



The Role of Community Engagement, Social Support Programs, and Digital Advocacy in Enhancing Social Welfare Outcomes: The Mediating Effect of Social Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the role of community engagement, social support programs, and digital advocacy in enhancing social welfare outcomes, with social empowerment examined as a mediating variable. The primary purpose of the research is to explore how participatory practices, supportive interventions, and digital platforms collectively contribute to improving social welfare, particularly within the socio-economic context of Pakistan. Using a quantitative research design, data was collected through a structured survey questionnaire administered to a sample of 400 respondents from various regions of Pakistan. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed for data analysis to assess the measurement and structural models. The findings reveal that community engagement, social support programs, and digital advocacy each have significant positive effects on social empowerment. Additionally, social empowerment demonstrates a strong and positive impact on social welfare outcomes. The results highlight the importance of fostering empowerment through participatory and supportive initiatives to achieve sustainable welfare improvements. This study offers theoretical contributions by validating the mediating role of empowerment and provides practical implications for policymakers and development practitioners seeking to enhance social welfare outcomes in developing countries.

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1.0 Introduction

In the last few years, the discourse in social welfare has undergone paradigm shift from the traditional focus on the distribution of the essential service to also incorporate active involvement and empowerment of marginalized population in processes that affect their life. A social welfare mechanism, traditionally has always been a top down mechanism that focused on meeting basic needs through institution interventions (Herani & Pranandari, 2024). These approaches contained answers to the immediate material deficiencies, but for the most part neglected the elements of sustainable, inclusive development which provides for the individual's agency and community's resilience. New social development theory perspectives agree with the idea of an integrated approach where individuals and communities are the focal points for welfare efforts, and empowerment is a process and also an outcome. In this context in evolution, community engagement and social support programs, as well as digital advocacy are key mechanisms to promote social welfare outcomes and complement social inclusion and equity goals (Selvakumar, 2025).

Community engagement is a process through a community of individuals and groups takes part actively in the decision-making processes, resource allocation and collective action initiatives in the communities. The public information hearing is widely known as a pillar of participatory governance and as a tool to enable trust, collaboration and shared responsibility between citizens and institutions. They cite genuine community engagement as one of the critical tools used for capacity building, creation of social capital and for inclusive development, by ensuring that the voices of marginalized populations are heard and integrated into policy frameworks (Shuhaimi, Md Noor, Wan Jaafar, & Mohd Khir, 2025). However, social support programs refer to formal and informal initiatives that aim at offering emotional, informational and material assistance to those who need it. They are key in buffering against socio economic vulnerabilities and positive in enhancing psychological well-being particularly on disadvantaged populations. Digital advocacy represents the strategic use of digital platforms in advancing digital public communication in the context of information and communication technologies (ICTs) support, including awareness raising, mobilizing support, and generating decision on Social Justice policy. A new kid on the block in the world of social welfare, digital advocacy enlarges the scope and significance of conventional advocacy activities, in addition to creating novel forms of the collective action while raising the voices of dominated groups (Tour & Creely, 2025).

Contemporary social welfare outcomes improvement strategies are based on the interrelationship of these three constructs: community engagement, social support program and digital advocacy. Although each variable is operationally different and has a different scope, each one plays a role in the synergistic process of social empowerment. This carries out with the dynamic interplay between the supply of social power and the demand for social empowerment where social empowerment, defined as an increase in individuals' and communities' capacity to make choices and to translate the choices into the desired actions and outcomes, plays as a critical mediating variable (Thackeray & Hunter, 2010). Empowerment is derived from

community engagement through active participation in decision making process and creating a sense of ownership towards the local initiatives that take place in a community. Social support programmed enable individuals by counteracting the adverse impacts of social and economic inequalities and by furnishing the individuals with required resources and emotional strength to pursue individual and collective aspirations. Digital advocacy facilitates participation of the marginalized populations, democratize information and communication channels to raise their concerns, demand accountability and participation in the shaping of policy agendas (Kadhim, Shakir, Majeed, Majdi, & Harun, 2024).

These relationships are theoretically informed by empowerment theory, social capital theory and participatory development paradigm. Empowerment theory suggests that the people and communities that hold the power resources, skills, and openings are able to act to make choices over their lives and have an effect on the sway constructions. Social capital theory makes the point that networks, trust and reciprocity are a means of collective action and greater social cohesion. The participatory development paradigm which calls for involvement of marginalized populations in development processes enables the participation of these groups in the decision-making processes such that sustainable and equitable development outcomes would be achieved through active participation and local ownership. Each of these theoretical frameworks provides a complete perspective from which to look at the intricate connections in between neighborhood engagement, social assistance programs, electronic advocacy, and social empowerment, and exactly how these play into more effective social advantages outcomes (Y. Kim & Meganck, 2025).

However, these various interrelated mechanisms have been increasingly recognized, but they have not been well examined through empirical research that systematically presents the combined effects of them on social welfare outcome mediated by social empowerment. A key point that has not been sufficiently addressed in existing studies is that social welfare strategies are complex, multi-dimensional processes and isolated interventions may be of little use in the sustainable mobilization of communities (Herlina, Maryani, & Siswantini, 2024). On the other hand, the potential of digital advocacy to transform, boost, and even, perhaps, create social support and community engagement programs that promote social empowerment and improve welfare outcomes is not as much researched, especially in low and middle regions where digital boundaries exist. It is lacking in integrative frameworks that show the interplay of these constructs for policymakers, practitioners and scholars to come up with evidence-based interventions in addressing the concerns of marginalized populations (Shah & Shah, 2024).

This critical gap in the literature provides the problem addressed in the research of this study. In particular, there is an immediate need to understand how community engagement, social support programs and digital advocacy impact social welfare outcomes and how the mechanism of social empowerment mediates the process. Without an understanding of such a synergy, social welfare interventions will likely continue to be fragmented and fall short of their synergistic effects by adopting empowerment driven approaches. Such a gap is filled by this study through the development and empirical testing of a comprehensive model that describes

the relationships among these variables as well as their collective impact on social welfare outcomes. It does so, however, with the aim of offering a nuanced view into the exact mechanisms by which empowerment acts as a mediator of the effects of participatory and support driven interventions on the well-being of marginalized populations (d'Haenens & Joris, 2025).

This study is significant since it could enhance the theoretical and practical knowledge in the social welfare field. By linking the literature on empowerment, social capital and participatory development, the study contributes to the body of literature on social welfare on a theoretical level through the development of an integrated framework that explains the role of community participation, social support programs and digital advocacy in generating social welfare. The study also positions social empowerment as a mediating variable through which agency and capacity building must go for sustainable welfare outcomes thus bridging gaps in the current theoretical models that tend to ignore these important variables (Koesnadi, Sekarningrum, Nurdin, & Sumadinata, 2025). Theoretically, the study contributes to efforts aiming at distinguishing the beneficial side of participation within the roles of management and monitoring, and it extends the literature on education integrity to account for user roles. Practically, the study offers important elucidations for policymakers, development practitioners, and social welfare organizations in crafting more efficacious, inclusive, and participatory interventions. Through a demonstration of the synergies between engagement, support, and advocacy, the study provides a formula for utilization of existing resources and capacities for the greatest effect of social welfare efforts (DeHoff, Staten, Rodgers, & Denne, 2016).

Additionally, the contemporary digital era in which the study was conducted, seeing the proliferation of ICTs, also makes the study relevant in the contemporary digital era. Digital advocacy offers unparalleled possibilities for marginal subjectivism to sound and for the advocacy of social justice causes to resonate no better; but it also raises critical questions of access and inclusivity as concerns to do with digital exclusion. The study addresses such challenges by examining the role of digital advocacy within the social welfare interventions at large and suggests strategies for using digital tools for the amplification of social empowerment and inclusion instead of impeding it. This is especially valid in areas where the digital divides are extremely present and the advantages of technological advancements are disproportionately and in fact, magnifying the already existing gaps (Qizam, Berakon, & Ali, 2025).

The study also contributes both theoretically and practically and is timely and related given the prevailing global challenges that have worsened social vulnerabilities and inequalities. For example, the COVID 19 pandemic highlighted the need for a strong social support system, robust community involvement and creative approaches of advocacy to adequately respond to the multifaceted needs of the affected people. In addition, it has also pointed out the significance of digital platforms in diffusing information, delivering services, and conducting collective action during the time of crisis. By so locating the analysis, the study therefore highlights the need to adopt integrated empowerment driven approaches to social welfare that are resilient and adaptable to the present and future global challenges.

In addition to these, this study attempts to play its part toward developing inclusive and sustainable social welfare systems that uphold the agency, dignity, and power of those who are relegated to the margins. The first goal of the study is to advance an integrated understanding of the interrelationships among communities' engagement, social support programs, digital advocacy, and social empowerment in order to improve policy and practice in social development, especially in terms of reducing inequalities. This research is expected to provide insights that are useful for a broad audience comprising academics, policymakers, practitioners and civil society organizations working towards social justice and improvement of the living standards of the disadvantaged communities around the globe.

2.0 Literature Review

The theoretical foundation for the factors that enhance social welfare outcomes needs to be robust, and able to incorporate different meanings of empowerment theory, social capital theory, and participatory development frameworks. According to empowerment theory, individuals and communities are enabled to exercise control over decisions that affect their lives only when they have both the agency and the capacity for this (Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment is a process in which the internal dimensions, for instance, development of critical consciousness and self-efficacy, are transformed into the external dimensions of resource access and participation in the structures of decision making (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). This perspective is complemented by social capital theory which focuses on the importance of social networks, trust or norms of reciprocity in making collective action and give people access to resources that augment well-being (Putnam 2000). These ideas are built on further by the participatory development theory which urges marginalized groups to be directly involved in development initiatives in terms of design, implementation and evaluation (Chambers, 1994). Together these theoretical approaches imply that community engagement, social support programmed, and digital advocacy are all ways in which individuals and groups might become empowered in order to better their social welfare outcomes. Besides, these frameworks demonstrate how empowerment constitutes a mediating factor of importance as well as how the interrelationship of participation, support and advocacy drives the process of social inclusion and equitable development (Nassar, Hossain, Naár, & Vasa, 2025).

The empirical studies on community engagement show that it can lead to socially favorable outcomes via mechanisms of including people in social welfare, collective action, and participatory governance. Similarly, Head (2007) and Taylor (2011) suggest that appropriate policies and service design for welfare are more responsive and equitable when the community participates meaningfully in policy and service design. More recent research echoes these findings, as for example the work of Mansuri and Rao (2013), who conducted a meta-analysis of community driven development programs and concluded that the real involvement of the community in these programs build trust, increases accountability and enhances outputs in the provision of services. Furthermore, Gaeta and Barrett (2012) discussed a variety of benefits of participatory governance projects that include increased state responsiveness and social cohesion, especially in situations of social inequalities. Although Jessop (2007), Cornwall (2008) and

Cooke & Kothari (2001) all make such warnings, either pointing to situations in which participatory processes are hijacked by elites or where marginalized groups remain unempowered even where they are invited to participate. Although these critiques are valid, the general empirical evidence is coherent with the claim that well designed and inclusive community engagement strategies positively impact social welfare by boosting local ownership and accountability (Narayan, 2002).

Also, there is a wealth of research demonstrating that the social support programs have a sophisticated role in lessening social and economic vulnerability and enhancing wellbeing outcomes. Social support is defined as the supply of emotional, informational, and instrumental resources to individuals intended to facilitate their ability to cope with the life challenges (House, 1981). According to empirical studies, social support programs (formal intervention of state or informal community networks) help to empower people psychologically, economically and socially (Lin, 1999; Karachi & Berkman, 2001). For instance, Fishbein and Shady (2009) have shown in their study on conditional cash transfer programs in Latin America that the social support mechanisms have effects on decreasing poverty and improving health and education outcomes among the population who are at the margins. Furthermore, the existence of strong social support networks has been linked to increased resilience as well as decreased vulnerability to the social risks (Adatom & Rhodiot, 2010). However, moving beyond a short-term poverty alleviation towards social support, Devereux and Abates Wheeler (2004) posit that social support programs are expected to focus on the structural drivers of inequality for sustainable social protection. The support line of argument supports the need to link support programmed with empowerment-oriented strategies toward achieving long term improved social welfare.

Digital advocacy has been gaining popularity in recent years, as it is becoming an important way of 'advocating' social welfare, especially when digital connectivity is widespread and more and more social media platforms are being utilized. Strategic use of digital tools and platforms to mobilize base support and raise awareness on a given social justice issue and influencing policy on that issue counts as digital advocacy (Guo & Saxton, 2014). Earl and Import (2011: 47) note that digital advocacy is capable of amplifying voices of the marginalized as well as furthering collective action and increasing access to information (Tufekci, 2017: 59). Joyce (2010) and Sandoval-Almanza and Gil-Garcia (2014) study how digital advocacy campaigns achieved policy reforms and forced government accountability related to anti-corruption, social welfare reform, and other issues. However, digital divide and the fear that those living at the margins will be left out of the gates to the digital spaces because of lack of technological literacy and access to available technology (Van Dijk, 2006; War Schauer, 2004) are noted as well. However, digital advocacy is a very useful tool for increasing social empowerment because its platforms often allow marginalized communities to express their issues and take part in developing social policies.

Both theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence provide support to the mediating role of social empowerment between community engagement, social support programs, digital

advocacy, and social welfare outcomes. Participatory and supportive interventions that enhance well-being and social inclusion are increasingly being viewed as dependent on empowerment mechanisms (Alsop & Henson, 2005). Kabeer (1999) and Ibrahim and Alike (2007) studies show that empowerment increases the capacity of individuals to have access to resources, be able to participate in decision making processes and challenge power disparities which yields positive social and economic outcomes (Baines, Charlesworth, Turner, & O’neill, 2014). In community driven development research, the idea of empowerment is found to be both a means and an end to achieving social welfare (Narayan, 2005; Wong, 2012). For example, empirical evaluation of empowerment-oriented interventions in health, education and livelihoods sector shows that there are large improvements in outcomes when the beneficiaries are involved in the design and implementation of the programmed (World Bank 2013). Just like they have had found initiatives digital in advocacy that prioritize manipulation boosting knowledge digital and provoking habit in the use of the internet to enhance participation in one’s community (Bennett & Cederberg, 2012).

Now, although there is growing body of research on community engagement, for social support programs, and digital advocacy, this is a gap in the literature that requires further investigation. Most of the existing empirical work studies these variables in an isolated manner and ignores the possibility of synergistic effects when the technology is used in a holistic manner. Partnering with other groups may create the tools to help individuals meet their basic needs in order to bring them into the process (Teng, 2024). However, most studies on community engagement focus on participatory governance but fail to pay attention to the role that social support programs play in meeting immediate needs that make participation possible (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Research on digital advocacy also often neglects downward effects of mobilization by not taking into careful consideration of roles built offline community engagement or support structures to maintain advocacy work (Tufekci, 2017). There are few studies, moreover, that examine the mediating effects of social empowerment as a factor in the connection of these variables to social welfare outcomes, especially in low- and middle-income countries that are characterized by structural inequalities and low levels of digitalization (Van Dijk, 2006; Heels, 2017).

This study attempts to develop and empirically examine a comprehensive framework to analyze these interrelationships among community engagement, social support programs and digital advocacy to promote social welfare outcomes with social empowerment as a mediator. The study based on the theoretical bases of empowerment theory, social capital theory, and participatory development hypothesizes that integration of these three factors synergistically improves outcomes of social welfare through the process of empowerment. Based on the proposed model, community engagement is theorized as a driver of participatory decision making and social cohesion, social support programmed as providers of the necessary means and security of participation, and digital advocacy as a multiplier of voice of the marginalized and an enabler of collective action.

3.0 Methodology

Using as a quantitative research design, the present study is an empirical study aiming to explore the impact of community engagement, social support programs, and digital advocacy towards the improvement of the social welfare outcome by the mediation of the social empowerment. This type of study is well suited to a quantitative approach because it allows the measurement of relationships between variables, the testing of hypotheses through statistical analysis and thus facilitates objectivity, reliability and generalizability of findings. The study is based on the positivist research philosophy which deals more with the observable and measurable facts and not the subjective interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Such a philosophical stance allows the use of structured methodologies in testing theories and validating proposed hypotheses through statistical techniques. The study is aimed at advancing existing theoretical frameworks through their empirically verification of the relationships proposed in the literature using a deductive approach.

For this research, the population is the people living in Pakistan who either benefit directly from the social welfare programs, take part in the community engagement activities, or are involved in digital advocacy works. This study is thus relevant in the context of Pakistan given its challenging socio-economic environment with high poverty, social inequality, and growing digital landscape with opportunities and challenges for an inclusive development (Nabi & Hamid, 2019). As the country's socio-political environment is diverse and community organization and digital literacy levels vary, it is an appropriate setting for the examination of how community engagement, social support and digital advocacy interact with one another and as how social empowerment mediates welfare outcomes.

This study employs purposive sampling which focused on individuals who have knowledge or are involved in the relevant community engagement, social support, and digital advocacy areas. In this case, purposive sampling is appropriate since it enables the selection of respondents who are either directly experienced or beneficiaries of the phenomenon under study, increasing the relevance and validity of data collected (Eitan et al., 2016). It studies a sample from four major provinces of Pakistan, namely Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan in order to capture geographic and socio-cultural diversity. Participants were chosen within the regions so as to be representative of urban, semi urban and rural areas. According to guidelines suggested by Hair et al. (2010), a total sample size of 400 respondents was determined since sample size should be at least 10 times the number of indicators used in such structural equation model (Thackeray & Hunter).

A structured survey questionnaire was prepared for data collection for this study and it is specifically designed for this study and the existing validated measurement scales from the literature were adapted. The questionnaire was sectioned to measure each of the core constructs of the study; such as community engagement, social support programs, digital advocacy, social empowerment and finally social welfare outcomes. All items were adapted from already established scales that were culturally appropriate and relevant for the respondents from the Pakistan socio cultural context. The measurement of community engagement involved a set of

indicators relating to participation in decision making processes, relationship of trust with local institutions and involvement in community initiatives (From Taylor, 2011). Formal welfare services, informal support networks and perceived adequacy of support were assessed as measures of social support programs (House, 1981; Lin, 1999). Items of digital advocacy included digital literacy, digital participation in online campaigns, and the use of social media in social justice topics (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Tufekci, 2017). Social empowerment was measured by self-efficacy, decision-making power and perception of agency (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000

To meet the respondents from different linguistic background, the questionnaire was administered in both English and Urdu. A pilot test of the instrument with 50 respondents was done before the full-scale survey to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument. Minor modifications in wording to some items was made based on feedback from the pilot study for the purpose of clarity and comprehension. Data collection was for a period of three months during which time, trained enumerators were on hand to assist the respondents with data collection to ensure completeness and accuracy of responses. Guarantees were made regarding anonymity and confidentiality of all the participants for them to provide honest and unbiased answers.

In order to analyze the data collected through the survey questionnaire, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used as a comprehensive statistical technique that allows one to examine several multiple relationships between observed and latent variables (Hair et al., 2010). This was done as SEM allows for testing of complex theoretical models while taking into account both direct and indirect relationships among variables and in particular, the mediating role of social empowerment. Preliminary analyses of the data involved descriptive statistics, reliability assessment (using Cronbach's alpha), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ascertain the validity of the measurement model and verification of statistical assumption. After the measurement model was validated, the structural model was tested to test the hypothesized relations amongst community engagement, social support programs, digital advocacy, social empowerment and social welfare outcomes. The goodness of fit of the model was evaluated using the model fit indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), as well as the Chi-square/df. Furthermore, mediation analysis was performed to investigate the indirect effects of the independent variables on the social welfare outcomes through social empowerment using bootstrapping technique to test for the significance of the mediation paths (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis (Outer Loadings, Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE)

Table 4.1 Reliability Analysis

Construct	Item Code	Outer Loading	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Community Engagement	CE1	0.78	0.853	0.895	0.682
	CE2	0.81			
	CE3	0.85			
Social Support Programs	SSP1	0.82	0.867	0.902	0.696
	SSP2	0.84			
	SSP3	0.79			
Digital Advocacy	DA1	0.80	0.875	0.910	0.716
	DA2	0.86			
	DA3	0.88			
Social Empowerment	SE1	0.79	0.860	0.899	0.688
	SE2	0.84			
	SE3	0.85			
Social Welfare Outcome	SWO1	0.83	0.882	0.916	0.734
	SWO2	0.89			
	SWO3	0.86			

The reliability analysis shows that all constructs meet the recommended thresholds for internal consistency and convergent validity. Cronbach’s Alpha values for all constructs exceed 0.70, indicating good internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). The Composite Reliability (CR) values are above the 0.70 threshold, confirming construct reliability.

4.2. Discriminant Validity (HTMT - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio)

Table 4.2 Discriminant Validity

Constructs	CE	SSP	DA	SE	SWO
Community Engagement	—	0.675	0.642	0.610	0.635
Social Support Programs		—	0.690	0.628	0.649
Digital Advocacy			—	0.652	0.678
Social Empowerment				—	0.705
Social Welfare Outcome					—

The HTMT values are all below the strict threshold of 0.85, indicating strong discriminant validity (Hensley et al., 2015). This suggests that the constructs are distinct and measure different concepts, satisfying the requirement for discriminant validity in PLS-SEM analysis.

4.3 Multicollinearity Assessment (VIF - Variance Inflation Factor)

Table 4.3 Multicollinearity Assessment

Construct	VIF Values
Community Engagement	2.135
Social Support Programs	2.021
Digital Advocacy	1.988
Social Empowerment	2.412

The VIF values for all constructs are below the threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in this model. This confirms that each construct provides unique information and does not exhibit redundancy with other constructs in the structural model.

4.4 Model Fit Indices (PLS-SEM Model Fitness)

Table 4.4 Model Fit Indices

Model Fit Criteria	Value	Recommended Threshold
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	0.053	< 0.08
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.912	> 0.90
Chi-Square / do	2.543	< 3.00
R-squared (Social Empowerment)	0.512	—
R-squared (Social Welfare Outcome)	0.639	—

The model demonstrates acceptable goodness of fit, with an SRMR value below 0.08, indicating a good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data (Hensley et al., 2016). The NFI is above 0.90, further confirming model adequacy. The Chi-square/do ratio is below 3, suggesting a reasonable model fit. The R-squared values for Social Empowerment (0.512) and Social Welfare Outcomes (0.639) indicate moderate to substantial explanatory power for the endogenous constructs.

4.5 Structural Model Results (Direct and Mediated Relationships)

Table 4.5 Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1: CE \rightarrow SE	0.355	5.413	0.000	Supported
H2: SSP \rightarrow SE	0.298	4.732	0.000	Supported
H3: DA \rightarrow SE	0.267	4.015	0.000	Supported
H4: SE \rightarrow SWO	0.573	8.129	0.000	Supported
H5: CE \rightarrow SE \rightarrow SWO (Mediated)	0.203	4.221	0.000	Supported
H6: SSP \rightarrow SE \rightarrow SWO (Mediated)	0.171	3.987	0.000	Supported
H7: DA \rightarrow SE \rightarrow SWO (Mediated)	0.153	3.614	0.000	Supported

All of hypothesized direct and mediated relationships are found to be statistically significant with p values less than 0.05 and t-values greater than the critical threshold of 1.96 for the 95% confidence level (Hair et al., 2019). The indirect effect of social empowerment on social welfare outcomes is very high (2.01) and positive; community engagement, social support programs, and digital advocacy have substantive positive effects on social empowerment. The mediation analyses validate that social empowerment mediates the relationships between each of the three exogenous constructs and each of the social welfare outcome variables. These results are consistent with the theoretical assertion that empowerment mechanisms are necessary to transform participatory and supportive programmers into better social welfare outcomes.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This study findings support that, in particular, community engagement, social support programs and digital advocacy can significantly improve social welfare outcomes, by means of a social empowerment mechanism. Analysis showed that community engagement has a positive impact on social empowerment and therefore illustrates why participatory practice and inclusive decision making are critical enablers of agency and control over one’s life (J. Kim, Park, & Park, 2025). These outcomes are in accordance with the empowerment theory by Zimmerman (2000), which postulates that active involvement in community initiatives leads to psychological empowerment, as well as enhances one’s capability to act on positive change in their socio-economic condition. In addition, the direct tie between community engagement and social empowerment can be backed up by earlier empirical results (Taylor, 2011; Homer & Beck, 2006), where it is clear that, by increasing participation and collaboration in a community, trust and social capital are key for collective prosper.

Findings on social support programs are also important and have a strong positive impact on social empowerment. Access to formal welfare services and informal support networks makes individuals feel more self-efficacious and secure and therefore, empowered. It is in line with Lin’s (1999) social capital theory that supportive relationships and access to resources are vital in enabling empowerment and enhancing social welfare outcomes (Dingle et al., 2025). This study extends on previous research by House (1981) and Narayan (2002) to show that in Pakistan,

where institutional support is usually fragmented, social support programs have an important role in allowing underserved communities access to vital services, to knowledge, and to build the resilience of the communities against socio economic vulnerabilities.

Social empowerment is also broached in terms of the role of digital advocacy as a driver of social empowerment. In this thesis the results show the use of digital platforms and online campaigns makes successful participation in social justice initiatives and policy dialogues possible for underserved populations and the result is being able to amplify the voices of marginalized populations (Ramasamy, Saravanan, Rangasamy, & Subramanian, 2025). This studies that argued that these digital technologies can democratize access and use of information, mobilize civic engagements, and collective actions. As internet penetration grows in Pakistan's emerging digital landscape, digital advocacy has become an important tool for bridging the gap between the people and the policy makers and enabling the people to ask for accountability and inclusive governance (Alanazi, Benlaria, & Alanazi, 2025).

A significant contribution of this study is the mediation of social empowerment in the relationship between community engagement, social support programs, digital advocacy and social welfare outcomes. In turn, the findings indicate that these factors individually have an effect on enhancement of welfare, but this effect is highly reinforced when individuals perceive themselves to be empowered change agents. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as the realization of particular ability of individuals to make strategic life choices in conditions under which they lacked such ability; this insight reflects this notion. In this way the study stretches the meaning of empowerment beyond simple development byproduct to a central mechanism for producing sustainable social welfare results (Gustafsson & Dannapfel, 2025).

From this study, community engagement, social support program, and digital advocacy together promote social empowerment that results in better social welfare outcome. The study shows that integrated and participatory approaches that assign a central role to empowerment as a key objective of social development policy and practices are necessary. The study thereby validates the mediating role of empowerment and how it interrelates with these factors to impact social welfare outcomes in the context of developing country like Pakistan that has a history of systemic inequality and resource constraint (Uluturk, Yilmaz Altuntas, & Hürmeriç, 2025).

Consequently, some recommendations follow. First, policymakers and development practitioners should design actions for community engagement that include marginalized populations as active participants in decision making so that, among other things, their needs may be addressed and their voices heard. Social capital and empowerment of the people can be augmented by programs that foster local leadership and community ownership (Purnell, 2025). Second, social support programs have to be extended to the vulnerable groups and become more accessible and they should encompass not only material support, but also building capacities and skills of the people in order to make them self-reliant. Third, digital plans always need to be accompanied by investments in digital infrastructure as well as digital literacy of the part of the public to reap full benefits of digital platforms. Bridging the digital divide will bring more citizens to it, involvement in policy discussions, and responsibility in holding decision makers

responsible (Shoukat, Elgammal, Khan, & Selem, 2025).

There are many implications of this study. Empirically, it helps to validate the mediating role of social empowerment in the practice of participatory practices, support programs and digital tools, and welfare outcomes relationship. This emphasizes empowerment as a process of empowerment and social change within a context. Theoretically, the study could be used to understand the determinants of child labor and motivates future exploration of possible endogeneity (Salsman et al., 2025). Practically, the study can point out to policymakers, NGO's and social welfare organizations in Pakistan and similar socio-economic context as to what can be done for the prevention and elimination of child labor in developing countries. The study suggests that empowering the users of welfare programs and advocacy initiatives will make these activities more effective, and that this empowerment must be integrated with top down support structures. Empowerment should be embedded as a key objective in future social welfare programs so that the beneficiaries are not passive recipients of the program but active participants in their own development.

Consequently, this paper demonstrates how social welfare outcomes can be promoted through the mediating role of social empowerment which has a critical interplay between community engagement, social support programs, and digital advocacy. The importance of multi sectoral collaboration in inclusive and participatory development is highlighted to ensure that empowerment is both the means and the end of social welfare interventions.

Arshed Ali: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Asma Seemi Malik: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Muhammad Usman: Methodology and Discussion

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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