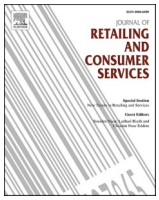
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services 80 (2024) 103927



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jretconser



How do customers react to preferential treatment? An affective events theory and time-lagged survey

Qurat Ul Ain [a], Weng Marc Lim [b,c,d,*], Shahid Rasool [e], Muhammad Zeshan [f]

[a] Department of Management Sciences, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan
[b] Sunway Business School, Sunway University, Sunway City, Selangor, Malaysia
[c] School of Business, Law and Entrepreneurship, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia
[d] Faculty of Business, Design and Arts, Swinburne University of Technology, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
[e] Azman Hashim International Business School, University of Technology Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[f] School of Management Sciences, Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute (GIKI) of Engineering Sciences and Technology, Topi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

ARTICLE INFO

Handling Editor: Prof. H. Timmermans

Keywords:
Preferential treatment
Customer delight
Customer advocacy
Impulse buying
Impulsive purchase
Attention-seeking motive
Affective events theory
Time-lagged survey

ABSTRACT

Understanding how preferential treatment influences customer behavior is pivotal in shaping effective marketing strategies. This study looks at how customers feel and act when they get special treatment compared to others (*preferential treatment*), using the idea of how emotions are stirred by certain events to understand its effect on what customers do (*affective events theory*). Using a time-lagged survey of 318 customers in the retail sector, we explored how preferential treatment influences three kinds of customer behavior: feeling extremely happy (*customer delight*), speaking favorably about a product or service (*customer advocacy*), and making unplanned purchases (*impulse buying*). We discovered that preferential treatment makes customers much happier, which then encourages them to both advocate for and buy products on a whim. Unexpectedly, our findings indicate that preferential treatment's ability to elevate customer happiness is somewhat diminished in those with a higher inclination toward seeking attention (*attention-seeking motives*), due to a perceived lack of genuineness or merit in the treatment received. Consequently, this study illustrates the complex dynamics of preferential treatment in enhancing customer delight, advocacy, and impulse purchasing, while also uncovering the noteworthy role of individual differences in these processes.

1. Introduction

Central to enhancing firm performance, customer relationship management (CRM) is instrumental in cultivating, maintaining, and strengthening customer relationships fundamental to modern marketing (Arbore and Estes, 2013; Baumann et al., 2017; Dwivedi, 2015; Lim et al., 2023a; Merdin-Uygur and Ozturkcan, 2023; Pontes et al., 2023; Xia and Kukar-Kinney, 2014). This strategic orientation is based on the premise that not all customers are created equal, with the profitability of serving certain customers far outweighing others, thereby necessitating a differentiated approach to service delivery (Homburg et al., 2008). In pursuit of customer delight, firms are increasingly adopting strategies that offer more than just satisfactory service, aiming to exceed customer expectations through personalized promotions and service upgrades (Chandra et al., 2022; Mattila et al., 2013; Park and Jang, 2015; Zheng et al., 2023). This segmentation, based on the projected value a customer brings, allows firms to allocate resources more efficiently, rewarding customer loyalty with tailored benefits (Chang et al., 2020; Hallikainen et al., 2022; Lacey et al., 2007). Concurrently, a growing awareness among customers regarding the advantages of sustained engagement with firms is reshaping expectations and dynamics within CRM (Henderson et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2022). Thus, it becomes imperative for firms to identify and prioritize customers with a high loyalty potential, offering them superior value as a means to solidify these relationships (Chark and Wang, 2024; Lang et al., 2022).

Building on the foundation of CRM's strategic importance, preferential treatment is a pivotal concept in customer engagement, where selected customers receive enhanced offerings and superior recognition (Lacey et al., 2007). This practice, evident through exclusive retail store cards, loyalty programs, personalized services, and targeted promotions

* Corresponding author. Sunway Business School, Sunway University, Sunway City, Selangor, Malaysia.
E-mail addresses: quratulain@numl.edu.pk (Q. Ul Ain), lim@wengmarc.com, marcl@sunway.edu.my, marclim@swin.edu.au, wlim@swinburne.edu.my (W.M. Lim), rasoolshahid@utm.my (S. Rasool), muhammad.zeeshan@giki.edu.pk (M. Zeshan).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103927
Received 18 March 2024; Received in revised form 4 May 2024; Accepted 19 May 2024
Available online 30 May 2024
0969-6989/© 2024 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

(Chark and Wang, 2024; Pontes et al., 2023), is also known as customer prioritization or differential customer treatment (Homburg et al., 2008; Mayser, 2011). Preferential treatment provides select customers with something additional or extra (e.g., level of service), thus creating a differentiated customer experience (Jiang et al., 2013; Söderlund and Colliander, 2015). Therefore, preferential treatment can be defined as the *deliberate elevation of product or service provided to select customers, which differentiates the customer experience by offering a higher level of value compared to what is available to the general customer base*.

Despite its prevalence, the broader implications of preferential treatment as a comprehensive business strategy remain underexplored (Henderson et al., 2011; Meyer-Waarden, 2015). The notion of preferential treatment may initially conjure a negative connotation, suggesting a potential for inequity or unfairness in customer service (Mayser and von Wangenheim, 2013). This perspective stems from the concern that such practices could alienate or disenfranchise non-targeted customers, leading to feelings of neglect or inferiority (Nguyen et al., 2014). Providing preferential treatment may inadvertently alienate non-favored customers, leading to diminished loyalty and sparking negative word-of-mouth that can harm the brand's reputation, while also encouraging customers to prioritize seeking special privileges over genuine satisfaction with the product or service, potentially destabilizing long-term customer relationships and firm performance (Meyer--Waarden et al., 2023).

However, when implemented with strategic finesse and transparency, preferential treatment holds the potential to significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty among the targeted segments (Söderlund and Colliander, 2015). The key lies in recognizing and rewarding customer value and contribution, which in turn incentivizes further engagement and investment in the brand (Pez et al., 2015). This approach not only fosters a sense of exclusivity and belonging among recipients but also sets a clear aspirational standard for other customers, potentially driving overall customer base engagement. Moreover, preferential treatment, when executed as part of a well-considered strategy, aligns with the principles of reciprocal loyalty, where the firm's acknowledgment of customer loyalty through enhanced services and recognition fosters a deeper emotional connection and commitment from customers (Xia and Kukar-Kinney, 2014). This reciprocal dynamic is crucial in competitive markets where differentiation based solely on product offerings may be insufficient. Thus, by reimagining preferential treatment not as a divisive tactic but as a strategic tool for cultivating meaningful relationships and driving customer engagement, firms can leverage this approach to create a sustainable competitive advantage and a more vibrant, engaged customer community.

Building on the existing body of research, it is evident that preferential treatment can significantly enhance the customer experience, fostering outcomes such as increased purchase intentions, stronger brand loyalty, and more positive word-of-mouth (Lacey et al., 2007; Lee and Shea, 2015; Mattila et al., 2013). Despite these findings, the quantification of preferential treatment's impact on the customer experience remains underexplored, with studies often focusing on the qualitative aspects of exceptional customer experiences without delving into measurable impacts (Chaabane and Pez, 2017; Collier et al., 2018; Tessaro et al., 2023). Moreover, Söderlund et al. (2014) highlight the effects of preferential treatment on customer satisfaction and perceived fairness, suggesting that the context—whether the preferential treatment is received individually or in the presence of others—may significantly influence customer reactions. This study seeks to bridge the gap identified by Kim and Baker (2020), who call for more exploration of strategies that enhance customer relationships, including the examination of customer delight structures and the ensuring outcomes. Grounded in the seminal work of Oliver et al. (1997), which associates customer delight with unexpected positive experiences, and subsequent studies that link delight to increased profitability and loyalty (Barnes et al., 2010; Collier et al., 2018), this study aims to extend the dialogue by exploring the behavioral outcomes of customer delight, as predicted by affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), where preferential treatment acts as a catalyst for customer delight, leading to subsequent behaviors such as customer advocacy and impulse buying.

The exploration of preferential treatment's impact on customer delight, advocacy, and impulsiveness in purchasing is a critical endeavor for firms aspiring to excel in today's competitive environment. Dissecting how preferential treatment affects customer experiences, this study endeavors to bridge a critical gap in the extant literature. The understanding of these effects is pivotal for the development of marketing and service strategies that not only resonate with customers on a personal level but also encourage behaviors beneficial to firms, such as increased advocacy and quicker purchasing decisions. The strategic allocation of preferential treatment, grounded in the principles of CRM, necessitates a delicate balance. Firms must navigate the fine line between incentivizing customer loyalty and preserving the authenticity of their customer engagements. The authenticity of preferential treatments, when aligned with genuine customer needs and desires (e.g., attention-seeking motive), holds the potential to transform customer-firm dynamics, fostering a sense of value and exclusivity among customers. Comprehensively understanding these dynamics, firms can leverage preferential treatment to fortify customer relationships, escalate advocacy, and amplify sales, thereby cementing their competitive stance in the marketplace. Consequently, this study is poised to address several pivotal research questions (RQs):

RQ_1. How does preferential treatment influence customer delight, advocacy, and impulsiveness?
RQ_2. Can customer delight mediate the effect of preferential treatment on customer behaviors such as customer advocacy and impulse buying?
RQ_3. Will these relationships be moderated by customers' propensity to seek attention?

This investigation is poised to make substantial contributions to both theory and practice. Examining the effect of preferential treatment on customer delight and subsequent behaviors such as advocacy and impulsiveness, this study enriches the theoretical discourse on CRM and marketing strategies, extending the current understanding of how differentiated customer experiences contribute to delight, advocacy, and impulsiveness, thereby providing a fresh perspective on the dynamics of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Exploring the mediating role of customer delight in the relationship between preferential treatment and customer behaviors offers insights into the emotional and psychological processes that underpin customer reactions to marketing strategies. This aligns with affective events theory, a theoretical framework that can be used to understand how specific events (preferential treatments) elicit emotional responses (delight) that drive behavioral outcomes (advocacy and impulsiveness) (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Investigating the moderating role of customers' attention-seeking motives offers a novel lens through which to view the effectiveness of preferential treatment strategies. This aspect introduces individual differences into the model, suggesting that the impact of preferential treatment may vary based on personal characteristics, thereby adding depth to the segmentation and targeting aspect of CRM strategies.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

Affective events theory (AET), proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), offers a valuable lens through which to examine the psychological mechanisms underpinning human reactions to specific events within organizations. At its core, AET posits that workplace events elicit affective reactions, which, in turn, influence a wide range of work-related attitudes and behaviors. This theory delineates the critical role of emotional responses in shaping individuals' attitudes toward their jobs and their subsequent behaviors at work. Transposing AET to the context of customer experiences, this study reconceptualizes the

workplace events described in AET as instances of preferential treatment within the customer-firm relationship. Such events can range from receiving personalized services to being granted exclusive benefits, each potentially eliciting strong affective reactions from customers. These emotional responses, akin to those detailed in AET, are anticipated to play a pivotal role in shaping customer behaviors, such as advocacy and purchasing patterns.

In guiding this study, AET provides a theoretical scaffold to understand how preferential treatment acts as an affective event in the customer journey, triggering emotional responses that culminate in significant behavioral outcomes (Fig. 1). Specifically, this study examines customer delight—an intense positive emotional reaction—as a central affective response to preferential treatment, hypothesizing that such delight can mediate the relationship between preferential treatment and subsequent customer behaviors, including increased advocacy and impulsiveness in purchasing. Moreover, this study explores the potential moderating role of individuals' attention-seeking motives, positing that customers with a higher propensity to seek attention may exhibit stronger reactions to preferential treatment, thereby amplifying the effects of customer delight on their behaviors. This consideration of individual differences is in line with AET's acknowledgment of the significance of personal dispositions in shaping affective responses to events. Leveraging AET as a guiding theoretical framework, this study aims to unpack the complex interplay between preferential treatment (as an affective event), customer delight (as an affective reaction), and the resultant customer behaviors (advocacy and impulse buying). This theoretical approach not only enriches our understanding of the dynamics at play but also offers practical insights for firms looking to harness the power of emotional engagement to foster deeper customer relationships and drive desirable behaviors. Through this exploration, the study seeks to contribute to the broader literature on CRM and marketing strategies by providing empirical evidence of the mechanisms through which preferential treatment can be leveraged to enhance customer experiences and outcomes, grounded in the robust theoretical foundation of AET.

2.1. Preferential treatment and customer delight

The evolution of customer relationship paradigms in the late 1990s underscored a pivotal shift from customer satisfaction to customer delight, a concept that transcends basic contentment to encapsulate higher-order emotional states (Agarwal et al., 2022; Caruelle et al., 2023; Skogland and Siguaw, 2004). This paradigmatic shift recognized that enduring engagement and loyalty stem not only from meeting expectations but from exceeding them in memorable and emotionally resonant ways.

Customer delight is fundamentally anchored in the dual pillars of surprise and joy, elements that catalyze an experiential elevation beyond conventional satisfaction (Kumar et al., 2001). This construct extends into the affective domain, invoking a tapestry of positive

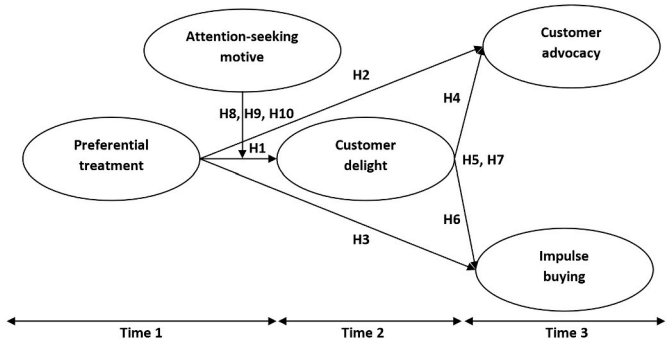


Fig. 1. An affective events theory and time-lagged survey of customer reactions to preferential treatment.

emotions such as cheerfulness, happiness, excitement, and thrill, which collectively contribute to the delightful customer experience. Importantly, Barnes and Krallman (2019) elucidate that delight can be cultivated through diverse pathways, underlining the versatility of delight-inducing strategies that can leverage excitement, fun, and joy to foster an emotionally charged and memorable customer experience.

In the context of preferential treatment, the provision of exclusive benefits such as complimentary upgrades, personalized offers, and targeted discounts serves as a potent catalyst for delight (Agarwal et al., 2022; Pez et al., 2015). These gestures of recognition and value not only meet but exceed customer expectations, thereby evoking a profound emotional response. The surprise element inherent in receiving unexpected perks, coupled with the joy derived from personalized attention and rewards, synergistically contributes to an elevated sense of delight. The emotional resonance of preferential treatment, rooted in the principles of surprise and joy, is thus a critical driver of customer delight. This enhanced emotional engagement not only fortifies customer relationships but also transforms the customer experience into one that is richly rewarding and emotionally compelling. Therefore, we posit:

H1. Preferential treatment positively impacts customer delight.

2.2. Preferential treatment and customer advocacy

Preferential treatment signifies the strategic allocation of additional benefits to certain customers, often manifesting in service-oriented settings where loyalty programs play a pivotal role (Jiang et al., 2013). This specialized treatment is typically merited through a customer's prior engagements and loyalty to a firm, where the quantum of past purchases and continued patronage directly correlates with the level of preferential treatment received (Drèze and Nunes, 2009; Meyer-Waarden et al., 2023). Such practices underscore a firm's commitment to acknowledging and rewarding customer loyalty, thereby fostering a deeper, more personalized relationship with its clientele.

Customer advocacy, a sophisticated iteration of market orientation, is inherently customer-centric, aiming to foster trust, commitment, and, consequently, enduring relationships with customers. The essence of customer advocacy lies in its focus on ensuring 'customer success,' a philosophy that transcends mere satisfaction to ensure customers derive maximum value from their interactions with a brand (Lawer and Knox, 2006). This involves adopting roles such as customer consultants or trusted advisors, thereby guiding customers toward informed purchasing decisions that enhance their overall service consumption experience (Achrol and Kotler, 1999; Sheth et al., 2000). In the context of preferential treatment, the act of providing select customers with exclusive benefits not only elevates their status within the brand's ecosystem but also engenders a sense of appreciation and belonging. This, in turn, can catalyze these customers into becoming brand advocates. The principle underlying this transition is rooted in relationship marketing, where the emphasis on building and nurturing relationships with customers leads to a natural inclination toward advocacy (Czepiel, 1990; de Regt et al., 2021; Grönroos and Ojasalo, 2004; Quaye et al., 2022; Sweeney et al., 2020). When customers perceive that a brand values them highly enough to offer preferential treatment, they are more likely to reciprocate through positive word-of-mouth and advocacy behaviors, driven by a genuine appreciation for the brand and a desire to share their positive experiences with others. Thus, the linkage between preferential treatment and customer advocacy is not merely transactional but deeply relational, fostering a sense of partnership and mutual growth between the customer and the brand. It is within this framework that we posit the following hypothesis:

H2. Preferential treatment positively impacts customer advocacy.

2.3. Preferential treatment and impulse buying

Preferential treatment entails recognizing and rewarding certain

customers with higher levels of service, exclusive products, or additional benefits that surpass the standard offerings of a firm (Lacey et al., 2007). This form of treatment is often a hallmark of loyalty programs designed to differentiate and elevate the experiences of select customers, fostering a sense of exclusivity and privilege (Chang et al., 2020; Drèze and Nunes, 2009; Nusrat and Huang, 2024).

Impulse buying, characterized by spontaneous and immediate purchasing decisions, emerges from a complex interplay of affective and cognitive responses (Gupta, 2022). The application of the myriad theories such as theories of uses and gratifications and reasoned action shows that certain factors, such as the communicative appeal of a website (Van der Heijden and Verhagen, 2004) or the ease and enjoyment of the shopping experience (Moon et al., 2022; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003), can significantly predispose consumers toward making impromptu purchases.

The nexus between preferential treatment and impulse buying can be understood through psychological reward systems and social status recognition. Favoritism in retail, such as personalized attention and special offers, is posited to enhance a customer's propensity for impulse purchases due to emotional satisfaction from perceived exclusivity and recognition (Maturo and Rosiello, 2013). This heightened emotional state reduces psychological spending barriers, making customers more susceptible to impulse buying (Xia and Kukar-Kinney, 2014). Additionally, the exclusive access to products afforded by preferential treatment often exposes customers to unique offerings, enhancing the impulse to buy as a form of reciprocation toward the brand (Lee and Kim, 2023). Thus, preferential treatment may significantly impact impulse buying by creating a loop of emotional gratification and exclusive access that stimulates unplanned purchases. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

H3. Preferential treatment positively impacts impulse buying.

2.4. Customer delight and advocacy

In today's fiercely competitive market, the imperative for firms to not only satisfy but actively delight customers is paramount (Kim and Baker, 2020). Delight, in this context, transcends mere satisfaction, embodying an emotional state where expectations are surpassed in such a way that it engenders joy and surprise. This can be achieved through various means such as concession vouchers, service upgrades, and the provision of complimentary benefits (Chakraborty et al., 2022; Torres, 2014).

The essence of customer delight hinges on the element of positive surprise, which has been consistently identified as a pivotal factor in inducing delight (Bartl et al., 2013; Oliver et al., 1997). Effective service recovery, professionalism, and employee friendliness also contribute significantly to this end (Guchait et al., 2014; Torres and Kline, 2013). The consequent emotional uplift experienced by customers often leads to a range of beneficial outcomes for the firm, including enhanced loyalty, a greater willingness to pay, and an increased likelihood of the customer engaging in positive word-of-mouth (Barnes et al., 2010; Chitturi et al., 2008; Liu and Keh, 2015).

In an era where access to information is ubiquitous, customers frequently engage in comparisons between brands. This has necessitated a strategic pivot toward customer advocacy, which involves guiding customers to products that best suit their needs and ensuring the provision of exemplary service thereafter (Urban, 2004). This strategy not only satisfies the customer's immediate requirements but also fosters a sense of trust and loyalty, laying the groundwork for a lasting and profitable relationship. Notably, customer delight, with its foundation in positive surprise, emerges as a potential mediator in this dynamic. When customers are genuinely delighted, they are more inclined to reciprocate this positive emotional experience through advocacy behaviors, such as recommending the brand to others. This reciprocal relationship underscores the transformative power of delight in converting satisfied customers into brand advocates. Therefore, we articulate the following hypotheses:

H4. Customer delight positively impacts customer advocacy.

H5. Customer delight positively mediates the relationship between preferential treatment and customer advocacy.

2.5. Customer delight and impulse buying

Impulse buying is characterized by spontaneity and immediate gratification, reflecting a non-deliberative decision-making process often driven by an intense desire to acquire a product instantly (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003; Verhagen and van Dolen, 2011). This behavior is not only unanticipated but also predominantly emotional, frequently ignited by the shopping environment which acts as a powerful stimulus, providing excitement and immediate sensory feedback at the point of purchase (Ahrholdt et al., 2017; Wong, 2004; Yu and Dean, 2001).

The link between impulse buying and customer delight is particularly potent when delight is triggered by unexpected positive experiences such as receiving preferential treatment. Studies suggest that customer delight surpasses expectations and induces positive emotional reactions, thereby enhancing satisfaction and fostering an emotional connection with the brand (Kim et al., 2024; Parasuraman et al., 2021; Shoukat and Ramkissoon, 2022). This heightened emotional state is pivotal in driving the excitement and pleasure associated with impulse purchases (Huang et al., 2024; Vohs and Faber, 2007).

Moreover, customer delight, which may result from exceptional service encounters or unexpected value additions such as exclusive offers or personalized service inherent in preferential treatment, amplifies emotional responsiveness (Kim et al., 2024; Parasuraman et al., 2021). This enhancement in emotional state, largely devoid of cognitive processing (Kim and Jang, 2021), might increase the propensity for impulse buying as the interplay of heightened emotions when customers are delighted by such exclusivities suggests that customer delight could play a crucial mediating role in the relationship between preferential treatment and impulse buying. This emotional elevation underscores the impulsive buying decision as an immediate and emotionally charged response to customer delight induced through preferential treatment. Given this backdrop, we posit the following hypotheses:

H6. Customer delight positively impacts impulse buying.

H7. Customer delight positively mediates the relationship between preferential treatment and impulse buying.

2.6. Attention-seeking motive

The influence of preferential treatment on consumer emotions and subsequent behaviors may be significantly moderated by individual customer characteristics (Lim et al., 2023b), which help explain diverse responses to preferential treatment. For instance, individuals with higher educational attainment or those who are achievement-oriented may expect more personalized services or self-expressive products, reflecting their perceived social status or achievements (Durvasula and Lysonski, 2008; Kaiser et al., 2017). Moreover, higher-income individuals often engage in upscale transactions, increasing their exposure to preferential treatment (Das et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2021). This corroborates the dynamics of service management, which emphasize the importance of aligning services with customer expectations to enhance consumer attitudes and behaviors (Pontes et al., 2023; Torrres et al., 2019).

Within this context, the individual's attention-seeking motive emerges as a critical moderator not just in the relationship between preferential treatment and customer delight but also in fostering customer advocacy and impulse buying. Positive surprises, such as unexpected gifts or upgrades, when aligned with the attention-seeking motives of customers, not only cultivate positive emotions but also

deeply resonate with these individuals. This is because preferential treatment not only confers a sense of privilege but also encourages recipients to share their extraordinary experiences with their social circles (Xia and Kukar-Kinney, 2014), thus acting as informal brand ambassadors. This effect is rooted in the broader discourse on social validation and the human desire for recognition—essential elements of human psychology (Desmet and Fokkinga, 2020). Moreover, this connection extends beyond delight to influencing customer behaviors like advocacy and impulse purchases. Preferential treatment, by meeting the attention-seeking behaviors of customers through personalized interactions and exclusive offers, significantly amplifies their experiences. This heightened emotional engagement leads to memorable moments that inspire not only loyalty but also advocacy and spontaneous purchasing behaviors, underpinned by a desire for social validation and recognition (Kim and Jang, 2021; Xia and Kukar-Kinney, 2014). Thus, attention-seeking motive significantly intensifies the impact of preferential treatment on customer delight, advocacy, and impulse buying, driving a cycle of emotional elevation and social acknowledgment that reinforces customer engagement with the brand. Given this backdrop, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8. Customer attention-seeking motive positively moderates the relationship between preferential treatment and customer delight.

H9. Customer attention-seeking motive positively moderates the relationship between preferential treatment and customer advocacy mediated by customer delight.

H10. Customer attention-seeking motive positively moderates the relationship between preferential treatment and impulse buying mediated by customer delight.

3. Methods

This study utilized a time-lagged research design to explore the dynamic relationships within the conceptual model illustrated in Fig. 1. Data collection occurred at three distinct time intervals, spaced one month apart, employing a survey-based approach. The goal was to capture the evolving nature of customer responses to preferential treatment and its subsequent effects on customer delight, advocacy, and impulse buying.

3.1. Instrumentation

To ensure the validity of the survey instruments, established scales from prior literature were adapted. Preferential treatment was measured using a 5-item scale by Lacey et al. (2007) based on the relational benefits scale developed by Gwinner et al. (1998). Customer delight employed a 14-item scale from Liu and Keh (2015), while customer advocacy was assessed through a 4-item scale by Roy (2013) adapted from Beatty and Ferrell (1998), impulse buying utilized a 5-item scale from Verhagen and van Dolen (2011), and the attention-seeking motive was measured using a 6-item scale by Sung et al. (2016). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). These items undergone a *pretest* with two academics with expertise in customer behavior to affirm *content validity* and a *pilot study* with 20 respondents to establish *face validity*.

3.2. Sampling

The initial participant outreach involved distributing 900 questionnaires, targeting consumers in the retail sector. A multi-stage probability sampling approach was employed to ensure the representativeness of the sample and minimize selection bias (Lim and Ting, 2010, 2012). Specifically, simple random sampling was utilized to select three out of nine shopping malls in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan with a vibrant retail sector suitable for the purpose of this study (Appendix Table A1). Subsequently, systematic sampling was implemented, selecting every *k*th (5th) visitor at the main entrance. The starting point was randomly determined each day to further ensure the randomness of the sample. This process was conducted at various days and times throughout a month, chosen to reflect typical variations in mall visitation patterns, thereby enhancing the external validity of our findings. To maintain confidentiality and data integrity, only the authors had access to the completed surveys.

The survey process commenced with an introductory cover letter outlining the study's objectives, which was instrumental in guiding respondents through the questionnaire. The initial section gathered demographic information, while respondents' email addresses facilitated the longitudinal matching of responses across the three points in time.

At the initial phase (Time 1), the focus was on gauging participants' perceptions of preferential treatment and their attention-seeking motives. The second phase (Time 2) centered on assessing customer delight, and the final phase (Time 3) measured customer advocacy and impulse buying. The response rates were indicative of the study's engagement level, with 768 useable responses from the initial distribution at Time 1 (85.3% response rate), 503 participants continuing at Time 2 (65.5% response rate), and 318 final responses at Time 3 (63.2% response rate). Due to participant attrition along the data collection phases, it became imperative to ascertain whether the responses among participants who dropped out exhibited any significant deviations from those who did not. To address this, we employed a paired sample *t*-test aimed at detecting any potential non-response bias. The analysis (Appendix Table A2) revealed no significant differences across key variables, including attention-seeking motives (Panel A, Time 1), preferential treatment (Panel A, Time 1), and customer delight (Panel B, Time 2). This finding suggests the absence of selection bias in our study's longitudinal data collection process.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study, encompassing age, gender, education, and income levels. The majority of participants fall within the 21–30 years age bracket, accounting for 92.1% of the sample, indicating a predominantly younger demographic. Gender distribution is nearly balanced, with females slightly outnumbering males at 50.3%. In terms of education, a significant portion of the respondents are undergraduates (51.6%), followed by non-graduates (38.4%), and a smaller segment of postgraduates (10.1%). The income distribution shows a substantial number of participants (49.4%) reporting an income below $20,000, while 26.1% fall within the $20,000 to $40,000 range, and 24.5% earn beyond $40,000. This demographic profile provides insights into the diverse backgrounds of the retail sector customers involved in the study, enabling a better understanding of the impact of

Table 1
Profile of respondents.

Characteristic	Frequency (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Age		
21–30 years	293	92.1
31–40 years	18	5.7
41–50 years	5	1.6
51–60 years	2	0.6
Gender		
Female	160	50.3
Male	158	49.7
Education		
Non-graduate	122	38.4
Undergraduate	164	51.6
Postgraduate	32	10.1
Income		
Below $20,000	157	49.4
Between $20,000 and $40,000	83	26.1
Beyond $40,000	78	24.5

Source: Authors' own compilation. See Appendix Table A3 for further information about treating consumer demographics as control variables.

preferential treatment on consumer behaviors across different segments.

4. Results

The evaluation of the conceptual model was conducted using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), a method selected for its capacity to simultaneously test multiple regression analyses (Hair et al., 2012). PLS-SEM is particularly advantageous in this context as it can handle datasets that may not strictly adhere to normal distribution, thus offering flexibility in data analysis. Despite this flexibility, care was taken to ensure data normality to mitigate potential issues during bootstrapping procedures, a critical step in PLS-SEM. Data normality was assessed and confirmed by examining skewness and kurtosis values, which were found to be within the acceptable range of +2 to −2.

4.1. Common method bias

To address concerns regarding common method bias (CMB), a significant potential confounder in behavioral research, this study employed a time-lagged research design. This approach inherently reduces the risk of CMB by separating measurements across different time points, thereby minimizing the overlap in variance attributed to the method of data collection. To further validate the absence of CMB, statistical checks were conducted, including the examination of variance inflation factor (VIF) values. VIF values below the threshold of 3.3, as suggested by Kock (2015), indicate a minimal risk of multicollinearity and, by extension, CMB in the dataset. The statistical evidence in Table 2 shows no issue of CMB, reinforcing the methodological rigor of the research design.

4.2. Measurement model

The measurement model indicates that the items measuring all constructs are reliable, as seen through the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values that exceed the minimum benchmark of 0.70 in Table 3 (Hair et al., 2019). These items also demonstrated convergent validity, as seen through factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) values that surpassed the minimum threshold of 0.50 in Table 3 (Hair et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2008), as well as discriminant validity, as seen through the square root of AVE for each construct being greater than any of its paired correlations in Table 4 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

4.3. Structural model

The structural model on preferential treatment explains 36% of customer delight, 66% of customer advocacy, and 41% of impulse buying, indicating a good fit of above small (0.25) and close to medium (0.5) and large (0.75) benchmarks for variance explained (R^2) (Hair et al., 2019). Table 5 reveals that preferential treatment stimulates customer delight ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and impulse buying ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), but not customer advocacy ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.24 > 0.10$). Therefore, H_1 and H_3 are supported, but not H_2. The table also shows that customer delight acts as both a direct predictor of customer advocacy ($\beta = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$) and impulse buying ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$), as well as a facilitator between preferential treatment with customer advocacy ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) and impulse buying ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H_4, H_5, H_6, and H_7. While attention-seeking motive significantly moderate the relationship between preferential treatment and customer delight, this influence was found to be negative ($\beta = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$), providing partial support for H_8. The same was observed for the moderated mediation of attention-seeking motive on the relationship between preferential treatment and customer advocacy ($\beta = -0.07, p < 0.05$) and impulse buying ($\beta = -0.04$, $p < 0.10$) mediated by customer delight, rendering partial support for H_9 and H_{10}.

Table 2
Construct-level variance inflation factor for assessment of common method bias.

Construct	Attention seeking motive	Customer advocacy	Customer delight	Impulse buying	Preferential treatment
Attention seeking motive			1.551		
Customer advocacy					
Customer delight		1.369		1.369	
Impulse buying					
Preferential treatment		1.369	1.583	1.369	

Source: Authors' own compilation.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

The results of this study offer several intriguing theoretical insights regarding the dynamics between preferential treatment, customer delight, customer advocacy, and impulse buying within the retail sector. The explanatory power of the model, with R^2 values indicating substantial effects, provides a robust foundation for understanding these relationships.

To begin, the significant positive relationships between preferential treatment and customer delight ($\beta = 0.29$) and impulse buying ($\beta = 0.30$) suggest that preferential treatment is a cornerstone in cultivating positive customer emotions and behaviors. Theoretically, this underscores the importance of personalized interactions in enhancing customer experiences (Chandra et al., 2022; Tyrväinen et al., 2020), leading to elevated levels of delight, and even impulse purchases. The substantial effect of preferential treatment on customer delight, in particular suggests that such treatment is a critical driver in transforming satisfied customers into delighted ones. This, in turn, renders preferential treatment as another vital source that can be added into the toolbox for brand support, alongside those shed by recent retail literature, including perceptions of justice (Aksoy and Yazici, 2023), retailers' sustainable development (Wang and He, 2022), and social capital (Wong, 2023).

Contrary to expectations, our analysis indicates that the connection between preferential treatment and customer advocacy lacks statistical significance ($p = 0.24$). This counterintuitive outcome may be elucidated by the concept of exclusivity dilution (Arbore and Estes, 2013; Shin et al., 2017), where the perceived value of preferential treatment diminishes if it becomes widespread. In essence, customers who enjoy special treatment might be disinclined to advocate for the brand, fearing that increased patronage would render their exclusive benefits commonplace. This phenomenon aligns with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), which suggests that individuals seek to maintain a positive and distinct social identity; sharing preferential treatment broadly could undermine this distinctiveness.

Furthermore, our model elucidates the critical role of customer delight in promoting customer advocacy and impulsive buying. The strong direct effects observed from customer delight to advocacy ($\beta = 0.78$) and impulsive buying ($\beta = 0.43$) underscore the transformative power of delight beyond mere satisfaction. This suggests that emotional elevation into delight can precipitate more profound, commitment-oriented customer behaviors, aligning with the theoretical proposition that emotionally charged positive experiences (i.e., delight) can lead to higher levels of engagement (e.g., brand evangelism) (Mvondo et al., 2023), while providing, to the best of our knowledge, seminal evidence on the role of delight in stimulating impulsive purchasing behaviors among customers. This extends the scope of impact in delighting

Table 3
Measurement model assessment of convergent validity and reliability.

Construct	Item		Convergent validity		Reliability	
			Loading	Average variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Attention-seeking motive	AS1	I like to attract attention.	0.87	0.64	0.89	0.91
	AS2	I want to be acknowledged by others.	0.87			
	AS3	I want to gain self-confidence from others' reactions.	0.87			
	AS4	I like to have my existence reaffirmed by others.	0.88			
	AS5	I like to show off.	0.63			
	AS6	I like to seek attention from the opposite sex.	0.63			
Customer advocacy	CA1	I advocate for the brand because of its unbiased advice that helps me to choose products and services.	0.92	0.84	0.94	0.95
	CA2	I advocate for the brand because it gives honest and open information and advice about their products and services along with those of their competitors.	0.93			
	CA3	I advocate for the brand because it keeps my best interests in mind.	0.93			
	CA4	I advocate for the brand because it is a customer advocate.	0.88			
Customer delight	CD1	The experience in the store was very pleasant.	0.83	0.75	0.97	0.98
	CD2	The staff seemed interested in helping me.	0.87			
	CD3	They were really helpful and polite.	0.87			
	CD4	Most services were very satisfying.	0.84			
	CD5	They made me think that I was very important.	0.87			
	CD6	I was treated like royalty.	0.85			
	CD7	The service I received was much more than generally necessary.	0.87			
	CD8	The shopping experience was full of wonderful surprises.	0.86			
	CD9	The store was a pleasant surprise.	0.89			
	CD10	The store was very exciting.	0.90			
	CD11	I felt stimulated during the shopping process.	0.87			
	CD12	My day in the store is truly a special one.	0.89			
	CD13	I felt that I was exceptionally lucky that day.	0.85			
	CD14	I never thought that I could enjoy shopping so much.	0.82			
Impulse buying	IB1	My purchase was spontaneous.	0.90	0.83	0.95	0.96
	IB2	My purchase was unplanned.	0.92			
	IB3	I did not intend to do this purchase before this shopping trip.	0.93			
	IB4	Before visiting the site, I did not have the intention to do this purchase.	0.93			
	IB5	I could not resist to do this purchase at the site.	0.88			
Preferential treatment	PT1	This brand does things for me that they don't do for most customers.	0.84	0.81	0.94	0.95
	PT2	This brand usually places me higher on the priority list when dealing with other customers.	0.89			
	PT3	This brand gives me faster service than most customers get.	0.94			
	PT4	This brand gives me better treatment than most customers get.	0.94			
	PT5	This brand gives me special things that most customers don't get.	0.88			

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Table 4
Correlation matrix and square roots of average variance extracted for the assessment of discriminant validity.

Construct	Attention seeking motive	Customer advocacy	Customer delight	Impulse buying	Preferential treatment
Attention seeking motive	0.80				
Customer advocacy	0.50	0.91			
Customer delight	0.54	0.81	0.86		
Impulse buying	0.48	0.74	0.59	0.91	
Preferential treatment	0.60	0.46	0.52	0.52	0.90

Source: Authors' own compilation.

customers, going beyond expected returns of willingness to buy and pay a premium (Sukhu and Bilgihan, 2021) and showing that immediate rather than delayed purchases can now be harnessed through preferential treatement.

Moreover, this study illuminates the mediating function of customer delight, revealing that preferential treatment, in isolation, does not suffice to spur advocacy ($p = 0.24$). Instead, it is the transition through delight that catalyzes such advocacy behaviors ($p < 0.001$). This mediating effect underscores a more complex, multi-step engagement process wherein preferential treatment initiates a positive emotional response (delight), which, in turn, manifests in tangible outcomes like customer advocacy ($\beta = 0.23$) and impulsive buying ($\beta = 0.13$). This layered understanding of customer engagement dynamics reveals that immediate emotional responses can lay the groundwork for more consequential behaviors (Lim and Rasul, 2022; Lim et al., 2022), adding greater specificity to the strategies brands might employ to foster customer advocacy and impulsive buying.

The unexpected negative moderation effect of the attention-seeking motive on the relationships between preferential treatment and customer delight ($\beta = -0.09$) and between preferential treatment and customer advocacy ($\beta = -0.07$) and impulse buying ($\beta = -0.04$) mediated by customer delight merits a deeper theoretical exploration. From a psychological perspective, this phenomenon could be rooted in the intrinsic value that individuals place on authenticity and meritocracy. Attention-seekers, despite their outward behavior aimed at garnering more attention, may internally value recognition that is perceived as earned rather than freely given or manipulated. This discrepancy between the external seeking of attention and the internal valuation of genuine recognition could lead to a cognitive dissonance when preferential treatment is received. This misalignment also diminishes the delight, advocacy, and impulsivity typically prompted by genuine recognition, leading to negative impacts on these mediated

Table 5
Structural model assessment of hypothesized relationships.

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	Standard error	*t*-value	Confidence interval		*p*-value	Hypothesis testing
					2.5%	97.5%		
H_1	Preferential treatment → Customer delight	0.29***	0.06	4.81	0.19	0.40	0.00	Supported
H_2	Preferential treatment → Customer advocacy	0.05$^{n.s.}$	0.04	1.28	−0.03	0.13	0.24	Not supported
H_3	Preferential treatment → Impulse buying	0.30***	0.06	4.88	0.18	0.41	0.00	Supported
H_4	Customer delight → Customer advocacy	0.78***	0.03	24.11	0.72	0.84	0.00	Supported
H_5	Customer delight → Impulse buying	0.43***	0.06	7.78	0.32	0.54	0.00	Supported
H_6	Preferential treatment → Customer delight → Customer advocacy	0.23***	0.05	4.81	0.14	0.31	0.00	Supported
H_7	Preferential treatment → Customer delight → Impulse buying	0.13***	0.03	3.92	0.07	0.19	0.00	Supported
H_8	Attention-seeking motive × Preferential treatment → Customer delight	−0.09**	0.06	2.06	−0.18	0.00	0.04	Partially supported
H_9	Attention-seeking motive × Preferential treatment → Customer delight → Customer advocacy	−0.07**	0.03	2.13	−0.14	−0.01	0.03	Partially supported
H_{10}	Attention-seeking motive × Preferential treatment → Customer delight → Impulsive buying	−0.04*	0.02	1.96	−0.09	−0.01	0.05	Partially supported

Notes: $N = 318$. Standardized coefficients are reported. * = $p < 0.10$. ** = $p < 0.05$. *** = $p < 0.01$. $^{n.s.}$ = Not significant.
Source: Authors' own compilation.

relationships. Theoretically, this dissonance arises because the attention-seeker may perceive the preferential treatment as a direct response to their attention-seeking behavior, rather than a recognition of their inherent value or contributions. This could inadvertently signal to the attention-seeker that the preferential treatment is not a genuine acknowledgment of worth but rather a superficial or strategic move by the provider. Such a perception undermines the very essence of what makes preferential treatment delightful, which is the feeling of being valued and special. If the preferential treatment is seen as unearned or as a mere result of one's attention-seeking actions, it loses its ability to confer a sense of exclusivity or personal value, leading instead to feelings of insincerity or manipulation. This theoretical interpretation aligns with broader psychological theories on the need for authenticity and genuine recognition in human interactions, while extending the scarce insights on unearned preferential treatment (Jiang et al., 2013; Kim and Baker, 2020), suggesting a complex interplay between individual motives and the perceived authenticity of preferential treatment in shaping customer responses.

Taken collectively, these findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of customer behavior by elucidating the pathways through which preferential treatment can foster positive customer outcomes. They highlight the multifaceted nature of customer reactions to preferential treatment, mediated by delight and moderated by individual psychological motives, in this case attention-seeking motives, thereby offering a finer-grained view of the customer experience and reaction to preferential treatement.

5.2. Managerial implications

The empirical evidence presented in this study elucidates the critical role of preferential treatment in the retail sector, offering profound insights for managers and practitioners focused on optimizing customer engagement and driving sales. A better understanding of the interplay between preferential treatment, customer delight, advocacy, and impulse buying can significantly enhance the effectiveness of CRM strategies, promotional activities, and the overall design of customer experiences.

To begin, the positive relationships between preferential treatment and key customer outcomes highlight the necessity for retail managers to tailor customer experiences more personally and genuinely. This might involve leveraging advanced customer data analytics to offer personalized discounts, exclusive early access to products or services, or special attention that aligns with the individual preferences and past behaviors of customers. Such personalized interactions not only enhance the customer experience but also foster a deeper emotional connection with the brand, paving the way for increased customer engagement and loyalty (Basu et al., 2023; Chandra et al., 2022).

The pivotal role of customer delight as a mediator in this dynamic underscores the importance of creating experiences that transcend mere satisfaction. Retail managers should strive to craft memorable, emotionally resonant experiences that can truly delight customers. This could be achieved through exceptional service delivery, unexpected rewards, or highly personalized engagements that make customers feel uniquely valued. Focusing on delight, rather than satisfaction, retailers can activate more profound, commitment-oriented customer behaviors, such as brand advocacy and impulse buying.

The substantial impact of customer delight on advocacy behaviors also suggests that retailers should focus on delighting customers not just to boost immediate sales but to cultivate a community of brand advocates. Encouraging delighted customers to share their positive experiences through social media, review platforms, and personal networks can significantly amplify the effects of preferential treatment, transforming satisfied customers into active brand promoters.

The influence of preferential treatment and customer delight on impulse buying offers retailers an avenue to stimulate unplanned purchases. Creating shopping environments—both physical and digital—that leverage the emotional states induced by preferential treatment and delight, such as through time-limited offers or exclusive deals for returning customers, retailers can encourage spontaneous buying decisions, further boosting sales.

However, the study also brings to light the complexities inherent in customer psychology, as evidenced by the negative moderation effect of attention-seeking motives on the relationship between preferential treatment and customer delight. This suggests that the indiscriminate application of preferential treatment, particularly toward individuals perceived as seeking attention, could potentially diminish the intended positive outcomes. Retail managers must, therefore, develop a keen sense for distinguishing between genuine customer engagement and mere attention-seeking behaviors. Tailoring recognition strategies to be more subtle or merit-based can align better with customers' intrinsic desires for authentic acknowledgment, ensuring that preferential treatment retains its intended effect of making customers feel genuinely special and valued.

Taken together, the managerial implications of this study provide a comprehensive guide for retail managers seeking to leverage preferential treatment effectively. Adopting a strategic approach to customer engagement that recognizes the multifaceted nature of customer responses to preferential treatment, managers can unlock the full potential of these strategies to foster positive customer outcomes, thereby driving retail success in a competitive marketplace.

5.3. Limitation and future directions

The present study, while offering significant insights into the dynamics of preferential treatment, customer delight, advocacy, and impulse buying, is subject to certain limitations that open avenues for future research.

One notable limitation is the study's focus solely on attention-seeking motives as a moderating variable. While this provides a valuable starting point, it also highlights the necessity for a broader investigation into various customer characteristics that may influence the efficacy of preferential treatment. Future research could explore other psychological traits, such as the desire for social recognition (Kim and Chang, 2023), need for uniqueness (Park and Li, 2023), or self-esteem levels (Dhandra, 2020), to better understand how these factors interact with preferential treatment to affect customer outcomes. This expansion of focus could yield a better understanding of the conditions under which preferential treatment is most likely to enhance customer delight, advocacy, and purchasing behaviors.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study, despite the mitigation of common method bias through the collection of data in three phases, presents another limitation. The temporal aspect of the impact of preferential treatment remains unclear, raising questions about the longevity of its effects on customer delight and subsequent behaviors. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to examine the persistence of these effects over time. Understanding the durability of preferential treatment's impact is crucial for developing sustainable customer engagement strategies that foster long-term advocacy and loyalty, rather than transient spikes in customer enthusiasm.

Moreover, the study's reliance on variance-based regression analysis through PLS-SEM points to a need for methodological diversification. Future studies could employ experimental designs or longitudinal panel data to establish causal relationships more definitively and capture the dynamic nature of customer reactions to preferential treatment over time. Additionally, investigating different types of preferential treatment—ranging from personalized communication and exclusive offers to priority services—could provide finer-grained insights into which strategies are most effective in delighting customers, fostering advocacy, and encouraging impulse buying. This could also elucidate the potential trade-offs or diminishing returns associated with various forms of preferential treatment, informing more targeted and effective customer engagement tactics.

While this study contributes significantly to our understanding of the role of preferential treatment in the retail sector, its limitations underscore the need for further research. Expanding the scope to include a wider range of moderating customer characteristics, employing longitudinal designs to assess the long-term effects of preferential treatment, and utilizing diverse methodological approaches to explore the nuances of different preferential treatment strategies will enrich our understanding and application of these concepts in the pursuit of enhanced customer engagement and firm success.

Source of funding

None.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Qurat Ul Ain: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Weng Marc Lim:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Shahid Rasool:** Writing – original draft, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Muhammad Zeshan:** Formal analysis, Methodology.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this manuscript.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Acknowledgment:

None.

Appendix

Table A1
List of shopping malls in Islamabad, Pakistan

Name	Location	Floors
1. Al-Janat Mall	G-9 Markaz, Islamabad	7
2. Centaurus Mall	F-8/4 Jinnah Avenue, Islamabad	26
3. Emporium Mall Islamabad	F10 Markaz, Islamabad	11
4. Giga Mall	Main GT Road, Defense Housing Authority, Sector F DHA Phase II, Islamabad	14
5. Gulberg Mall	Gulberg Greens Block A, Islamabad	11
6. Majestic Mall	GT road commercial, Block B Multi Gardens B-17, Islamabad	7
7. Mall of Islamabad	Jinnah Ave, Block J F 7/1 Blue Area, Islamabad	20
8. Olympus Mall	Plot 23, S11 F11 Markaz, Islamabad	5
9. Safa Gold Mall	College Rd, F-7 Markaz, Islamabad	7

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Table A2
Paired samples *t*-test.

Panel A. Attention-seeking motives (AS) and preferential treatment (PT): Differences between participants who did and did not drop out from longitudinal study at Time 1

Item pairing		Paired difference					*t*-value	df	Significance (2-tailed)
		Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error	95% confidence interval				
					Lower bound	Upper bound			
Pair 1	AS1–AS1A	−0.01	2.78	0.17	−0.34	0.33	−0.04	265	0.96
Pair 2	AS2–AS2A	0.01	2.72	0.17	−0.32	0.34	0.05	265	0.96
Pair 3	AS3–AS3A	−0.02	2.81	0.17	−0.35	0.32	−0.09	265	0.93
Pair 4	AS4–AS4A	−0.07	2.75	0.17	−0.40	0.26	−0.40	265	0.69
Pair 5	AS5–AS5A	−0.14	2.60	0.16	−0.45	0.17	−0.87	265	0.38
Pair 6	AS6–AS6A	−0.14	2.78	0.17	−0.48	0.20	−0.82	265	0.41
Pair 7	PT1–PT1A	−0.12	2.70	0.17	−0.45	0.21	−0.73	265	0.47
Pair 8	PT2–PT2A	−0.09	2.70	0.17	−0.41	0.24	−0.52	265	0.60
Pair 9	PT3–PT3A	−0.06	2.91	0.18	−0.41	0.30	−0.32	265	0.75
Pair 10	PT4–PT4A	−0.09	2.70	0.17	−0.42	0.23	−0.57	265	0.57
Pair 11	PT5–PT5A	−0.14	2.57	0.16	−0.45	0.17	−0.89	265	0.38

Panel B. Customer delight (CD): Differences between participants who did and did not drop out from longitudinal study at Time 2

Item pairing		Paired difference					*t*-value	df	Significance (2-tailed)
		Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error	95% confidence interval				
					Lower bound	Upper bound			
Pair 1	CD1–CD1A	−0.08	0.96	0.07	−0.21	0.06	−1.07	185	0.28
Pair 2	CD2–CD2A	−0.10	0.90	0.07	−0.23	0.03	−1.47	185	0.14
Pair 3	CD3–CD3A	−0.10	0.94	0.07	−0.23	0.04	−1.40	185	0.16
Pair 4	CD4–CD4A	−0.06	0.87	0.06	−0.19	0.06	−1.01	185	0.31
Pair 5	CD5–CD5A	−0.04	0.75	0.05	−0.15	0.07	−0.69	185	0.49
Pair 6	CD6–CD6A	−0.02	0.63	0.05	−0.11	0.07	−0.46	185	0.64
Pair 7	CD7–CD7A	−0.08	0.82	0.06	−0.20	0.04	−1.34	185	0.18
Pair 8	CD8–CD8A	−0.08	0.78	0.06	−0.19	0.03	−1.41	185	0.16
Pair 9	CD9–CD9A	−0.02	0.58	0.04	−0.10	0.07	−0.38	185	0.71
Pair 10	CD10–CD10A	−0.10	0.94	0.07	−0.23	0.04	−1.41	185	0.16
Pair 11	CD11–CD11A	−0.04	0.68	0.05	−0.14	0.06	−0.86	185	0.39
Pair 12	CD12–CD12A	−0.05	0.78	0.06	−0.16	0.06	−0.85	185	0.40
Pair 13	CD13–CD13A	0.00	0.67	0.05	−0.10	0.10	0.00	185	1.00
Pair 14	CD14–CD14A	−0.01	0.74	0.05	−0.12	0.10	−0.20	185	0.84

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Table A3
Post-hoc analysis of consumer demographics as control variables

Relationship	Mean	Standard deviation	*t*-value	*p*-value
Age → Customer advocacy	−0.04 $^{n.s.}$	0.03	1.22	0.22
Age → Impulsive buying	−0.02 $^{n.s.}$	0.05	0.51	0.61
Education → Customer advocacy	0.04 $^{n.s.}$	0.03	1.15	0.25
Education → Impulsive buying	0.06 $^{n.s.}$	0.05	1.32	0.19
Gender → Customer advocacy	−0.03 $^{n.s.}$	0.03	0.94	0.35
Gender → Impulsive buying	−0.06 $^{n.s.}$	0.05	1.27	0.20
Income → Customer advocacy	0.05 $^{n.s.}$	0.03	1.66	0.10
Income → Impulsive buying	0.00 $^{n.s.}$	0.04	0.07	0.94

Notes: * = $p < 0.10$. ** = $p < 0.05$. *** = $p < 0.01$. $^{n.s.}$ = Not significant.
Source: Authors' own compilation.

References

Achrol, R.S., Kotler, P., 1999. Marketing in the network economy. J. Market. 63 (4Suppl. 1), 146–163.

Agarwal, R., Mehrotra, A., Misra, D., 2022. Customer happiness as a function of perceived loyalty program benefits-A quantile regression approach. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 64, 102770.

Ahrholdt, D.C., Gudergan, S.P., Ringle, C.M., 2017. Enhancing service loyalty: the roles of delight, satisfaction, and service quality. J. Trav. Res. 56 (4), 436–450.

Aksoy, N.C., Yazici, N., 2023. Does justice affect brand advocacy? Online brand advocacy behaviors as a response to hotel customers' justice perceptions. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 73, 103310.

Arbore, A., Estes, Z., 2013. Loyalty program structure and consumers' perceptions of status: feeling special in a grocery store? J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 20 (5), 439–444.

Barnes, D.C., Krallman, A., 2019. Customer delight: a review and agenda for research. J. Market. Theor. Pract. 27 (2), 174–195.

Barnes, D.C., Beauchamp, M.B., Webster, C., 2010. To delight, or not to delight? This is the question service firms must address. J. Market. Theor. Pract. 18 (3), 295–303.

Bartl, C., Gouthier, M.H., Lenker, M., 2013. Delighting consumers click by click: antecedents and effects of delight online. J. Serv. Res. 16 (3), 386–399.

Basu, R., Lim, W.M., Kumar, A., Kumar, S., 2023. Marketing analytics: the bridge between customer psychology and marketing decision-making. Psychol. Market. 40 (12), 2588–2611.

Baumann, C., Hoadley, S., Hamin, H., Nugraha, A., 2017. Competitiveness vis-à-vis service quality as drivers of customer loyalty mediated by perceptions of regulation and stability in steady and volatile markets. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 36, 62–74.

Beatty, S.E., Ferrell, M.E., 1998. Impulse buying: modeling its precursors. J. Retailing 74 (2), 169–191.

Caruelle, D., Lervik-Olsen, L., Gustafsson, A., 2023. The clock is ticking—or is it? Customer satisfaction response to waiting shorter vs. longer than expected during a service encounter. J. Retailing 99 (2), 247–266.

Chaabane, A.M., Pez, V., 2017. "Make me feel special": are hierarchical loyalty programs a panacea for all brands? The role of brand concept. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 38, 108–117.

Chakraborty, D., Siddiqui, A., Siddiqui, M., Alatawi, F.M.H., 2022. Exploring consumer purchase intentions and behavior of buying ayurveda products using SOBC framework. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 65, 102889.

Chandra, S., Verma, S., Lim, W.M., Kumar, S., Donthu, N., 2022. Personalization in personalized marketing: trends and ways forward. Psychol. Market. 39 (8), 1529–1562.
Chang, W., Song, J.H., Lee, S., 2020. Observation of other's preferential treatment as a constructive catalyst for improved repatronize intentions. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 57, 102214.
Chark, R., Wang, J.Q., 2024. Relationship norm moderates observers' reaction to unearned preferential treatment. J. Trav. Res. 63 (4), 923–939.
Chitturi, R., Raghunathan, R., Mahajan, V., 2008. Delight by design: the role of hedonic versus utilitarian benefits. J. Market. 72 (3), 48–63.
Collier, J.E., Barnes, D.C., Abney, A.K., Pelletier, M.J., 2018. Idiosyncratic service experiences: when customers desire the extraordinary in a service encounter. J. Bus. Res. 84, 150–161.
Czepiel, J.A., 1990. Service encounters and service relationships: implications for research. J. Bus. Res. 20 (1), 13–21.
Das, M., Habib, M., Saha, V., Jebarajakirthy, C., 2021. Bandwagon vs snob luxuries: targeting consumers based on uniqueness dominance. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 61, 102582.
de Regt, A., Plangger, K., Barnes, S.J., 2021. Virtual reality marketing and customer advocacy: transforming experiences from story-telling to story-doing. J. Bus. Res. 136, 513–522.
Desmet, P., Fokkinga, S., 2020. Beyond Maslow's pyramid: introducing a typology of thirteen fundamental needs for human-centered design. Multimodal Technologies and Interaction 4 (3), 38.
Dhandra, T.K., 2020. Does self-esteem matter? A framework depicting role of self-esteem between dispositional mindfulness and impulsive buying. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 55, 102135.
Drèze, X., Nunes, J.C., 2009. Feeling superior: the impact of loyalty program structure on consumers' perceptions of status. J. Consum. Res. 35, 890–905.
Durvasula, S., Lysonski, S., 2008. A double-edged sword: understanding vanity across cultures. J. Consum. Market. 25 (4), 230–244.
Dwivedi, A., 2015. A higher-order model of consumer brand engagement and its impact on loyalty intentions. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 24, 100–109.
Fornell, C., Larcker, D.F., 1981. Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: algebra and statistics. J. Market. Res. 18 (3), 382–388.
Grönroos, C., Ojasalo, K., 2004. Service productivity: towards a conceptualization of the transformation of inputs into economic results in services. J. Bus. Res. 57 (4), 414–423.
Guchait, P., Kim, M.G., Roseman, M.G., 2014. Error management at multiple organizational levels: impact on customer self-esteem and delight. J. Foodserv. Bus. Res. 17 (5), 450–471.
Gupta, R.K., 2022. Effects of confidence and social benefits on consumers' extra-role and in-role behaviors: a social identity and social exchange perspective. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 65, 102879.
Gwinner, K.P., Gremler, D.D., Bitner, M.J., 1998. Relational benefits in services industries: the customer's perspective. J. Acad. Market. Sci. 26, 101–114.
Hair, J.F., Ringle, C.M., Sarstedt, M., 2012. Partial least squares: the better approach to structural equation modeling? Long. Range Plan. 45 (5–6), 312–319.
Hair, J.F., Risher, J.J., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C.M., 2019. When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. Eur. Bus. Rev. 31 (1), 2–24.
Hallikainen, H., Luongo, M., Dhir, A., Laukkanen, T., 2022. Consequences of personalized product recommendations and price promotions in online grocery shopping. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 69, 103088.
Henderson, C.M., Beck, J.T., Palmatier, R.W., 2011. Review of the theoretical underpinnings of loyalty programs. J. Consum. Psychol. 21 (3), 256–276.
Homburg, C., Droll, M., Totzek, D., 2008. Customer prioritization: does it pay off, and how should it be implemented? J. Market. 72 (5), 110–130.
Huang, Q., Dastane, O., Cham, T.H., Cheah, J.H., 2024. Is 'she' more impulsive (to pleasure) than 'him' during livestream e-commerce shopping? J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 78, 103707.
Janssen, M.F., Birnie, E., Haagsma, J.A., Bonsel, G.J., 2008. Comparing the standard EQ-5D three-level system with a five-level version. Value Health 11 (2), 275–284.
Jiang, L., Hoegg, J., Dahl, D.W., 2013. Consumer reaction to unearned preferential treatment. J. Consum. Res. 40, 412–427.
Jin, T., Prentice, C., Shao, W., 2021. Identifying antecedent conditions for luxury brand purchase. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 60, 102466.
Kaiser, U., Schreier, M., Janiszewski, C., 2017. The self-expressive customization of a product can improve performance. J. Market. Res. 54 (5), 816–831.
Kim, S., Chang, H.J.J., 2023. Mechanism of retail therapy during stressful life events: the psychological compensation of revenge consumption toward luxury brands. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 75, 103508.
Kim, H., Jang, S.S., 2021. Is differential treatment in response to service failures effective? The roles of comparison, loyalty, and scarcity messages. Int. J. Hospit. Manage. 95, 102952.
Kim, S., Kim, M., Choi, L., 2024. "Going the extra mile": an integrative model of customer delight. Int. J. Contemp. Hospit. Manag. 36 (4), 1193–1212.
Kim, Y.S., Baker, M.A., 2020. I earn it, but they just get it: loyalty program customer reactions to unearned preferential treatment in the social servicescape. Cornell Hospitality Quarterly 61 (1), 84–97.
Kock, N., 2015. Common method bias in PLS-SEM: a full collinearity assessment approach. Int. J. e-Collaboration 11 (4), 1–10.
Kumar, A., Olshavsky, R.W., King, M.F., 2001. Exploring alternative antecedents of customer delight. J. Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction Complain. Behav. 14, 14–26.
Lacey, R., Suh, J., Morgan, R.M., 2007. Differential effects of preferential treatment levels on relational outcomes. J. Serv. Res. 9 (3), 241–256.
Lang, L.D., Lim, W.M., Guzmán, F., 2022. How does promotion mix affect brand equity? Insights from a mixed-methods study of low involvement products. J. Bus. Res. 141, 175–190.
Lawer, C., Knox, S., 2006. Customer advocacy and brand development. J. Prod. Brand Manag. 15 (2), 121–129.
Lee, L., Kim, D., 2023. How special am I? Consumer responses to promotion individualization and notification exclusivity. Asia Pac. J. Mark. Logist. 35 (3), 582–605.
Lee, S.A., Shea, L., 2015. Investigating the key routes to customers' delightful moments in the hotel context. J. Hospit. Market. Manag. 24 (5), 532–553.
Lim, W.M., Rasul, T., 2022. Customer engagement and social media: revisiting the past to inform the future. J. Bus. Res. 148, 325–342.
Lim, W.M., Ting, D.H., 2010. Young adults' susceptibility to interpersonal influence: a case of apparel purchases. Int. J. Manag. Stud. 17 (2), 143–164.
Lim, W.M., Ting, D.H., 2012. Research Methodology: A Toolkit of Sampling and Data Analysis Techniques for Quantitative Research. Grin Verlag, Germany.
Lim, W.M., Kumar, S., Pandey, N., Rasul, T., Gaur, V., 2023a. From direct marketing to interactive marketing: a retrospective review of the Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing. J. Res. Indian Med. 17 (2), 232–256.
Lim, W.M., Kumar, S., Pandey, N., Verma, D., Kumar, D., 2023b. Evolution and trends in consumer behaviour: insights from journal of consumer behaviour. J. Consum. Behav. 22 (1), 217–232.
Lim, W.M., Rasul, T., Kumar, S., Ala, M., 2022. Past, present, and future of customer engagement. J. Bus. Res. 140, 439–458.
Liu, M.W., Keh, H.T., 2015. Consumer delight and outrage: scale development and validation. Journal of Service Theory and Practice 25 (6), 680–699.
Mattila, A.S., Hanks, L., Zhang, L., 2013. Existential guilt and preferential treatment: the case of an airline upgrade. J. Trav. Res. 52 (5), 591–599.
Maturo, A., Rosiello, M.G., 2013. Psychological and social motivations to the purchase of technological goods: fuzzy mathematical models of interpretation. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences 84, 1845–1849.
Mayser, S., 2011. Perceived Fairness of Differential Customer Treatment. Technische Universität München.
Mayser, S., von Wangenheim, F., 2013. Perceived fairness of differential customer treatment: consumers' understanding of distributive justice really matters. J. Serv. Res. 16 (1), 99–113.
Merdin-Uygur, E., Ozturkcan, S., 2023. Consumers and service robots: power relationships amid COVID-19 pandemic. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 70, 103174.
Meyer-Waarden, L., 2015. Effects of loyalty program rewards on store loyalty. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 24, 22–32.
Meyer-Waarden, L., Bruwer, J., Galan, J.P., 2023. Loyalty programs, loyalty engagement and customer engagement with the company brand: consumer-centric behavioral psychology insights from three industries. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 71, 103212.
Moon, M.A., Faheem, S., Farooq, A., 2022. I, me, and my everything: self conceptual traits and compulsive buying behavior. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 68, 103075.
Mvondo, G.F.N., Jing, F., Hussain, K., 2023. What's in the box? Investigating the benefits and risks of the blind box selling strategy. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 71, 103189.
Nguyen, B., Lee-Wingate, S.N., Simkin, L., 2014. The customer relationship management paradox: five steps to create a fairer organisation. Social Business 4 (3), 207–230.
Nusrat, F., Huang, Y., 2024. Feeling rewarded and entitled to be served: understanding the influence of self-versus regular checkout on customer loyalty. J. Bus. Res. 170, 114293.
Oliver, R.L., Rust, R.T., Varki, S., 1997. Customer delight: foundations, findings, and managerial insight. J. Retailing 73 (3), 311–336.
Parasuraman, A., Ball, J., Aksoy, L., Keiningham, T.L., Zaki, M., 2021. More than a feeling? Toward a theory of customer delight. J. Serv. Manag. 32 (1), 1–26.
Park, J.Y., Jang, S.S., 2015. You got a free upgrade? What about me? The consequences of unearned preferential treatment. Tourism Manag. 50, 59–68.
Park, J., Li, W., 2023. "I got it FIRST": antecedents of competitive consumption of a new product. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 73, 103367.
Pez, V., Butori, R., de Kerviler, G., 2015. Because I'm worth it: the impact of given versus perceived status on preferential treatment effectiveness. J. Bus. Res. 68, 2477–2483.
Pontes, V., Greer, D.A., Pontes, N., Beatson, A., 2023. Need for distinction moderates customer responses to preferential treatment. J. Serv. Market. 37 (4), 409–419.
Quaye, E.S., Taoana, C., Abratt, R., Anabila, P., 2022. Customer advocacy and brand loyalty: the mediating roles of brand relationship quality and trust. J. Brand Manag. 29 (4), 363–382.
Roy, S.K., 2013. Consequences of customer advocacy. J. Strat. Market. 21 (3), 260–276.
Sheth, J.N., Sisodia, R.S., Sharma, A., 2000. The antecedents and consequences of customer-centric marketing. J. Acad. Market. Sci. 28 (1), 55–66.
Shin, H., Eastman, J.K., Mothersbaugh, D., 2017. The effect of a limited-edition offer following brand dilution on consumer attitudes toward a luxury brand. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 38, 59–70.
Shoukat, M.H., Ramkissoon, H., 2022. Customer delight, engagement, experience, value co-creation, place identity, and revisit intention: a new conceptual framework. J. Hospit. Market. Manag. 31 (6), 757–775.
Skogland, I., Siguaw, J.A., 2004. Are your satisfied customers loyal? Cornell Hotel Restaur. Adm. Q. 45 (3), 221–234.
Söderlund, M., Colliander, J., 2015. Loyalty program rewards and their impact on perceived justice, customer satisfaction, and repatronize intentions. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 25, 47–57.
Söderlund, M., Liljander, V., Gummerus, J., Hellman, P., Lipkin, M., Oikarinen, E.L., et al., 2014. Preferential treatment in the service encounter. J. Serv. Manag. 25 (4), 512–530.

Sukhu, A., Bilgihan, A., 2021. The impact of hedonic dining experiences on word of mouth, switching intentions and willingness to pay. Br. Food J. 123 (12), 3954–3969.
Sung, Y., Lee, J.A., Kim, E., Choi, S.M., 2016. Why we post selfies: understanding motivations for posting pictures of oneself. Pers. Indiv. Differ. 97, 260–265.
Sweeney, J., Payne, A., Frow, P., Liu, D., 2020. Customer advocacy: a distinctive form of word of mouth. J. Serv. Res. 23 (2), 139–155.
Tajfel, H., 1974. Social identity and intergroup behaviour. Soc. Sci. Inf. 13 (2), 65–93.
Tessaro, J.A., Harms, R., Schiele, H., 2023. How startups become attractive to suppliers and achieve preferred customer status: factors influencing the positioning of young firms. Ind. Market. Manag. 113, 100–115.
Torres, E.N., Kline, S., 2013. From customer satisfaction to customer delight: creating a new standard of service for the hotel industry. Int. J. Contemp. Hospit. Manag. 25 (5), 642–659.
Torres, E.N., 2014. Deconstructing service quality and customer satisfaction: challenges and directions for future research. Int. J. Hospit. Manag. 23 (6), 652–677.
Torrres, E.N., Zhang, T., Ronzoni, G., 2019. Measuring delightful customer experiences: the validation and testing of a customer delight scale along with its antecedents and effects. Int. J. Hospit. Manag. 87, 102380.
Tyrväinen, O., Karjaluoto, H., Saarijärvi, H., 2020. Personalization and hedonic motivation in creating customer experiences and loyalty in omnichannel retail. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 57, 102233.
Urban, G., 2004. The emerging era of customer advocacy. MIT Sloan Manag. Rev. 45 (2), 77–82.
Van der Heijden, H., Verhagen, T., 2004. Online store image: conceptual foundations and empirical measurement. Inf. Manag. 41 (5), 609–617.
Verhagen, T., van Dolen, W., 2011. The influence of online store beliefs on consumer online impulse buying: a model and empirical application. Inf. Manag. 48 (8), 320–327.
Vohs, K.D., Faber, R.J., 2007. Spent resources: self-regulatory resource availability affects impulse buying. J. Consum. Res. 33 (4), 537–547.
Wang, X.X., He, A.Z., 2022. The impact of retailers' sustainable development on consumer advocacy: a chain mediation model investigation. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 64, 102818.
Weiss, H.M., Cropanzano, R., 1996. Affective events theory: a theoretical discussion of the structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work. Res. Organ. Behav. 18 (1), 34–74.
Wolfinbarger, M., Gilly, M.C., 2003. eTailQ: dimensionalizing, measuring and predicting etail quality. J. Retailing 79 (3), 183–198.
Wong, A., 2004. The role of emotional satisfaction in service encounters. Manag. Serv. Qual.: Int. J. 14 (5), 365–376.
Wong, A., 2023. How social capital builds online brand advocacy in luxury social media brand communities. J. Retailing Consum. Serv. 70, 103143.
Xia, L., Kukar-Kinney, M., 2014. For our valued customers only: examining consumer responses to preferential treatment practices. J. Bus. Res. 67 (11), 2368–2375.
Yu, Y.T., Dean, A., 2001. The contribution of emotional satisfaction to consumer loyalty. Int. J. Serv. Ind. Manag. 12 (3), 234–250.
Zheng, X., Zhang, L., Line, N., Wei, W., 2023. The effects of unfulfilled preferential treatment and review dispersion on Airbnb guests' attitudes and behavior. J. Hospit. Tourism Res. 47 (7), 1244–1269.

Qurat Ul Ain is a Lecturer within the Department of Management Sciences at the National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan. She pursued a Master of Science in Business Administration with a specialization in Marketing from Fatima Jinnah Women University. Her research interests include business strategy and consumer behavior.

Weng Marc Lim is a Distinguished Professor and the Dean of Sunway Business School at Sunway University in Malaysia as well as an Adjunct Professor at Swinburne University of Technology's home campus in Melbourne, Australia and international branch campus in Sarawak, Malaysia. He is the Editor in Chief of *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* (Wiley) and an Associate Editor of *Journal of Business Research* (Elsevier) and *Journal of Strategic Marketing* (Taylor and Francis). He has authored ±100 manuscripts in journals ranked 'A*' and 'A' such as *European Journal of Marketing*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Journal of Brand Management*, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *Marketing Theory*, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, and *Psychology & Marketing*, among others. He has also presented his work and led high-level policy discussions at the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* and the *World Economic Forum*. Contact: @limwengmarc on Instagram and Twitter or his personal homepage at https://www.wengmarc.com.

Shahid Rasool is a Senior Lecturer in the Azman Hashim International Business School at University of Technology Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. His areas of expertise include marketing and neuromarketing. He has published in journals such as the *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, *British Food Journal*, *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, *Journal of Social Issues*, *Sage Open*, and *Sustainable Development*, among others.

Muhammad Zeshan is an Assistant Professor at the GIK Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology, Pakistan. He holds a Ph.D. from the University Paris 1 Pantheon Sorbonne and has taught at ESLSCA Business School Paris Campus. He has published in numerous journals and is committed to advancing understanding at the dynamic intersection of digital innovation and organizational studies.