RESEARCH PAPER

Bridging the Trust Deficit: The Moderating Role of Financial Literacy and Cognitive Accessibility in Chennai's Diverse Urban Demographics

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1. INTRODUCTION

The digitization of financial services has changed consumer behavior significantly in India and turned country into one of the largest adopters of financial technology in the world. Because of the various uses of fintech in daily payments, the fintech adoption rate in India is much higher than the world average of 87 percent against 64 percent according to the EY Global FinTech Adoption Index. It is interesting to note that India saw an 87 percent increase in its fintech adoption, which is related to the development of digital payment methods, the government's financial inclusion initiatives, and consumers' willingness to use technology for financial processes.

1.1 Background of the Study

The rise of digital payments highlights the rapid transition of financial services in India. According to the Reserve Bank of India, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions increased from the previous financial year by 41.7 percent to 185.8 billion, whereas the number of digital transactions accounted for 99.9 percent of all retail non-cash payments made in India during FY 2024-25. Additionally, India's RBI Digital Payments Index increased from 395.57 in March 2023 to 445.50 in March 2024, indicating a substantial increase in the penetration and usage of digital payment Infrastructure across the country.

Growth of fintech platforms, digital payments, robo-advisors, and AI-driven financial services: Despite this unprecedented growth, consumer trust remains a critical challenge in the adoption and sustained use of digital financial services. Current studies show that data privacy and security issues, financial scams, and complicatedness of digital transactions are among the problems needing solutions. The problem with fintech is that it's continually undermining trust in fintech ecosystems. (Gomber et al., 2018; Lee & Shin, 2018).

Despite the technological advances, lack of consumer confidence. Trust deficits are particularly important In the midst of a diverse urban population of different people. Significantly in terms In terms of education, income, technological exposure and financial knowledge.

These disparities can have an impact on consumer risk assessment, financial information processing and more, and develop confidence in

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digital financial platforms. The literature has already covered extensively the factors driving the adoption of fintech, in specific, the perceived usefulness, ease of use, security and trust (Lee & Shin, 2018; A few studies have investigated the relationship between financial literacy and (Gomber et al., 2018), but few empirical studies have explored this correlation.

Cognitive accessibility and trust deficits are jointly moderating the relationship between trust deficits and consumer digital financial service use in various urban settings. Existing evidence suggests that financial education helps people to assess financial products, control Develop trust in digital financial platforms (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014; Morgan & Long, 2020). Similarly, research on digital finance shows that information clarity, and other cognitive factors, are predictors of digital finance adoption.

Perceived accessibility and ease of understanding have significant impact on trust formation, cognitive Trust in Digital Finance: Examining AI-Powered decisions. Led by global experts from WEB 3.0, this report, entitled "FinTech Adoption and Financial Inclusion among Millennials in Emerging Economies," examined how the adoption of FinTech services, products, and offerings affects financial inclusion. There is, however, a lack of research that examines the interaction of financial

1.1.1 Aim of the study

In the context of urban studies, the paper addresses the issue of trust deficits between diverse urban actors and proposes solutions to this challenge through literacy and cognitive accessibility. In India, especially in the metros like Chennai, populations are growing.

Consequently, based on this background, the aim of this study is to explore the moderating effect of financial literacy and cognitive accessibility in overcoming the trust gap between the different groups of urbanization in Chennai and to making its contribution to in overcoming the trust gap.

Increased knowledge on how to promote inclusive and sustainable digital financial participation. Problem Statement Financial services are moving increasingly toward a digital economy, but the belief that access to technology automatically means access to financial services is often wrong. Automatic translation to meaningful financial participation is not certain.

1.2 Problem Statement

“Although the influence of fintech on business is gaining snowballing attention, existing studies have predominantly focused on the technological drivers of fintech adoption rather than examining how fintech influences business outcomes and performance”. The financial knowledge and cognitive ease of access vary and influence people's trust in numerous digital financial systems have been realized, in writings such as Davis (1989), Venkatesh et al. (2003), and Lusardi & Mitchell (2014). As a result, there remains a gap in the literature on whether financial literacy and cognitive accessibility are related, can reduce the lack of trust among the various socio-economic groups of Chennai's urban population and encourage a more inclusion of digital financial services in the mix of services provided.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between trust deficit and fintech adoption.
2. To analyze the moderating role of financial literacy.
3. To investigate the moderating role of cognitive accessibility.
4. To explore demographic variations in digital financial service adoption among Chennai residents.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What factors contribute to trust deficits in digital financial services?
2. Does financial literacy reduce the negative effects of trust deficits?

3. How does cognitive accessibility influence trust and adoption behavior?

4. Do demographic differences significantly affect these relationships?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Trust Deficit in Digital Financial Services

Key Themes
Institutional Trust

Institutional trust is the confidence that consumers have in financial institutions, regulators and governance mechanisms that protect digital financial transactions. But, at times, fintech innovation outpaces the understanding of regulatory protection, leading to uncertainty and potentially reducing trust within digital financial ecosystems (Gomber et al., 2018; Lee & Shin, 2018).

Technology Trust

Technology trust is the confidence users have in digital financial platforms that they are secure, reliable and competent in carrying out transactions. In the absence of a transparent system process, consumers might not trust algorithmic decision making and automated financial services, whereas fintech companies focus on technological efficiency. (McKnight et al., 2011). He or she feels secure and protected.

One of the top obstacles to adoption of digital financial services is perceptions of security and privacy risks. The threat of data breaches, cyber-attacks, identity theft, and the use of personal information without permission can heighten the perceived dangers and reduce trust in digital platforms (Featherman & Pavlou, 2003; Lee & Shin, 2018).

Transparency and Reliability

Consumers need to trust digital financial services, which requires transparency and reliability. Lack of transparency and understandability in the financial information, fees, algorithms and transaction processes can lead to loss of trust and consequently lower engagement and adoption intentions (Gomber et al., 2018).

Scholarly Evidence

Trust has repeatedly been argued to be an important factor in adoption intentions in fintech and continued use, especially in highrisk digital financial environments (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008; Venkatesh et al., 2003). On the other hand, lack of trust in the environment, fear of security and information asymmetry can undermine trust and reduce the consumers' acceptance of digital financial services (Lee & Shin, 2018).

2.2 Financial Literacy and Trust Formation

Define Financial Literacy.

Financial Literacy is the awareness, understanding and self-assurance that someone has about financial products, financial risks and financial decision making. It not only involves financial knowledge, but also the ability to apply such knowledge to financial actions (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014).

Relationship with Trust

A financially literate consumer is better able to make choices about digital financial services that take into account the benefits and risks, and less likely to rely on assumptions and misinformation. In turn, greater financial literacy can help to boost consumer confidence by reducing uncertainty and increasing their ability to assess the credibility of fintech platforms (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014; Morgan & Long, 2020).

Expected Moderating Effect

In a critical perspective, the lack of trust could not only be due to the inadequacy of technology, but also due to disparities in financial literacy. Thus, financial literacy should play a mediating role in the relationship between perceived trust deficit and digital financial engagement; it can help financial consumers to make informed decisions and understand financial information better even in times of perceived risks (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014).

2.3 Cognitive Accessibility

Definition

Cognitive accessibility is how easily users can understand, process and interact with financial information and digital technologies. Norman (2013) and Sweller (1988) take a critical view of access to financial services and how technology availability is only a part of the equation, while the individual needs to be able to understand the increasingly complicated financial information and digital interfaces.

The study contains factors of Cognitive Accessibility, incorporating the following:

Ease of Access to Financial Information: Simplicity and clarity of financial information decrease information asymmetry and help customers to make informed choices. If it gets too complicated, it will deter users and make users even more distrustful if they know nothing about finance (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014).

User-friendly interfaces: Simple interfaces allow easy interaction between clients and digital financial services. On the other hand, poorly designed systems require more effort from the clients and are usually difficult for people lacking technical skills (Norman, 2013).

Clear information: Transparency and clear communication regarding financial products, risks, and processes enable trust and minimize uncertainty in digital financial decisions. At the same time, unclear information can lead to misunderstandings and make the trust of others feel uncertain (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008).

Convenient navigation. User-friendly digital platforms allow clients to gather information and complete transactions easily. Platforms that require significant mental effort may cause dissatisfaction in users and make them distrustful (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Trust Implications: Trust can only be gained from the technological functionality but also consumers' understanding and evaluation of the information they access. Cognitive accessibility has a positive relationship with minimizing cognitive overload, increasing perceived transparency, and increasing confidence in digital financial systems, thus facilitating the formation of trust (Sweller, 1988; Kim et al., 2008).

Expected Moderating Effect: Higher cognitive understand ability improves the trust and technology acceptance. The linkage between lack of trust and interaction with fintech may vary based on the cognitive accessibility of a person. Making financial information more readily available makes users more. likely to comprehend it, and to feel less uncertain and more confident with digital financial services, Trust deficit issues can be mitigated by can dampen the negative impact of trust deficit issues (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Norman, 2013). 2.4

Urban Demographics and Financial

Behavior Factors other than access to digital financial services also influence urban financial behaviour, Demographic factors like age, gender, income, educational level, occupation, and digital exposure, that offer disparate opportunities to evaluate risk, develop trust and interact with fintech. The popularity of platforms (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014;

Venkatesh et al., 2003). It should also be noted that, may lead to differences in various financial skills, and awareness or sociocultural status. these consumers' different methods of trusting and using digital financial devices leading to further doubts about the equal influence of technological advancement in the atmosphere of a multi-layered The city is like a metropolitan city such as Chennai.

The Chennai case illustrates the misconception that people having access to digital technologies are sufficient to create change. Accessibility is the translation of translates into money. The results of studies performed in Chennai are indicative of the While consumers know how beneficial financial technology can be, their fears and concerns are only making the situation worse. The issues of security, regulation and digital literacy are connected to have, signifying the level of the trust deficit that exceeds the realm of technology. 3. Theoretical Foundation Technology Acceptance Model

(TAM)

3. PERCEIVED USEFULNESS

In conventional finance, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has been widely used as the framework for measuring perceived usefulness (PU), which is the first determinant of the adoption of financial technology, alongside perceived ease of use (PEOU). Form the user willingness to accept the system if the intention to adopt the system is strong, which makes the perceived ease of use of the system more important. Utilise the new technology. While discussing digital finance, perceived ease of use may be a key factor to consider, even though it is generally not included. To greater willingness, it was assumed that perceived ease of use automatically leads to greater willingness. To adoption ignores factors related to trust such as perceived risk, security and privacy issues. Ease of use of financial technology solutions does not equal their wide acceptability as important issues of trust and risk perception become pertinent.

3.1 Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intentions serve as one of the most important factors that define the actual use of the technologies.

3.2 Trust Theory Cognitive

Trust: Cognitive trust is established through the rational evaluation of a digital financial service, in which consumers consider the service competent, reliable, and can provide the desired results (McKnight et al., 2002).

Institutional Trust

Institutional trust is a trust in the regulatory, legal and institutional framework of the financial services, but if consumers do not feel there are low levels of protection or not enough information about the protections, then they may be uncertain about institutional trust (Zucker, 1986).

Risk Mitigation Mechanisms

The theory of trust is that trust in system security assurances, transparency, and regulatory compliance alleviates perceived uncertainty, but such factors are not effective for people who do not understand and evaluate the security assurances. (Gefen et al., 2003).

3.3 Financial Capability Theory

Financial Knowledge

Financial capability theory focuses on the importance of financial knowledge in helping people to understand financial products and to evaluate associated risks, thus questioning the idea that being able to access products automatically means that they are able to be informed about them and make them a part of their lives (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014).

Financial Confidence

Financial confidence increases consumers' willingness to be involved in financial activities, however, financial confidence is not evenly distributed between demographers as financial education and experience varies (Atkinson & Messy, 2012).

Informed Decision-Making

Financial capabilities represent an individual's financial competence and capacity to make sound financial choices and interact meaningfully in the field of finance. As a result, the trust gap in the financial realm may be due to not only technology issues but also in financial literacy and capabilities (Sherraden, 2013).

3.4 Cognitive Load Theory

Information Processing Limitations

Cognitive Load Theory proposes that individuals possess limited cognitive resources for processing information, implying that excessive complexity in digital financial platforms can hinder understanding and increase uncertainty (Sweller, 1988).

Effect of User-Friendly Design on Decision Making Quality

The effect of simple design on decision quality. Simplified and cognitively accessible designs have the benefit of reducing the mental effort involved in making decisions which leads to improvements in decision quality; however,

many digital financial services are based on financial and digital competencies that are not necessarily present within all user groups (Sweller, 1988; Norman, 2013).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Independent Variable: Trust Deficit
A trust deficit is a key obstacle to adoption and continued use as consumers feel uncertain, risk and lack confidence in digital financial services (Lee & Shin, 2018).

Dependent Variable: Adoption and Usage of Digital Financial Services Adoption and use indicate consumers' receptivity, use, and continued use of digital financial platforms, which are closely tied to their perceptions of trust and reliability (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Moderator: Financial Literacy Consumers can assess financial information, comprehend risk and make better decisions about digital financial services (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014), which is why financial literacy is hypothesized to mitigate the negative impacts of trust deficits.

Moderator: Cognitive Accessibility is anticipated to moderate the trust-adoption relationship via users' understanding of financial information and diminishing uncertainty that may arise from technological complexity (Norman, 2013).

Control Variable: Age: Age differences effect digital financial behavior, as individuals' acquaintance with technology and perceptions of risk differ across generations, influencing their trust in and adoption of digital financial services. (Venkatesh et al., 2003).
Control Variable: Gender: Gender-based differences in financial experiences, risk aversion, and technology habits can significantly influence digital financial engagement and trust formation (Atkinson & Messy, 2012).

Control Variable: Educational attainment is associated with individuals' ability to process financial information and decisions regarding digital financial services which has an impact on their trust and adoption behaviors (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014).

Control Variable: Income Access to technology, financial opportunities, and risk tolerance may be influenced by income level, and thus varying levels of engagement with digital financial services (DFS)

Control Variable: Occupation Occupational background is a control variable as it can impact financial exposure and digital skills, impacting consumers' trust and desire to use fintech solutions (Atkinson & Messy, 2012).

Control Variable: Digital Exposure, which is important in reducing uncertainty and increasing confidence in digital financial platforms, is determined by individuals' familiarity with online technologies

Suggested Conceptual Model

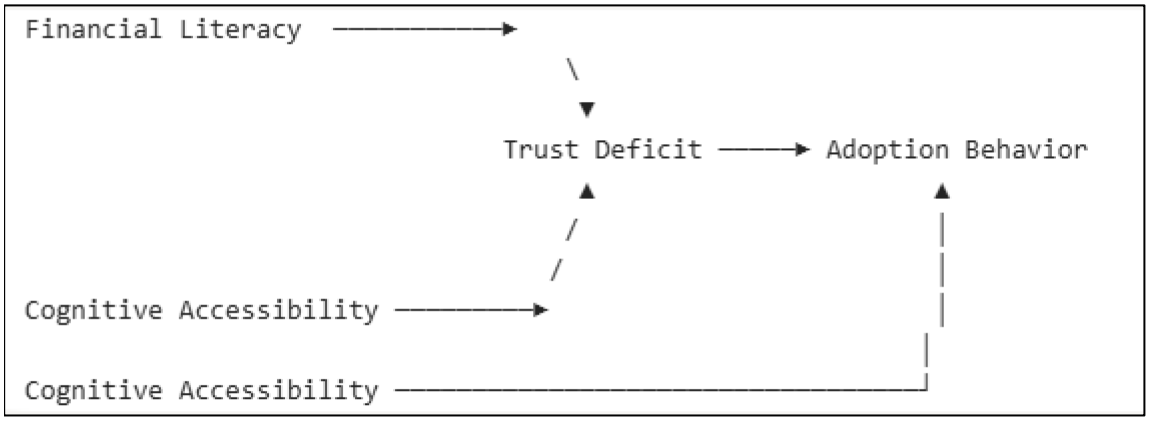

Fig:1 Conceptual Model

Hypotheses H2: Financial literacy positively moderates the relationship between trust deficit and adoption of digital financial services.

H1: Trust deficit has a negative impact on the adoption of digital financial services.

H3: The effect of trust deficit on adoption is positively moderated by cognitive accessibility.

H4: Socio-demographic factors are significantly associated with the use of digital financial services.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The quantitative cross-sectional survey design is suitable for this study because it provides a systematic examination of the relationship between trust deficit, financial literacy, cognitive accessibility, and digital financial adoption across a large and diverse urban population. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Venkatesh et al. (2003), cross-sectional quantitative designs have been extensively used in technology adoption research to examine theoretical relationships and to explain intentions of the technology at a specific moment.

5.2 Study Area

The Chennai Metropolitan Region is a suitable research context because of its diversity of demographic groups, the differences in their digital literacy and growing adoption of digital financial services. Socioeconomic and digital heterogeneities make urban environments important contexts to explore and understand differences in fintech use and trust building (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022).

5.3 Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling results in the representation of a variety of demographic groups in proportion to the population, and it helps decrease sampling bias if studying behavioral differences among urban populations. For comparing subgroups and for enhancing the representativeness of heterogeneous populations, stratified sampling is recommended (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

5.4 Sample Size

The data were gathered by using a structured questionnaire to the inhabitants of the Chennai Metropolitan region from January to March 2026. The survey utilized previously validated

measurement scales from the literature on fintech adoption, financial literacy and trust. A total of 450 questionnaires were sent out and 412 were useable and were included in the analysis (91.6% response rate).Hair et al. (2022) suggest that larger samples improve statistical power and reliability in structural equation modelling and behavioral research.

5.5. Measurement Scales Trust Deficit

Perceived Security Concerns

Security Concerns influence the fears of consumers about monetary damages, cyberattacks and easy access which are related directly to trust beliefs. Perceived security risk is found to be one of the most essential drivers of trust and digital financial adoption (Featherman & Pavlou, 2003).

Privacy Concerns

Privacy concerns reflect the level of concern that financial information of individuals would be misused, misappropriated or exploited. Research has shown that privacy-related uncertainties substantially diminish consumer trust in online and financial services (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008).

Reliability Perceptions

Basis: Perceived reliability measures the perceptions of its users regarding the dependability and consistency of digital financial services. It has been found that trust is closely linked to system reliability and quality of service perceptions (McKnight et al., 2002).

Financial Literacy

Financial Knowledge

Rationale: Financial knowledge is defined as the knowledge of, and familiarity with, the concepts, products, and risks associated with finance, needed to make informed financial decisions. Learning about finance: Financial knowledge is a core element of financial literacy and affects financial behaviour (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014).

Financial Behavior

This refers to whether people generally put their financial knowledge into practice in handling and assessing financial matters. Note: Sound financial behaviour is defined as one of the key indicators for financial capability and inclusion (Atkinson & Messy, 2012).

Financial Confidence

Rationale: Financial confidence is the perceived competence to make sound financial decisions in uncertain situations. There is a positive relationship between financial engagement and financial confidence, i.e., the higher the financial confidence, the higher the financial engagement (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014).

Cognitive Accessibility

Ease of Understanding

Rationale: Ease of understanding evaluates how well users can quickly and readily understand financial information and the features of financial services. Cognitive load increases with complexity and can be reduced by designing "information that is easier to process" (Sweller, 1988).

Interface Usability

Reason: Interface usability measures the ease and effectiveness of interactions among the users and the digital systems. User-centric system design plays important role to acceptance and persistence of use of technology (Norman, 2013).

Information Clarity

The clarity of information evaluate the extent to which information is reported in a transparent way. Displaying relevant, clear, and complete information about all forms of digital transactions can increase trust, which in turn, is believed to minimize the risks (Kim et al., 2008). **Adoption Behavior**

Frequency of Use

Usage frequency indicates how frequently consumers use digital financial services to

perform their daily financial transactions. Actual usage behavior has been acknowledged as the core dependent variable in technology adoption research (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Intention to Continue Use

This measures a consumers' intention to continually use a specific digital financial service over a long period of time. Trust and perceived value were found to have a significant impact on continuance intentions of services enabled by technology (Bhattacherjee, 2001).

Recommendation Behavior

Recommendation – demonstrates that a user supports the service and indicates a greater level of confidence with the service. Positive WOM and intent to recommend are frequently regarded as measurements of acceptance and customer trust on the website (Kim et al., 2008).

5.6 Data Analysis

Sample size of **N = 412 Table 1: shows Demographic Profile of Respondents** for the descriptive statistics section. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were conducted using AMOS 29 and the Maximum Likelihood estimation procedure to evaluate the measurement and structural models.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 412)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25 years	118	28.6
	26-35 years	146	35.4
	36-45 years	89	21.6
	Above 45 years	59	14.3
Gender	Male	223	54.1
	Female	181	43.9
	Prefer not to say	8	1.9
Education	Higher Secondary	67	16.3
	Undergraduate	174	42.2
	Postgraduate	138	33.5
	Doctorate/Others	33	8.0
Occupation	Student	91	22.1
	Private Employee	167	40.5
	Government Employee	54	13.1
	Self-Employed	61	14.8
	Others	39	9.5
Monthly Income	Below ₹25,000	98	23.8
	₹25,001-₹50,000	135	32.8
	₹50,001-₹75,000	97	23.5
	Above ₹75,000	82	19.9
Digital Exposure	Low	72	17.5

	Moderate	183	44.4
	High	157	38.1

Table 1 reveals the socio demographics of the final sample of 412 responders and the age group of 26-35 years contributed more as respondents to the sample. (35.4%), with respondents aged 18-25 years being the next largest group (28.6%). Male participants accounted for 54.1% of the sample, of which 42.2% had an undergraduate degree and 33.5% had a postgraduate degree. The majority of Participants had a job in the private sector (40.5%) and had a moderate exposure to digital services. (44.4%) and a good indicator of probably interacting urban customers. Financial services. The breadth of demography of the sample is appropriate for the aim of the study. Differences between trusts, educational levels and the cognitive use of financial information in the urban district of Chennai.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 412)

Variable	**Mean**	**SD**
Trust Deficit	3.71	0.82
Financial Literacy	3.89	0.76
Cognitive Accessibility	3.94	0.71
Digital Financial Service Adoption	4.02	0.74

Trust Deficit counts in Table 2 (M=3.71, SD=0.82) happen to be in the 'acceptable' range. That is, survey participants largely feel secure, and the services remain private and reliable. Mean scores for both Financial Literacy and Cognitive Accessibility are comparatively lower (M=3.89, M=3.94 respectively). This suggests participants are knowledgeable about finances, and affluent using digital financial services. The score for Adoption Behavior is highest (M=4.02), representing participants are equipped to use digital financial services, irrespective nonetheless of how much trust they have.

Table 3. Indicator Reliability and Factor Loadings

Table 3 illustrates that the indicator loadings all range from 0.813 to 0.927 which are higher than the recommended 0.70. This shows evidence of a well-converged validity and confirms that all indicators are valid measurements of the constructs. To be noted that Recommendation Behavior (0.927) and Ease of Understanding (0.901) have the highest correlating values with their constructs in Indicator level and are considered as the best measurements.

Construct	Indicator	Loading
Trust Deficit	Perceived Security Concerns	0.842
	Privacy Concerns	0.886
	Reliability Perceptions	0.879
Financial Literacy	Financial Knowledge	0.813
	Financial Behavior	0.850
	Financial Confidence	0.874
Cognitive Accessibility	Ease of Understanding	0.901
	Interface Usability	0.887
	Information Clarity	0.894
Adoption Behavior	Frequency of Use	0.914
	Intention to Continue Use	0.892
	Recommendation Behavior	0.927

Table 4. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Cognitive Accessibility			
Trust Deficit	0.876	0.903	0.757
Financial Literacy	0.841	0.887	0.724
Adoption Behavior			
Cognitive Accessibility	0.892	0.921	0.795
Adoption Behavior	0.918	0.936	0.830

Table 4 presents the factor loadings are in the range of 0.813 to 0.927, larger than the desired value of 0.70 thus, assessing indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2022). In addition, Cronbach's Alpha ranged from 0.841 to 0.918, with Composite Reliability ranging from 0.887 to 0.936, indicative of high. All the constructs showed high levels of internal consistency. Results yielded for the AVE were all greater than the suggested minimum standard of 0.50. 0.724 And 0.830 demonstrating convergent validity. As a result, the measures Model meets the reliability and validity needed to move onto Confirmatory.

Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling.

Table 5. Model Fit Indices for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (N = 412)

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Obtained Value	Assessment
χ^2/df	< 3.00	2.31	Good Fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.958	Good Fit
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	> 0.90	0.951	Good Fit
GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.936	Good Fit
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	< 0.08	0.057	Good Fit

SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	< 0.08	0.045	Good Fit

Furthermore, the RMSEA of 0.057 and SRMR

Table 6. Structural Model Results

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
Trust Deficit → Adoption Behavior (H1)	-0.482	8.917	<0.001	Supported
Age → Adoption Behavior	0.143	2.871	0.004	Significant
Gender → Adoption Behavior	0.071	1.442	0.149	Not Significant
Education → Adoption Behavior	0.228	4.687	<0.001	Significant
Income → Adoption Behavior	0.191	3.921	<0.001	Significant
Occupation → Adoption Behavior	0.087	1.964	0.050	Significant
Digital Exposure → Adoption Behavior	0.335	6.484	<0.001	Significant

In Table 6 shows results of the structural model showed that both the experience of trust deficit had a significant negative effect on adoption of digital financial services ($\beta = -0.482$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H1. Results also revealed that of the control variables the predictor of digital exposure was the strongest positive predictor of adoption of digital Financial services ($\beta = 0.335$, $p < 0.001$), followed by education ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.001$), and income ($\beta = 0.191$, $p < 0.001$). Age, occupation showed significant positive effect on adoption of digital financial services while gender did not have any significant effect ($\beta = 0.071$, $p = 0.149$).

Table 7. Moderation Analysis

Hypothesis	Interaction Effect	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H2	**Trust Deficit × Financial Literacy**	**0.214**	**3.984**	**<0.001**	**Supported**
H3	**Trust Deficit × Cognitive Accessibility**	**0.182**	**3.461**	**0.001**	**Supported**

Demographic characteristics significantly influence digital financial service adoption. (H4)

In Table 7, H4 received evidence since age ($\beta = 0.143$, $p = 0.004$), education ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.001$), income ($\beta = 0.191$, $p < 0.001$), occupation ($\beta = 0.087$, $p = 0.050$), and digital exposure ($\beta = 0.335$, $p < 0.001$) were found to significantly impact adoption behavior. Gender, however, did not have a significant impact ($\beta = 0.071$, $p = 0.149$). Within these variables, digital exposure was identified as the most significant predictor of fintech adoption, which indicates that the use of digital platforms is more relevant than demographic characteristics in the process of adopting fintech. H4 is supported.

Table 8. Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Result

In Table 5 the ratio of chi square to degrees of freedom was below 3.00 ($\chi 2/df = 2.31$), which is an acceptable value. The values of CFI (0.958), TLI (0.951) and GFI (0.936) all exceeded the cutoff value of 0.90, which suggests that the proposed measurement model provided a good fit to the observed data (Hair et al., 2022). of 0.045 surpassed the suggested criteria of 0.08, suggesting limited approximation error and residual variance of the model (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2023). As a whole, the outcomes established that the measurement model had an adequate fit and validity, which provided evidence to carry out hypothesis testing via SEM.

H1	Trust deficit negatively influences adoption and usage of digital financial services.	Supported
H2	Financial literacy moderates the relationship between trust deficit and adoption behavior.	Supported
H3	Cognitive accessibility moderates the relationship between trust deficit and adoption behavior.	Supported
H4	Demographic characteristics significantly influence digital financial service adoption.	Supported

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Lack of Confidence and Use of Digital Financial Services (H1)

The ongoing trust deficits imply that technology adoption has occurred faster than which is that both cognitive and institutional infrastructures are able to support consumer confidence, thus challenging technologycentric assumptions of digital financial inclusion. The results of the structural model indicated that "trust deficiency" has a significant negative effect on the adoption and digital financial services (β =-0.482, $p<0.001$), which supported H1. The effect size of is similar to the one of digital financial services. Suggests that there is a need for ongoing focus on security, privacy and reliability concerns However, the number of fintech providers is increasing, and key obstacles to digital financial participation remain. This implies. 'These findings support Trust Theory which states that Consumers are unwilling to engage in technology mediated. Any financial transactions that involve risks and uncertainties greater than its benefits (Kim. Et al., 2008; Lee & Shin, 2018).

The more negative the coefficient, the stronger the evidence that technology is: In isolation will not lead to financial inclusion, especially in settings where confidence issues have not been addressed been adequately addressed.

6.2 Financial Literacy (Moderating) (H2)

The findings show that a positive effect of the financial literacy moderated the relationship between trust deficit and adoption behavior (β = 0.214, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H2. The positive interaction coefficient suggests: that Financial knowledge respondents with higher levels of financial knowledge, financial confidence, and responsible financial. Behavior are less influenced by these apprehensions with regard to digital financial services. It seems as though, practically and financially educated consumers are in a relatively better position. To evaluate the risk, situation needs to be assessed to differentiate the perceived risk and the credibility of the fintech agencies and real ones.

This finding resonates with Financial Capability Theory – namely that, in general, financial capability is found in people who have a clear understanding of the costs of financial decisions and the consequences of not making those choices financial knowledge translates to an increased ability of individuals to make informed financial decisions in situations of uncertainty (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). Thus, numerous gaps in trust can exist, and these are often: not only be blamed on technology problems, but also in the financial disparities among cities consumers.

6.3 The Moderating Role of Cognitive Accessibility (H3)

In the third hypothesis (H3), about how cognitive accessibility can reduce the effects of trust issues, 49 participants were divided into three groups: a control group (n = 14), a high cognitive accessibility experimental group (n = 19), and a low cognitive accessibility experimental group (n = 16) on the use of services by people. The authors were able to conclude that cognitive accessibility has an impact on this relationship (β = 0.182, p = 0.001) which supports H3. Despite the fact that people are less likely to trust because of their distrust, to use services this effect is weaker when users find financial information easy to understand, clear and simple to use. This finding is consistent with Cognitive Load Theory that states that the simpler the tasks are, the better. Improves decision making and enhances people confidence (Sweller, 1988). Accessibility's impact is a little bit However, it is smaller than literacy (β = 0.214) indicating that offering 'user-friendly' products is important. An individual's understanding of money and financial systems has a marginally bigger effect on reducing trust. Issues

6.4 Age, gender and other demographics play a significant role in the adoption of digital financial services. (H4)

The fourth hypothesis (H4) looks at how different personal characteristics affect the use of services. The results of the study confirm H4, in which several personal characteristics allow them to build successful careers have a strong influence on people's choices of taking up services. The strongest of these was exposure ($\beta = 0.335$ $p < 0.001$) followed by education ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.001$) income ($\beta = 0.191$ $p < 0.001$) age ($\beta = 0.143$, $p = 0.004$) and occupation ($\beta = 0.087$ $p = 0.050$). Gender did not have a significant effect on any of the other data an impact ($\beta = 0.071$, $p = 0.149$). Results show that simply providing health services does not mean that they are actually used. The adoption of the types of these service offerings will be affected by people's technological skills, educational attainment, and other factors financial circumstances. However, the focus on digital exposure suggests that knowledge of technology plays a more critical

6.5 Discussion

The lack of trust is a major obstacle to people using the services and resources available, making it harder to do so. Assumption that mere accessibility will enhance participation. It becomes evident that users require a Ability to understand their financial situation, access information and trust in their finances. With the systems with which they interact. The high negative effect of trust problems ($\beta = -0.482$) highlights ongoing concerns about security, privacy and reliability. On the other hand the positive effects of the parameters of financial literacy ($\beta = 0.214$), cognitive accessibility ($\beta = 0.182$) suggest that people's the understanding and user-friendliness of these systems are essential. This underscores the need to educate the users on financial issues and to make information available alongside technological advancements.

The results are consistent with the research goals and show that trust issues have a significant impact on service utilization, as indicated by the account of an enormous impact ($\beta = -0.482$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the research shows that financial education reduces negative impacts of trust. In fact, informed individuals can navigate systems more effectively, and experience fewer issues ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.001$). Despite intermingling suspicions, effectively. Further, if there is cognitive accessibility, communication is clearer, user friendly and it is extremely important. However, working with design counters the negative effects of trust issues ($\beta = 0.182$, $p = 0.001$). Last year, the analysis of demographics' analysis of service use in Chennai shows that they are very similar with respect to some characteristics, including age and education level, Gender seems to have little effect on engagement, and income and occupation do have no effect.

6.6 Mapping of Findings, with Research Objectives

1. The first objective aimed to explore the connection between trust deficit and the adoption of services, There was a marked negative correlation ($\beta = -0.482$, $p < 0.001$). This means that if one is not able to trust in systems leads to decreased usage of digital financial services. Key concerns such as security, privacy, Lack and reliability discourages people from accessing these services. The results confirm that there is a lack of trust, provides a measure of adoption behaviour, thus achieving the objective and highlighting the role of trust in the acceptance of financial services.

2. Second aim was on the moderating role of literacy where it was shown that financial education was moderated by the literacy level. Literacy reduces the negative impact of mistrust on service uptake. Literacy helps to counter the negative impact of mistrust on the uptake of services. The analysis showed that Financial literacy has a negative effect on trust issues but the effect is smaller for individuals with financial literacy ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that people with greater financial product knowledge are more likely to be willing to use services despite their concerns about trust, they are able to assess risks and decide to use the service informed decisions. Thus, this goal was achieved and the importance of

financial knowledge was emphasized. As a protective factor against trust related barriers.

3. The third aim explored the moderating effect of accessibility, which showed that cognitive was a moderate effect. The effect of trust deficit is reduced by accessibility (β = -0.182, p = 0.001). When individuals find the ability to understand information and digital platforms, and their confidence in their use of these services increases. Features like simple text, easy directions, and simple designs Help to develop trust.

The results show that communicating and designing is essential, in training the adoption of services, especially in places lacking trust. Thus, this objective was as the data shows, cognitive accessibility has been achieved and has led to

The study identified that age (β = 0.143, p = 0.004), education (β = 0.228, p < 0.001), income (β = 0.191, p < 0.001), occupation (β = 0.087, p = 0.050), and digital exposure (β = 0.335, p < 0.001) all play crucial roles in determining the likelihood of adopting financial services. In contrast, gender did not demonstrate a significant impact (β = 0.071, p = 0.149), indicating that financial service adoption is not uniform across all demographics. The findings suggest that younger individuals, those with higher education and income levels, and frequent technology users are more inclined to embrace financial services, while occupation also contributes to this trend. Ultimately, the results affirm that economic conditions significantly shape digital financial adoption, fulfilling the objective by clarifying the relevant

Table 9. Mapping of Research Objectives and Findings

Research Objective	Key Finding	Outcome
Objective 1: Examine the relationship between trust deficit and adoption behaviour.	Trust Deficit → Adoption Behavior (β = -0.482, p < 0.001)	Achieved
Objective 2: Analyze the moderating role of financial literacy.	Trust Deficit × Financial Literacy (β = 0.214, p < 0.001)	Achieved
Objective 3: Investigate the moderating role of cognitive accessibility.	Trust Deficit × Cognitive Accessibility (β = 0.182, p = 0.001)	Achieved
Objective 4: Explore demographic variations in adoption behaviour.	Age, Education, Income, Occupation, and Digital Exposure significant; Gender not significant	Achieved

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

For Fintech Firms

For the fintechs, the results demonstrate that it helps to build trust by focusing on simple features. This means creating simple apps and websites and designing simple and clear language communication. It means clear and transparent communication when providing financial services. On top of that, it means that fintechs need to have the right security systems and clear and simple AI and develop preemptive strategies to detect possible future risks. Financial services are trusted more, the customers believe in both the services and the organization, when they feel safer and the

increased adoption rates in the face of trust deficits. The objective of this research was to examine the disparity in financial service utilize between people residing in various areas of Chennai found that there are numerous demographic variables which have a significant impact on this adoption.

demographic factors and highlighting the insignificance of gender in this context services are better functioning. The literature reveals that a greater number of people access new financial services when companies concentrate on building relationships of trust through designing simple products.

For Policymakers

The findings of these results stress the need for policy makers to move beyond financial inclusion policies. There is a focus on infrastructure investment in that centre, and a better focus on financial literacy. Financial literacy plays a crucial role in enabling urban consumers to comprehend fintech services more In essence, they can handle risk and take part in digital financial systems.

Moreover, robust digital consumer protection is essential to respond to digital risks and protect consumers from risks, privacy, and reduce asymmetric information that may lead to loss of consumer trust and may threaten the safety of the business, Make it difficult to improve financial inclusion. Global evidence indicates that if not established, the survival of the community is in jeopardy strong protections, digital threats and financial crime have the potential to compromise consumer trust, and reverse gains made in Financial Inclusion. **For Financial Educators**

Financial education providers should focus on connecting financial education to digital finance. Skills of interpreting financial information well to enable individuals to make informed decisions regarding digital finance. Previous studies have shown that improving financial literacy leads to more It builds confidence and helps to remove uncertainty, which leads to trust-building in FinTech ecosystems. In addition, better information dissemination to consumers can reduce

The lack of knowledge on digital financial products and related issues is another form of information asymmetry. Challenges and complexities in financial interfaces. Highlighting financial literacy that can be understood is especially important to bridge digital financial inclusion gaps by city

8. CONCLUSION

The results of the study suggest that trust is still an important element of engagement in the digital financial sphere ecosystems. As technology has come of age in financial services, there are still notable gaps in trust impede consumers' participation, especially for those with limited cognitive and financial resources. Thus, the challenges of digital finance go beyond just technological barriers to include educational and informational problems. Furthermore, the research financial landscapes and make well-considered decisions. It highlights the importance of financial literacy and cognitive ease in assisting users with making informed choices and decisions when dealing with financial matters. Build trust for digital financial services, navigate uncertainty and evaluate risks. By exploring the study contributes to the understanding of the mediating role of these factors in the urban population of Chennai which is quite diverse. The knowledge of inclusive access to digital finance. Bridging the trust gap however, requires technological advances, as well as continuous financial education work, Make financial processes easier; make digital financial systems accessible, transparent and; reliable by all members of the society.

Future Research Directions

This study may be extended with further studies on other psychological and institutional factors (including digital self-efficacy, perceptions of fairness, and regulatory trust), may have an impact on consumer interaction with fintech services. Moreover, future studies should be done in Metropolitan and semi-urban areas across India. This could offer rich learning opportunities for the use of English to support sustainable development. The creation of trust and the progress of digital progress is affected by demographical changes within human financial inclusion.

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