might perceive these products as unpatriotic or inferior to local alternatives, leading to negative evaluations and reduced purchase intentions. However, younger consumers, who are more exposed to globalization, may exhibit lower levels of ethnocentrism and greater openness to imported goods (Silili & Karunarathna, 2014).

In the context of functional foods, Xin and Seo (2019) examined the role of consumer ethnocentrism, country image, and subjective knowledge in predicting the intention to purchase imported functional foods. Their findings revealed that consumer ethnocentrism negatively affects purchase intentions, while a positive country image and greater subjective knowledge can mitigate these effects.

This indicates that consumers in a developing country like Sri Lanka may be significantly influenced by ethnocentrism. When imported nutritional supplements enter the Sri Lankan market, consumer ethnocentrism could emerge as a critical factor shaping the purchasing attitudes of Sri Lankan consumers. Ethnocentric consumers may perceive buying imported nutritional supplements as unpatriotic or contrary to local values, which could lead to a negative evaluation of these products. Consequently, ethnocentrism may hinder the growth of the imported nutritional supplement market in Sri Lanka by discouraging purchases.

Purchase Attitude

Purchase attitude refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of purchasing a particular product or service (Ajzen, 1991). It is a crucial component of consumer decision-making, as attitudes directly influence purchase intentions, which subsequently guide actual purchasing behavior. Various factors shape purchase attitudes, including product quality, price, brand image, cultural values, and social influences (Ajzen, 1975). In the context of imported nutritional supplements, purchase attitude reflects consumer evaluations based on perceived quality, trust, and benefits compared to domestic alternatives. A favorable purchase attitude enhances purchase intention, whereas a negative attitude may deter consumers from making a purchase (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Several studies emphasize the mediating role of purchase attitude in the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention. Xin and Seo (2019) found that while consumer ethnocentrism negatively affects attitudes toward imported functional foods, a positive purchase attitude can mitigate this effect, leading to higher purchase intention. Similarly, Sharma et al. (1995) noted that ethnocentric consumers are less likely to develop positive attitudes toward foreign products, which in turn reduces their intention to purchase.

Consumers often exhibit varying purchase attitudes toward imported and domestic products due to factors such as perceived quality, cultural pride, and national loyalty. Ethnocentric consumers tend to favor domestic products, associating them with patriotism and economic support for the local industry (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Conversely, imported products are often perceived as superior in terms of quality, innovation, and brand reputation, particularly in developing countries where local production may lag behind global standards (Kaynak & Kara, 2002).

For instance, Nguyen et al. (2023) found that ethnocentric Vietnamese consumers displayed negative attitudes toward Chinese products despite their affordability. Similarly, Gantulga and Ganbold (2022) and González-Cabrera and Trelles-Arteaga (2021) highlighted how ethnocentrism, combined with country-of-origin effects and social influence, shapes purchase attitudes toward imported goods in Mongolia and Ecuador, respectively. In Sri Lanka, Haniffa et al. (2023) and Karunaratne and Wanninayake (2019) demonstrated that ethnocentric tendencies during economic crises influenced consumers' attitudes and impulsive buying behavior, particularly in the food and milk powder markets.

In the context of imported nutritional supplements, consumers may perceive these products as offering better quality and efficacy compared to local alternatives. However, ethnocentrism can influence these attitudes by creating biases against imported goods, leading to negative evaluations (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). This divergence in attitudes highlights the complexity of consumer behavior, where cultural and psychological factors interplay to shape purchasing decisions.

This study views purchase attitude as a mediating variable that influences the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention. It encapsulates consumer evaluations of imported nutritional supplements based on perceived quality, trust, and benefits. By analyzing how ethnocentric tendencies shape purchase attitudes and, in turn, influence purchase intention, this study aims to provide deeper insights into consumer behavior.

Findings from Zhang et al. (2024) emphasize the mediating roles of perceived quality and perceived behavioral control in shaping Chinese consumers' purchase intentions for domestic infant milk formula. Similarly, Liu et al. (2021) integrated fear of COVID-19 and health motivations into the Theory of Planned Behavior to explain dietary supplement purchases, reinforcing the importance of psychological factors in shaping purchase attitudes.

Research has also explored the impact of various marketing and psychological factors on purchase attitude. Farid et al. (2023) examined the role of marketing mix elements in shaping purchase intentions for dairy products in Bangladesh, emphasizing how brand positioning and promotions influence consumer attitudes. Similarly, Akhtar (2021) analyzed functional food consumption in Pakistan, demonstrating that consumer perception of health benefits plays a crucial role in forming purchase attitudes.

Consumer ethnocentrism has been extensively studied in relation to purchase attitudes and intentions. Miguel et al. (2022) and Maksan et al. (2019) applied the extended Theory of Planned Behavior to examine how ethnocentrism affects the purchase of domestic fruits, vegetables, and wine, respectively. Both studies confirmed that strong ethnocentric tendencies result in more favorable attitudes toward domestic goods while creating resistance toward foreign alternatives.

By examining the interplay between ethnocentrism, purchase attitudes, and purchase intentions, this study seeks to provide deeper insights into the factors driving consumer behavior in the context of imported nutritional supplements.

Hypotheses Development

Consumer ethnocentrism refers to the belief that purchasing domestic products is more appropriate and morally justified than buying foreign products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). This attitude often arises from national pride, economic concerns, and cultural identity (Han, 1988). When consumer ethnocentrism is high, individuals tend to avoid foreign products, perceiving them as a threat to the local economy and domestic producers (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). Defined as the preference for domestic products over foreign alternatives due to national loyalty and perceived economic or cultural threats (Maksan et al., 2019; Miguel et al., 2022), consumer ethnocentrism is a critical determinant of purchase behavior.

Ethnocentric consumers often associate foreign products with negative economic consequences or cultural incompatibility, leading to reluctance in adopting such products (Gantulga & Ganbold, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). Empirical studies on various imported goods, such as dietary supplements (Chung et al., 2012), dairy products (Farid et al., 2023), and functional foods (Xin & Seo, 2019), consistently indicate that higher ethnocentric tendencies reduce consumers' willingness to purchase foreign goods.

This study proposes four hypotheses that collectively operationalize the mediation framework grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The direct relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention has been well-established across diverse product categories and geographic contexts. Ethnocentric consumers tend to view foreign products as inferior or detrimental to the domestic economy, leading to reluctance in purchasing such items (Klein et al., 1998). This aversion is reinforced by perceptions of inferior quality, distrust of foreign brands, and moral concerns about undermining local industries (Karunaratne & Wanninayake, 2019; Haniffa et al., 2023).

In the context of imported nutritional supplements, ethnocentric consumers may perceive these products as economically threatening or culturally inappropriate, thereby diminishing their purchase intention. Evidence from Sri Lanka (Haniffa et al., 2023), Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2023), and China (Xin & Seo, 2019; Chung et al., 2012) consistently corroborates the negative relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention for foreign products. Sri

Lankan consumers, in particular, may exhibit intensified ethnocentric tendencies in the aftermath of economic volatility, as documented by Haniffa et al. (2023), further strengthening resistance toward imported goods such as nutritional supplements. Based on this reasoning:

H1: Consumer ethnocentrism has a negative impact on purchase intention for imported nutritional supplements.

Beyond its direct influence on purchase intention, consumer ethnocentrism is theorized to first shape consumers' evaluative dispositions, that is, their purchase attitudes toward imported products. This is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which frames attitude as the primary cognitive and affective response that connects underlying belief structures (such as ethnocentric dispositions) with behavioral intentions. In this framework, consumer ethnocentrism functions as a belief-level antecedent that generates an attitudinal response before that response translates into behavioral intention.

Shimp and Sharma (1987) established that ethnocentric consumers inherently hold negative attitudes toward foreign products, viewing them as culturally inappropriate, economically damaging, and morally objectionable. Sharma et al. (1995) further demonstrated that ethnocentric consumers are significantly less likely to develop favorable attitudes toward imported goods, as nationalistic orientation creates cognitive bias against foreign alternatives. This attitudinal resistance is not merely a product evaluation issue but is rooted in patriotic and identity-based belief systems.

Empirical evidence confirms the CE–attitude relationship across multiple product categories and contexts. Xin and Seo (2019) found that consumer ethnocentrism significantly and negatively affected purchase attitudes toward imported functional foods among Chinese consumers. Nguyen et al. (2023) reported that ethnocentric Vietnamese consumers developed strongly negative attitudes toward Chinese products regardless of price or quality advantages. Applying the extended Theory of Planned Behavior, Maksan et al. (2019) and Miguel et al. (2022) demonstrated that ethnocentrism was a significant negative determinant of attitudes toward imported wine and foreign produce, respectively. González-Cabrera and Trelles-Arteaga (2021) further established that ethnocentrism-rooted unfavorable attitudes function as psychological barriers to foreign product adoption in developing economies, a context directly analogous to Sri Lanka.

In the context of imported nutritional supplements in Sri Lanka, ethnocentric consumers are likely to develop negative purchase attitudes by perceiving imported supplements as economically inappropriate, culturally incompatible, or unnecessarily foreign when domestic alternatives exist. Therefore:

H2: Consumer ethnocentrism has a negative impact on purchase attitude for imported nutritional supplements.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) consistently positions attitude as one of the strongest and most direct antecedents of behavioral intention. Attitude toward a behavior, defined as the degree to which an individual holds a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of performing that behavior (Ajzen, 1991), directly and positively shapes the strength of the accompanying behavioral intention. A consumer who evaluates the act of purchasing imported nutritional supplements favorably is therefore more likely to form a concrete intention to purchase.

This attitude–intention relationship has been empirically confirmed across a wide range of food and supplement consumption contexts. Farid et al. (2023) confirmed that purchase attitude positively and significantly predicted purchase intention for dairy products among Bangladeshi consumers. Liu et al. (2021) similarly demonstrated that attitude was a significant predictor of dietary supplement purchase intention. Toorani et al. (2024) found attitude to be among the most influential determinants of functional drink consumption intention. MacKenzie et al. (1986) and Bian and Forsythe (2012) additionally established that consumer attitude plays a critical and consistent role in linking antecedent beliefs to behavioral outcomes across product domains. In the TPB extended ethnocentrism literature, both Maksan et al. (2019) and Miguel et al. (2022) confirmed that attitude positively and significantly predicted purchase intention for domestic wine and produce, respectively, demonstrating the robustness of this relationship in food-related contexts.

In the context of imported nutritional supplements among Sri Lankan consumers, a favorable purchase attitude, shaped by perceptions of health efficacy, product quality, and personal benefit, is expected to positively translate into purchase intention. Conversely, consumers holding unfavorable purchase attitudes, potentially driven by ethnocentric beliefs, are expected to demonstrate substantially lower purchase intentions. Therefore:

H3: Purchase attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention for imported nutritional supplements.

Building upon the three component hypotheses above, H1 (CE → PI), H2 (CE → PA), and H3 (PA → PI), this study proposes that purchase attitude functions as a formal mediating mechanism through which consumer ethnocentrism indirectly influences purchase intention. This mediation pathway is grounded in the core proposition of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which positions attitude as the mechanism through which underlying beliefs and dispositions are translated into behavioral intentions. Accordingly, ethnocentric beliefs (H2), by generating unfavorable purchase attitudes toward imported supplements, are expected to indirectly suppress purchase intentions (H3), representing the psychological process through which ethnocentrism ultimately influences behavior.

The mediating role of attitude in the CE–PI relationship has begun to receive empirical attention in adjacent product categories. Farid et al. (2023) formally confirmed that purchase attitude mediated the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention in the dairy products context in Bangladesh. Miguel et al. (2022) similarly established attitude mediation in the domestic fruits and vegetables context in Portugal. In the functional food domain, Xin and Seo (2019) recognized the theoretical basis for attitude mediation, though their study primarily examined country image and subjective knowledge as moderating variables rather than formally testing purchase attitude as a mediator. Zhang et al. (2024) and Liu et al. (2021) tested related psychological constructs as mediators, namely perceived quality and health motivation, respectively, but did not examine purchase attitude specifically. Notably, no study to date has formally tested the CE → PA → PI mediation chain specifically for imported nutritional supplements in a South Asian developing economy such as Sri Lanka.

The mediation test will determine whether purchase attitude partially or fully mediates the CE–PI relationship. If the indirect effect (CE → PA → PI) is significant and the direct effect (H1) is reduced upon inclusion of purchase attitude in the model, partial mediation is supported. If the direct effect becomes non-significant, full mediation is evidenced (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Therefore:

H4: Purchase attitude mediates the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention for imported nutritional supplements.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), extended to incorporate consumer ethnocentrism as an antecedent belief-level construct and purchase attitude as a formal mediating variable linking ethnocentrism to purchase intention.

Relationships Between Constructs and Corresponding Hypotheses

H1: CE → PI (Direct, Negative): Consumer ethnocentrism is proposed to negatively and directly influence purchase intention toward imported nutritional supplements, consistent with documented negative CE–PI relationships across product categories (Haniffa et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023; Xin & Seo, 2019).

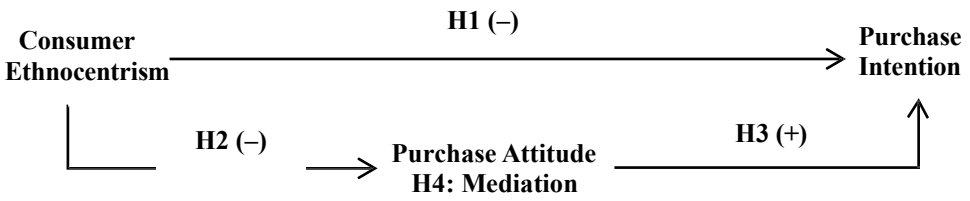
H2: CE → PA (Negative): Consumer ethnocentrism is proposed to negatively influence purchase attitude toward imported nutritional supplements. Ethnocentric dispositions create unfavorable evaluative responses toward foreign goods by framing such purchases as economically threatening and culturally inappropriate (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; González-Cabrera & Trelles-Arteaga, 2021).

H3: PA → PI (Positive): Purchase attitude is proposed to positively influence purchase intention, consistent with the attitude–intention pathway of the TPB (Ajzen, 1991). Consumers holding favorable evaluations of purchasing imported supplements are more likely to form and express an intention to purchase (Farid et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021).

H4: CE → PA → PI (Mediation): Purchase attitude is proposed to mediate the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention, operationalizing the indirect pathway through which ethnocentric beliefs ultimately shape purchasing behavior through attitudinal evaluations (Miguel et al., 2022; Farid et al., 2023).

Figure 1. 1

Conceptual Framework



The framework depicts four empirically testable pathways: a direct negative effect of CE on PI (H1); a negative effect of CE on PA (H2); a positive effect of PA on PI (H3); and the indirect mediation of PA between CE and PI (H4). Together, these hypotheses operationalize the full mediation structure and allow for testing of both partial and full mediation.

Operationalization

This section provides a detailed account of the latent constructs identified under the conceptual framework. The proposed study examines the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism, purchase attitude, and purchase intention regarding imported nutritional supplements in Sri Lanka. Purchase intention (PI) is considered the dependent variable, consumer ethnocentrism (CE) is the independent variable, and purchase attitude (PA) serves as the mediating variable.

The constructs were operationalized using validated measurement scales adopted from Xin and Seo (2019). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Table 1: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Definition	Measurement Items	Scale	Source
Purchase Intention (PI) (Dependent Variable)	An individual's readiness to perform a specific behavior and the immediate antecedent of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991).	PI1: I am likely to purchase imported nutritional supplements consistently. PI2: I want to purchase imported nutritional supplements consistently. PI3: I am planning to purchase imported nutritional supplements consistently.	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Xin & Seo (2019)

Variable	Definition	Measurement Items	Scale	Source
		PI4: I will recommend the purchase of imported nutritional supplements to people around me. PI5: I will actively talk about the benefits of imported nutritional supplements to people around me.		
Consumer Ethnocentrism (CE) (Independent Variable)	Consumers' beliefs regarding the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).	CE1: It is unpatriotic to purchase foreign products. CE2: Sri Lankan people should always buy products made in Sri Lanka. CE3: Curbs should be put on imports of products made in countries other than Sri Lanka. CE4: We should purchase products manufactured in Sri Lanka instead of letting other countries get rich off us. CE5: Sri Lankans should not buy foreign products because it	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Xin & Seo (2019)

Variable	Definition	Measurement Items	Scale	Source
		hurts Sri Lankan businesses and causes unemployment.		
Purchase Attitude (PA) (Mediating Variable)	The degree to which an individual has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991).	PA1: It is good to purchase imported nutritional supplements. PA2: It is valuable to purchase imported nutritional supplements. PA3: It is helpful to purchase imported nutritional supplements.	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Xin & Seo (2019)

The use of validated scales from prior studies enhances the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument. The operationalization of these constructs facilitates the empirical examination of the relationships among consumer ethnocentrism, purchase attitude, and purchase intention toward imported nutritional supplements in Sri Lanka.

Future Research Directions

The current study focused on the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention in the nutritional supplements sector, considering purchase attitude as a mediator. Future research could expand this by incorporating multiple dependent and mediating variables such as brand loyalty, perceived quality, and consumer trust to better capture the complexity of consumer behavior (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Shankarmahesh, 2006). Additionally, studies could explore various industries beyond nutritional supplements, including electronics, fashion, and pharmaceuticals, to examine whether the effects of consumer ethnocentrism differ across sectors (Balabanis & Siamagka, 2017; Cleveland,

Laroche, & Papadopoulos, 2009). Methodologically, adopting longitudinal designs would allow researchers to observe changes in consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intentions over time, especially in response to economic or social shifts, rather than relying solely on cross-sectional data (Craig & Douglas, 2006; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004). To enhance generalizability, future studies should aim for larger, more diverse samples that include rural populations and older consumers, who are often underrepresented (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Camacho et al., 2021). Furthermore, qualitative or mixed-method approaches could provide deeper insights into the motivations and cultural narratives underlying ethnocentric consumer behavior, complementing quantitative findings and enriching theoretical understanding (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Overall, broadening theoretical frameworks, diversifying industries and populations studied, and employing varied research designs will strengthen future research on consumer ethnocentrism.

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Contemporary Consumer Behavior in Gifting: The Shift from Material Gifts to Experiential Gifting

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Abstract

Gifting has evolved beyond the exchange of material items into a symbolic and emotional practice shaped by relationships, personal values and social expectations. Alongside the rise of the experience economy, there's a noticeable shift among consumers, in valuing experiential gifts that create memorable and meaningful moments over material gifts. Experiential gifting is associated with greater happiness, stronger social bonds and enhanced relational satisfaction compared to material gifting. Drawing on existing literature, this paper discusses the characteristics of experiential gifts, Four S's of experience gifting and the four stages of consumption experience. The study provides directions on how businesses can strategically design memorable experiences in a giftable manner within contemporary marketing practices.

Keywords: Gifting, Experiential gifts, Four S's of experience gifting, Four stages of consumption experience.

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Introduction

Living in a consumerist society, where consumption is not merely for need fulfillment, gifting in turn has evolved with such symbolic interpretations beyond the generic motives of the exchange of gifts (Kumar, 2022). 'Gifts' induce positive emotional connections between the giver and the receiver and are influenced by numerous factors like personal values, type of relationship, gender, cultural context (Davies et al., 2009). Prior studies look at gifting as a social event which is of economic value (Kim et al., 2018). Gifting is now an evolving industry where gifts are carrying how a relationship is perceived, be it love, power or identity. Simultaneously the rise of experiential economy has transformed consumer preferences, shifting attention from material possessions towards creating memorable experiences (Weingarten & Goodman, 2020).

Much of the gift giving models and processes are predominantly developed around physical goods. Although gift giving behavior has been studied in various context, contemporary behavioral shift to experiential gifting has gained limited scholarly attention (Clarke, 2008). This paper identifies two supporting models that enhance value in experiential gifting and the process of it. By integrating the Four S's of Experience gifting with the Four stages of consumption experiences, the paper proposes how business in the experiential sector can strategically design their services as meaningful giftable experiences. The purpose of this study is to look at how the Four S's influence different stages of experience consumption? identify which experience stage contributes most to perceived gifting value and thereby expand knowledge on how potentially giftable services can be improved.

Gifts, Gifting Process and Gifting Experience

The act of giving is a social interaction that has various purposes. Gifts can be defined as the voluntary giving of something generously, either tangible or intangible, that carries symbolic meaning and may involve expectations of reciprocity or be given without any expectation in return (Davies et al., 2009; Givi et al., 2022). Gifting is identified as a process which starts from preparation, followed by exchange, reveal, use, reflect and reciprocate (Davies et al., 2009). It has been constantly argued that the spending on gifting or the gift market is of significant monetary value (Lim & Ok, 2021). On a broader sense gifting has been identified under two different spectrums, it could be 'relational' focusing on relationship development, mostly consumer to consumer gifting and on other hand 'transactional' where the emphasis is placed more on the act of donation itself and the benefits received by the giver (Kim et al.,

2018). Research on gifting has evolved around interesting areas such as emotions followed in the process, different roles in the gifting process, motives for gifting, value of gift giving experience (Givi & Galak, 2017), gift selection, impact of gender/cultural influence on gifting (Shanka & Handley, 2011), self-gifting (Ward & Tran, 2008).

Prior research emphasizes that gifting can be motivated either by 'altruistic' motives; giving out of love or generosity to maximize the pleasure of the receiver or 'agonistic' motives; giving gifts for self-related reasons such as gaining status, influence (Sharp & Randhawa, 2014). Gifting Process starts with a stimulus, which is mostly an occasion or a moment of celebration (Gupta et al., 2022). 'Obligation' the sense of indebtedness to gift something and 'reciprocity' wanting to repay by gifting something back to the giver have received greater attention as dominant characteristics of the gifting process (Zollo et al., 2017). The feelings of obligation and reciprocity in turn create stress and anxiety (Davies et al., 2009).

Gift selection is found to be challenging as appropriateness of a gift is been judged based on givers perception about the receivers' personal likes and dislikes (Davies et al., 2009). However, failing to make the correct choice, either gifting something which is too low or too high priced, or a poor judgment of the recipient's taste, will create a negative effect.

Studies show interest findings on the role of gender in this gifting process (Gupta et al., 2022). Women are found to be most responsible for gift giving related activities as they tend to care more about social bonds. Findings also emphasize buying a gift for someone of the same gender is simpler for people (Shanka & Handley, 2011).

It is clear that gifting is a complex process shaped by emotional, relational and situational factors, where symbolic meaning and social expectations significantly influence both gift selection and evaluation. Building on this understanding, the following section explores distinct characteristics of experiential gifting.

Experiential Gifting

Experiences are not a new economic offering. While commodities, goods, services lie outside of the consumer, experiences live within them (Pine, 2022). Experiences can be defined as memorable events that engage each individual in an inherently personal way (Same & Larimo, 2012). These experiences could be entertainment, education, aesthetics and escapism (Carter & Gilovich, 2012). Experiential consumption is said to promote positive implications for individuals and society. A key idea associated with this experience economy that has drawn scholarly attention is experiential advantage, which states that consumers are happier when

they buy experiences rather than material goods because experiences are more fun to bring up in conversations and are thought to have more social value (Bastos & Brucks, 2017).

Usually, a Gift is selected by the giver and he/she has to make a choice based on the occasion and understanding of the receivers' personal preferences. This choice could be a material gift which are objects to be kept in the recipient's possession or experiential gifts which are events that the recipient lives through (Clarke, 2008). Scholars claim that experiential gifts lead to greater satisfaction, less regret and greater happiness (Caprariello & Reis, 2012) Experiential gifts are found to strengthen relationships more than material gifts, increasing social closeness between givers and recipients in gift-giving exchanges (Kumar, 2022). Therefore, giving experiential presents is recognized as a very successful way to spend money on prosocial spending (Same & Larimo, 2012). Experiential gifts tend to be favored when the giver and recipient share a closer social bond (Goodman & Lim, 2018). People perceive that experiences they purchase reflect more of their identity compared to physical items. Engaging in experiential gifts fosters a sense of autonomy support, which is correlated with an increase in feelings of gratitude (Puente-Díaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2024). Scholars claim 'best gifts' were found to be unforgettable experiences over tangible possessions (Branco-Illodo & Heath, 2019). Experiential gifts are less likely to make people compare themselves negatively with others. Westerners are more likely to gift less tangible gifts such as holiday at a resort, lunch outing.

Thus, experiential gifting possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from material gifting, through its ability to generate emotional value, shared memories.

Four S's of Experience Gifting

Clarke (2006) drawing upon gift giving theory explored Four S's of experience gift giving: surprise, suspense, sacrifice and sharing. Many experience gifts are designed by givers as surprises for recipients; the unexpected is seen as a desirable feature to incorporate into the giving process (Vanhamme et al., 2020). The experiential gift's intangibility and inseparability allow the donor to create suspense. The "what" and "where," questions are the two main components of suspense (Clarke, 2006). Planning, organizing, reserving, traveling, or coordinating events are typically necessary for experience gifts. As a result, the donor sacrifices labor and time, which elevates the gift's emotional value and thoughtfulness (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014). Experience gifts, however, also demand work from the recipient, participating in the activity requires time from the recipient. One of the most important aspects of experience

gifts is sharing. In contrast to many material gifts, they frequently entail spending time with someone, making memories, learning, and strengthening bonds (Clarke, 2006).

The significance of the Four S's extends beyond describing the characteristics of experiential gifts. Collectively, they provide a useful framework for understanding how a service experience can acquire gifting value. Surprise and suspense differentiate an experiential gift from an ordinary service purchase by creating emotional anticipation surrounding its presentation and consumption. Sacrifice reflects the giver's investment of time, effort and resources, allowing the gift to communicate thoughtfulness and knowledge of the recipient. Sharing further enhances the relational value of experiential gifts by facilitating time spent together, social interaction and the creation of shared memories. Thus, the Four S's help explain why the value of an experiential gift may lie not merely in the service being consumed, but in the symbolic, emotional and relational meanings surrounding the experience.

The framework is particularly relevant to experiential service providers because many hospitality, leisure and tourism offerings may already possess the potential to become gifts but are not necessarily designed or marketed as such. The Four S's provide service providers identifying what needs to be in the potential design principles for transforming ordinary service offerings into more giftable experiences. However, the relevance and desirability of each element of Four S's can vary based on the characteristics of the recipient, relationship and nature of the experience.

Four Stages of Experience Consumption

Consumer Purchase behavior has been studied in a various context and is changing with the volatility of the world. Hence scholars have paid attention on how this purchasing behavior may change in terms of material purchasing vs experience purchasing circumstances (Gilovich & Gallo, 2019) and it was identified that it could be more naturally compared focusing on the subjective emotions. In consuming experiences, they surpass emotions of anticipation, experience and remembrance (Vichiengior et al., 2019). Based on previous studies four stages of consumption experience were identified; pre-consumption experience, the purchase experience, the core consumption experience, and the remembered consumption experience (Guevarra & Howell, 2013). Pre-consumption, stage before making a purchase is driven by the desire and intention to buy something. At this stage individuals experience anticipatory pleasure by planning, imagining and expecting the future benefits or happiness the purchase may bring (Jiang et al., 2017). Purchasing stage starts when a customer makes the decision to

acquire something. When making an experienced purchase, like buying dinner while hanging out with friends, the purchasing process is frequently integrated into the whole experience (Lanier & Rader, 2015). In general, the purchasing experience has received little attention and has prospects for further study. Core consumption experience is where the consumer actually consumes the product associated with their direct emotional and sensory reactions (Chaney et al., 2018). Since this stage strongly influences satisfaction or dissatisfaction, it is considered one of the most important parts of the consumption experience (Sun & Pham, 2025). Finally remembered consumption experience, is where the consumer stores the experience in their episodic memory. At this stage consumer recalls and relives in their experience later, evaluating their overall journey and can be remembered as enjoyable, satisfying, simple, or extraordinary (Akhoondnejad et al., 2024).

Drawing on these frameworks together, the following section examines how the Four S's of experiential gifting may operate across the four stages of consumption experience and how this integration can inform the strategic design of giftable experiential offerings.

Implications for Marketing

Experiences are regarded as a key concept in Marketing today; experience businesses are inherently customer-centric, constantly looking for new and unique ways to impress the people they serve (Same & Larimo, 2012). In a context where humans are seeking happiness and tying happiness along their purchases, researchers confirm that buying experiences are more likely to give that pleasure at a higher rate (Caprariello & Reis, 2012). Therefore, it's vital that businesses operating in the experience sector like leisure, entertainment strategically position their offerings in a giftable way.

Four S's of experience gift giving; surprise, suspense, sacrifice sharing (Clarke, 2006) and the four stages of consumption experience; pre-consumption experience, the purchase experience, the core consumption experience and the remembered consumption experience (Guevarra & Howell, 2013) provide theoretical foundation for such future implementations. In the pre-consumption stage, businesses can emphasize surprise and suspense by designing mystery or customizable gift experiences (Vanhamme et al., 2020). Theoretical support from anticipatory utility literature suggests that consumers derive pleasure from imagining future consumption meaning firms can increase perceived value even before the experience occurs (Guevarra & Howell, 2013). By offering options like "choose-your-adventure" companies can strengthen value of experiences and make the offering more attractive as a gift. In the core consumption

stage, businesses can facilitate sharing, which is a key driver of experiential value. Drawing from experiential consumption literature, shared experiences enhance relational bonding and satisfaction (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). Therefore, firms should design experiences that are inherently social (couple packages, group bookings, participatory activities) and encourage co-consumption through guided interaction, storytelling, making the experience immersive. During the Purchase stage the 'sacrifice' element becomes central. Business in the experience industry should be able to make the gift givers' sacrifices made in the pre stages and recipients time spent consuming this experience look worthwhile (Sun & Pham, 2025).

Finally, in the remembered consumption stage, firms can enhance the longevity of the gift through memory reinforcement mechanisms (Akhoondnejad et al., 2024). Remembrance is no longer confined to human memory alone, as integration of social media has made experiential consumption hyper-salient and enduring. Experiences were traditionally thought to be more transient than material belongings since they gradually disappear from view and memory. But in today's digital world, social media platforms allow users to record, share and relive their experiences over time (Weingarten & Goodman, 2020). Experience providers can further enhance experiential gifting by enabling the creation of shareable content such as photographs, video highlights and digital souvenirs into the customer journey that could be shared across social media platforms.

In conclusion, integrating experiential gifting theory with the four-stage consumption framework offers valuable insights for marketers in the experience economy. By intentionally designing experiences that leverage surprise, suspense, sacrifice, sharing and memory reinforcement, firms can transform services into meaningful and giftable offerings.

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- The submission should be a conceptual paper which describes a single (broad) key concept in the students' research project (e.g., social entrepreneurship, workplace bullying).
- The first page must include a title with names and affiliations of the authors, and contact details (including the email addresses).
- An abstract with a maximum of 120 words and around 3-5 keywords should be submitted along with the conceptual paper.
- The content of the submission may include the following: terminology clarification, recent research findings around the concept, theories used in the conceptual domain, different conceptualizations and operationalizations of the concept, diverse methodologies used, different contextual backgrounds of the past research, and directions for future research agenda.
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  Line spacing: 1.5
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  Page margins: 1 inch all sides

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