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Professional Skepticism under scrutiny: The Mediating Effects of Felt Accountability and Judgment Accuracy on Oversight Effectiveness
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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how the multidimensional construct of professional skepticism influences oversight effectiveness among accountants and auditors in an emerging economy, focusing on the mediating roles of felt accountability and judgment accuracy.

Design/methodology/approach: Grounded in Tetlock's Social Contingency Model of Accountability and Hurr's trait-based framework, professional skepticism is conceptualized as a second-order construct with three dimensions: Critical Questioning, Proactive Inquiry, and Resilient Independence. The dataset was collected through a survey from 386 practicing accountants/auditors and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to test direct effects and parallel mediation pathways.

Findings: All three skepticism dimensions positively and significantly predict felt accountability and judgment accuracy. Felt accountability strongly drives oversight effectiveness, while judgment accuracy shows a positive but non-significant direct effect. Partial mediation is supported for both pathways, with felt accountability transmitting larger indirect effects than judgment accuracy, highlighting the primacy of motivational mechanisms in weak institutional contexts.

Originality/value: This research extends behavioral accounting/auditing literature by validating a parsimonious three-dimensional skepticism model in an emerging-market setting and elucidating dual mediation mechanisms under Tetlock's accountability framework. It addresses a gap in mechanism-focused studies beyond developed economies.

Implications: Theoretically, it advances understanding of how skeptical traits operate indirectly through motivational (felt accountability) and cognitive (judgment accuracy) pathways in resource-constrained

environments. Practically, firms and regulators should prioritize interventions that strengthen internalized accountability perceptions, such as structured reviews and consequence communication, to enhance oversight quality amid institutional and cultural challenges.

1. Introduction

In the era of ever-increasing financial complexity, systemic interconnected risks, robust regulatory inspections, and intensified accountability burdens, effective oversight has emerged as a dominant concern for organizations globally. Oversight effectiveness goes beyond reliance on formal governance structures, compliance protocols, or regulatory mandates; it hinges on the ability of assurance professionals, including accountants, internal controllers, auditors, and risk overseers, to exercise professional judgment (Hurt et al., 2013). A significant empirical analysis specifies that oversight disasters frequently stem not from incompetent formal controls, but from lapses in professional skepticism, imperfect judgment processes, and diminished perceptions of accountability that erode control efficacy (Brazel et al., 2025).

Professional skepticism is an important part of accounting, assurance standards, and auditing, defined as an attitude that encompasses a questioning mind and a critical evaluation of evidence, along with fundamental analytical procedures (Kelly & Larres, 2025). Professional skepticism enables professionals to challenge assertions, expose manipulations, detect material misstatements and financial fraud, and uphold the reliability of financial reporting. Regardless of critical prominence, steady implementation remains elusive in routine practice. Research in behavioral accounting and auditing steadily validates that professional skepticism diverges due to individual-level traits, external demands, situational pressures, organizational frameworks, and cutting-edge technological influences (Brazel et al., 2025). Such discrepancies and inconsistencies are intensified in emerging markets (Dickey et al., 2022), where institutional voids, regulatory inconsistencies, unpredictable enforcement, cultural conformity norms, client pressures, and resource restrictions constrain rigorous skepticism (Opiso et al., 2023).

The prevailing literature has advanced beyond unidimensional views of professional skepticism. Based on the trait-based scale by Hurt (2010), and consequent repetitions, the present research theorizes professional skepticism as a multidimensional, second-order construct with three first-order dimensions: Critical Questioning (questioning mind + suspension of judgment), Proactive Inquiry (search for knowledge + interpersonal understanding), and Resilient Independence (autonomy + self-confidence). The present framework and professional skepticism structure propose a novel lens for investigating how professional skepticism elements function through distinct psychological and cognitive pathways to influence outcomes (Hardies et al., 2024).

Existing research primarily connects professional skepticism directly to judgments or outcomes, for instance, transaction monitoring, risk detection, fraud recognition, evidence assessment, audit quality, or, in remote settings, inadequate attention has been allocated to the transitional procedures enlightening how professional skepticism dimensions lead strategic directions along with superior oversight (Ahmad Tarmizi et al., 2023), demonstrating a shortcoming and serious deficiency: direct-effect models overlook motivational like accountability perceptions and cognitive like judgment precision pathways that mediate the skepticism–oversight relationship, primarily in emerging market frameworks where regulatory scrutiny and external accountability is unpredictable (Rodgers et al., 2017).

Regardless of pleas for mechanism-focused research beyond developed economies, like emphasis on embedding skepticism and rewarding skepticism (Brazel et al., 2025), limited research examines twofold mediation pathways in emerging economies, where institutional voids intensify reliance on internal drivers like felt accountability and judgment accuracy (Opiso et al., 2023). The present research seeks to

answer the question: How do the dimensions of professional skepticism (Critical Questioning, Proactive Inquiry, and Resilient Independence) influence oversight effectiveness through the dual mediating mechanisms of felt accountability and judgment accuracy in an emerging economy context? Based on the groundwork, the research empirically investigates the direct effects of the three skepticism dimensions on felt accountability and judgment accuracy. Furthermore, it examines felt accountability and judgment accuracy as dual (parallel) mediators linking skepticism dimensions to oversight effectiveness. Specifically, the study offers theoretical extensions to trait-based skepticism models and operational recommendations for augmenting oversight in resource-deficient frameworks (Qaiser & Hassan, 2025).

As illustrated in the conceptual model, the three core professional skepticism dimensions are hypothesized to positively affect felt accountability and judgment accuracy (Nelson, 2009), as they are evidence-based, unbiased evaluations resisting biases (Bonner, 1999). These constructs, being mediators, in turn, heighten oversight effectiveness, incorporating vigorous monitoring, risk evaluation, supervisory obstacles, and reliable reporting associated with governance and overall perspectives of enterprise risk management (Beasley et al., 2005). Moreover, the present research contributes theoretically by incorporating twofold mediation into multidimensional skepticism frameworks, empirically by examining in an emerging economy, and practically by informing firms, regulators, and training on strengthening accountability perceptions and judgment precision amid institutional challenges.

2. Literature Review

The present study blends prevailing literature on professional skepticism as a multidimensional construct, directs Tetlock's Social Contingency Model of Accountability (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999) as the fundamental theoretical underpinning, and connects the three core dimensions, critical questioning, proactive inquiry, and resilient independence, to felt accountability and judgment accuracy as twofold mediators of their effects on oversight effectiveness. Furthermore, prominence is employed on behavioral advancements in accounting and auditing, encompassing direct imitations, additions to accountability experiments, and emerging-economy evidence as presented by Hurtt (2010).

2.1 Professional Skepticism as a Multidimensional Construct

According to the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB), Professional skepticism is defined in auditing standards as an attitude incorporating a questioning mind and critical assessment of evidence. Hurtt (2010) established a trait-based, multidimensional measurement scale of professional skepticism with six characteristics: questioning mind, suspension of judgment, search for knowledge, interpersonal understanding, autonomy, and self-confidence. Contemporary imitations and additions strongly validate such a framework, representing differential impacts of dimensions on cognitive processing, intentions, and behaviors (Xu & Yang, 2025).

For example, the research work by Janssen et al. (2020) certifies the scale's legitimacy and reliability across auditor ranks, incorporating it with the Theory of Planned Behavior to present trait influences on skeptical intentions. Khan and Oczkowski (2021) segregate trait from state skepticism, emphasizing questioning mind and search for knowledge as strategic predictors in fraud-risk scenarios. Moreover, experiential research further illuminates that interventions intensify dimensions such as questioning the mind and the search for knowledge, enhancing visual attention, information depth, and judgment quality (Brazel et al., 2025).

In the context of emerging economies, institutional voids, cultural conformity norms, and enforcement gaps surge trait variability and challenge consistent application (Opiso et al., 2023). Resulting parsimonious pattern analysis (Hardies et al., 2024), the present research utilized a three-dimensional

second-order structure: Critical Questioning (questioning mind + suspension of judgment), Proactive Inquiry (search for knowledge + interpersonal understanding), and Resilient Independence (autonomy + self-confidence), as such a method preserves conceptual depth while facilitating empirical testing in resource-restricted contexts (Qaiser & Ahmed, 2025).

2.2 Tetlock's Social Contingency Model of Accountability as Theoretical Foundation

The Tetlock's Social Contingency Model of Accountability functions as the prime academic anchor (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), as it suggests that accountability, the expectancy of mitigating judgments to others, prompts adaptive cognitive strategies: conformity, defensiveness, or preemptive self-criticism (effortful, accuracy-oriented processing to produce defensible outcomes) (Qaiser, Parveen, Gull, & Khan, 2025). In the model of accounting and auditing, the model powerfully explains how accountability expectations drive deeper evidence processing, alternative consideration, and bias reduction (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023).

Contemporary research in behavioral accounting and auditing robustly supports Tetlock's predictions, showing that accountability augments cognitive effort, judgment quality, and defensibility (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023). In emerging economies, where external mechanisms like regulatory inspections and legal process are inconsistent, felt accountability emerges as a vital internal motivator, amplifying skeptical traits into diligent behavior despite weak enforcement (El Badlaoui et al., 2021), making the model ideal for connecting trait skepticism to motivational (felt accountability) and cognitive (judgment accuracy) pathways in the proposed dual-mediation framework.

2.3 Felt Accountability as a Motivational Mediator

Felt accountability denotes the subjective perception of answerability for judgments and actions, with potential consequences (Rodgers et al., 2017). According to Tetlock's model, it initiates preemptive self-criticism, fostering greater effort and defensibility. Skepticism dimensions are posited to heighten this perception: Critical Questioning raises concerns about defensibility through assumption-probing; Proactive Inquiry aligns with evidence-seeking for justification; Resilient Independence sustains accountability-oriented processing amid pressure.

Empirical support is robust: Accountability pressures bolster skeptical judgments/actions (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023), especially under review or social presence (Sorensen & Ortegren, 2021). In emerging economies, internal felt accountability mitigates external weaknesses (El Badlaoui et al., 2021). Hence, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Critical Questioning positively influences felt accountability.

H2: Proactive Inquiry positively influences felt accountability.

H3: Resilient Independence positively influences felt accountability.

2.4 Judgment Accuracy as a Cognitive Mediator

Judgment accuracy encompasses precise, unbiased, evidence-aligned evaluations under uncertainty (Nelson, 2009). Tetlock's accountability-driven effortful cognition links skeptical traits to accuracy: Critical Questioning promotes alternative generation; Proactive Inquiry ensures comprehensive integration; Resilient Independence counters biases/anchoring. The current evidence confirms that skepticism interventions improve accuracy via deeper processing/bias mitigation (Brazel et al., 2025). Accountability reduces overconfidence and estimation bias (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023). Hence, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: Critical Questioning positively influences judgment accuracy.

H5: Proactive Inquiry positively influences judgment accuracy.

H6: Resilient Independence positively influences judgment accuracy.

2.5 Mediators and Oversight Effectiveness

Oversight effectiveness involves robust risk monitoring, managerial challenge, and reliable reporting (Beasley et al., 2005). Felt accountability provides motivational discipline; judgment accuracy delivers cognitive precision. Recent links show both enhance audit quality/oversight (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023). Twofold mediation addresses mechanism gaps in skepticism outcome research (Gajewski et al., 2025). Hence, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H7: Felt accountability positively influences oversight effectiveness.

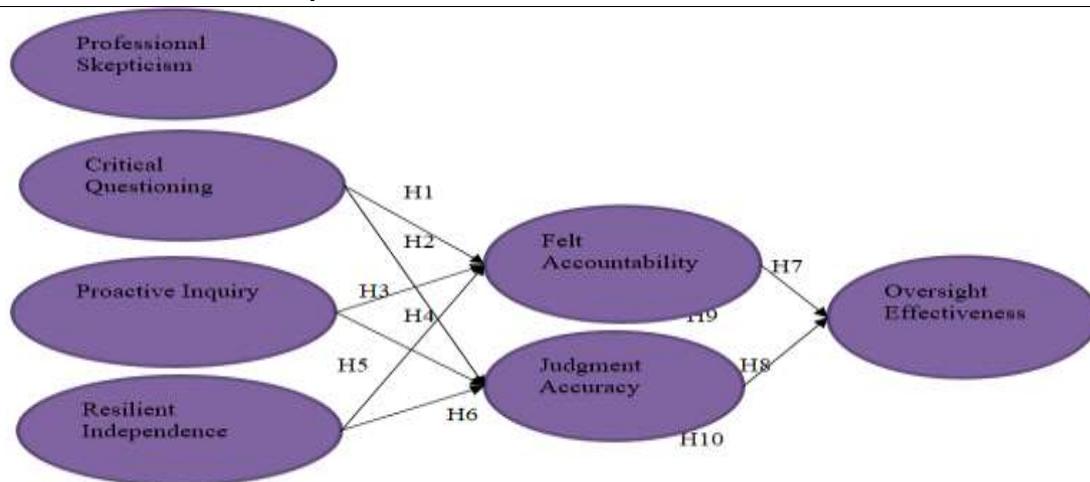
H8: Judgment accuracy positively influences oversight effectiveness.

H9: Felt accountability mediates the relationships between the three skepticism dimensions and oversight effectiveness.

H10: Judgment accuracy mediates the relationships between the three skepticism dimensions and oversight effectiveness.

The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Professional Skepticism Framework Model



Source: Author's own

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present research employs a quantitative research design, a cross-sectional survey to examine the relationships among the three dimensions of professional skepticism (Critical Questioning, Proactive Inquiry, and Resilient Independence), the mediating procedure of felt accountability and judgment accuracy, and eventually the concluding variable of oversight effectiveness (Qaiser, Parveen, Gull, & Adeel, 2025). Such a design and technique are highly suitable for examining theoretically quantified structural relationships, investigating parallel mediation effects, and capturing behavioral insights in natural professional settings (Qaiser, Abbas, & Ahmed, 2025). To evaluate the proposed framework, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is applied. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable because:

The model includes a second-order latent construct and multiple mediators,

The research is theory-extending rather than strictly confirmatory,

Survey data in emerging-economy contexts often show non-normality, and moderate sample sizes are expected.

Moreover, Variance-based SEM also prioritizes prediction and explained variance, aligning with contemporary behavioral accounting research (Hair et al., 2019).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population of the present study encompasses professional accountants and auditors practicing in the industrial sector, comprising individuals working in public accounting firms, corporate finance, internal audit, and risk management functions, as well as regulatory or oversight institutions. An appropriate framework of an emerging economy characterized by evolving regulatory enforcement, cultural influences on professional judgment, and institutional constraints that may shape the enactment of professional skepticism (Opiso et al., 2023). Since wide-ranging sampling frames of practicing accountants, professionals, and auditors are challenging to attain, the research utilizes a non-probability convenience sampling approach through specialized systems. The criteria of participation required a minimum of five years of professional experience, confirming respondents possessed adequate exposure to accounts, audit, and professional judgment, as well as oversight processes (Etikan et al., 2016).

The dataset for the present research was collected in two temporally separated phases (T1 & T2) to diminish the probable risk of common method bias. In phase 1 (T1), measures of the independent variables (dimensions of professional skepticism) and control variables were collected. After an approximate six-month time lag, Phase 2 (T2) captured the dependent variable (oversight effectiveness) and the mediating constructs (felt accountability and judgment accuracy) from the same respondents. Temporal separation between predictor and outcome measures is a widely recommended procedural remedy for minimizing common method bias in behavioral survey research (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, Harman's single-factor test revealed that the largest factor explained 37% of the total variance, substantially lower than the 50% cut-off commonly used to indicate problematic common method variance, thereby providing initial evidence that CMB does not materially affect the data (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Overall, around 461 questionnaires were distributed across the two phases, yielding an anticipated 410 matched responses, eventually 386 usable responses after screening for completeness and eligibility, representing an effective response rate of 84%. This sample size is satisfactory for PLS-SEM analysis, satisfying the recommended minimum 10:1 ratio of observations to the largest number of structural paths or indicators directed at a latent construct, as well as broader statistical power considerations (Qaiser et al., 2026). The achieved sample size is also consistent with response levels reported in recent emerging-economy behavioral auditing studies (Chang et al., 2019).

3.3 Measurement Instruments

For the present study, all constructs were measured using established, adapted multi-item scales on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree).

Professional Skepticism: The second-order construct. Adapted from Hurtt (2010), 21-items grouped into three first-order dimensions as per recent parsimonious approaches (Brazel et al., 2025), with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.87.

Critical Questioning: Encompassing items from questioning mind and suspension of judgment subscales; 8 items, with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.87.

Proactive Inquiry: Encompassing items from search for knowledge and interpersonal understanding; 6 items, with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.86.

Resilient Independence: Encompassing items from autonomy and self-confidence; 7 items with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.87.

Overall, all items were slightly adapted for contextual relevance.

Felt Accountability: Measured with Hall et al. (2017) 7-item scale, adapted for the accounting and auditing framework, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Judgment Accuracy: Adapted from Nelson (2009) and Bonner (1999) behavioral measures, with 9 items measuring perceived precision/unbiasedness, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91.

Oversight Effectiveness: Adapted from Beasley et al. (2005) enterprise risk management/oversight maturity items, using 9 items, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91.

3.4 Data Analysis

Furthermore, Table 1 presents demographic analysis, profiles 386 practicing professional, predominantly male (74%) with ICMAP (37%), ACCA (30%), and ICAP (33%) qualifications with key designations Managers/Accounts (72%), CFOs (21%), Controllers (7%), Directors (1%) having experience: 11-15 years (44%), 5-10 years (31%), 15+ years (25%). This mid-to-senior, male-dominated sample is well-suited for testing professional skepticism traits such as diligence and judgment accuracy in emerging markets.

Table 1 - Demographic Analysis (n=386)

| Variable | Category | N | % | Variable | Category | N | % |
|-------------|-------------------------|------|------|------------|------------|-----|------|
| Gender | Male | 285 | 74% | Education | ICAP | 126 | 33% |
| | Female | 101 | 26% | | ICMAP | 144 | 37% |
| | Total | 386 | 100% | | ACCA | 116 | 30% |
| Designation | Manager | | | Experience | Total | 386 | 100% |
| | Accounts | 278 | 72% | | 5-10 | 118 | 31% |
| | Chief Financial Officer | 80 | 21% | | 11-15 | 171 | 44% |
| | Management Controller | 26 | 7% | | 15 & Above | 97 | 25% |
| | Directors | 2 | 1% | | Total | 386 | 100% |
| Total | 386 | 100% | | | | | |

Source: Author’s own

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and inter-construct correlations for the study variables. Reliability is adequate, as composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2019), the correlation matrix indicated positive and theoretically consistent associations among constructs, with no correlation exceeding 0.70, thereby reducing concerns regarding multicollinearity (Tabachnick, 2007). Mutually, these results establish the adequacy of the measurement properties and provide a sound basis for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 2 - Descriptive Statistics, Correlation, and Reliability

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. CQ | 0.87 | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. PI | .434** | 0.86 | | | | | | | | |
| 3. RI | .463** | .434** | 0.87 | | | | | | | |
| 4. FA | .511** | .439** | .456** | 0.90 | | | | | | |
| 5. JA | .493** | .410** | .386** | .481** | 0.91 | | | | | |
| 6. OE | .367** | .326** | .372** | .472** | .325** | 0.91 | | | | |
| 7. Gender | .006 | -.069 | -.052 | -.022 | -.015 | -.018 | NA | | | |
| 8. Designation | .031 | .034 | .056 | -.028 | -.047 | -.031 | .036 | NA | | |
| 9. Education | -.042 | .021 | -.060 | .014 | -.068 | -.017 | .005 | -.012 | NA | |
| 10. Experience | .071 | .136** | .065 | .015 | .058 | .080 | .003 | .391** | -.131** | NA |
| 11. Mean | 3.3449 | 3.2202 | 3.1677 | 3.2413 | 3.2418 | 3.1903 | 1.2617 | 1.3575 | 1.7668 | 1.9663 |
| 12. SD | .89053 | .85332 | .85626 | .88167 | .86768 | .91567 | .44011 | .62970 | .60521 | .78717 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

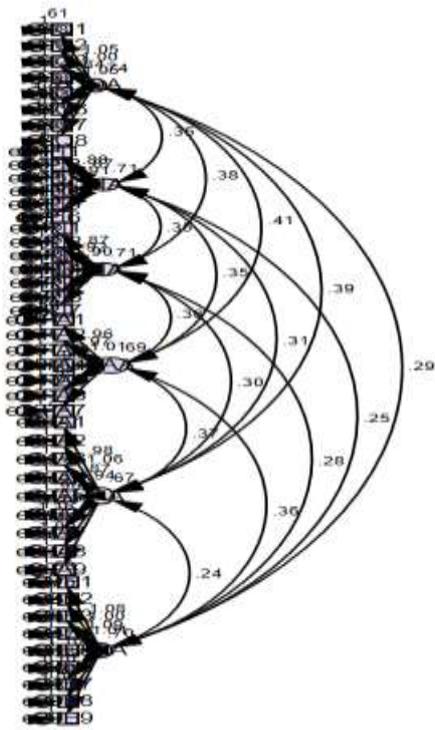
Table 3 and Figure 2 report the confirmatory factor analysis by using the AMOS program, supporting the measurement model for professional skepticism. The six-factor structured model demonstrated good model fit with index values (CMIN=1832.782, DF=974, CMIN/DF= 1.882, CFI=0.909, NFI=0.84, and RMSEA=0.048), meeting established fit criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999). On the other hand, the single-factor alternative exhibited substantially poorer fit with index values (CMIN=5734.455, DF=991, CMIN/DF=5.787, CFI=0.489, NFI=0.545, and RMSEA=0.121), indicating model misspecification and providing evidence for the multidimensional nature of professional skepticism. This result is consistent with recent empirical replications and supports the use of the multidimensional structure in subsequent structural analyses (Janssen et al., 2020).

Table 3 - Confirmatory Factor Analysis

| Variable | CMIN | DF | χ^2 | CFI | NFI | RMSEA |
|--------------------|----------|-----|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1-Factor Model | 5734.455 | 991 | 5.787 | 0.489 | 0.454 | 0.121 |
| 2-Factor Model | 5172.101 | 989 | 5.230 | 0.546 | 0.507 | 0.115 |
| 3-Factor Model | 4546.988 | 988 | 4.602 | 0.610 | 0.565 | 0.980 |
| 4-Factor Model | 3656.703 | 984 | 3.716 | 0.700 | 0.665 | 0.860 |
| 5-Factor Model | 2832.325 | 979 | 2.893 | 0.787 | 0.725 | 0.081 |
| 6-Factor Model (A) | 1832.782 | 974 | 1.882 | 0.909 | 0.840 | 0.048 |

Source: Author's own

Figure 2 - Confirmatory Factor Analysis



Source: Author’s own

Table 4 reports the measurement model results, including item loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and maximum shared variance (MSV) for all constructs. All factor loadings exceed the recommended 0.50 threshold, and AVE values are above 0.50, confirming adequate indicator reliability and convergent validity, while CR values indicate satisfactory internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 - Item loadings, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted

| Variables | Items | Loading | CR | AVE | MSV |
|----------------------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| Critical Questioning | CQ8 | 0.731 | 0.894 | 0.515 | 0.333 |
| | CQ7 | 0.715 | | | |
| | CQ6 | 0.745 | | | |
| | CQ5 | 0.671 | | | |
| | CQ4 | 0.754 | | | |
| | CQ3 | 0.637 | | | |
| | CQ2 | 0.72 | | | |
| | CQ1 | 0.757 | | | |
| Proactive Inquiry | PI6 | 0.685 | 0.871 | 0.530 | 0.253 |
| | PI5 | 0.792 | | | |
| | PI4 | 0.747 | | | |
| | PI3 | 0.719 | | | |
| | PI2 | 0.743 | | | |
| | PI1 | 0.674 | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Resilient Independence | RI7 | 0.7 | 0.880 | 0.512 | 0.268 |
| | RI6 | 0.695 | | | |
| | RI5 | 0.747 | | | |
| | RI4 | 0.673 | | | |
| | RI3 | 0.749 | | | |
| | RI2 | 0.693 | | | |
| | RI1 | 0.747 | | | |
| Felt Accountability | FA7 | 0.696 | 0.875 | 0.500 | 0.333 |
| | FA6 | 0.697 | | | |
| | FA5 | 0.679 | | | |
| | FA4 | 0.696 | | | |
| | FA3 | 0.721 | | | |
| | FA2 | 0.71 | | | |
| | FA1 | 0.749 | | | |
| Oversight Effectiveness | OE9 | 0.708 | 0.912 | 0.535 | 0.271 |
| | OE8 | 0.678 | | | |
| | OE7 | 0.76 | | | |
| | OE6 | 0.707 | | | |
| | OE5 | 0.771 | | | |
| | OE4 | 0.683 | | | |
| | OE3 | 0.78 | | | |
| | OE2 | 0.707 | | | |
| | OE1 | 0.78 | | | |
| Judgment Accuracy | JA9 | 0.728 | 0.914 | 0.540 | 0.303 |
| | JA8 | 0.731 | | | |
| | JA7 | 0.751 | | | |
| | JA6 | 0.752 | | | |
| | JA5 | 0.686 | | | |
| | JA4 | 0.727 | | | |
| | JA3 | 0.699 | | | |
| | JA2 | 0.793 | | | |
| | JA1 | 0.744 | | | |

Source: Author’s own

Table 5 reports that the Discriminant validity was also established, as the square roots of AVE diagonal elements exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations, satisfying the criterion by Fornell and Larcker (1981), and indicating that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs.

Table 5 - Discriminant validity

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. OE | 0.732 | | | | | |
| 2. CQ | 0.404 | 0.717 | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 3. PI | 0.357 | 0.484 | 0.728 | | | |
| 4. RI | 0.404 | 0.518 | 0.493 | 0.715 | | |
| 5. FA | 0.521 | 0.577 | 0.503 | 0.515 | 0.707 | |
| 6. JA | 0.354 | 0.550 | 0.454 | 0.436 | 0.538 | 0.735 |

Source: Author’s own

4. Results

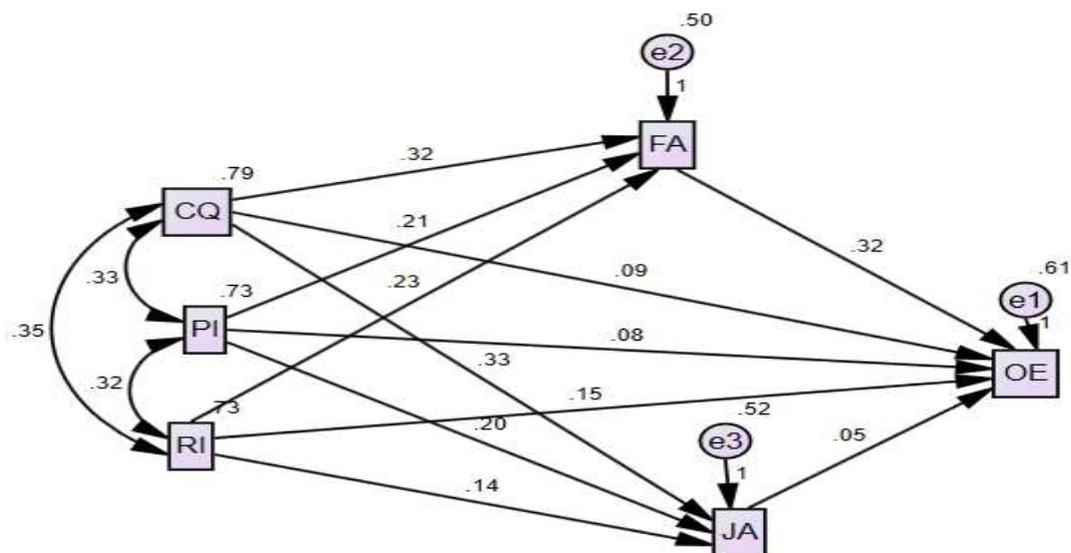
Table 6 and Figure 3 demonstrate the structural model results obtained through AMOS and SPSS, while the mediation effects were examined through bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples, offering robust estimates of indirect effects and their statistical significance (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Furthermore, the mediation analysis presented in Table 7.

Table 6 - Structural Model Results

| Hypotheses | Path | (β) | S.E | t-value | p-value | Decision |
|------------|------------|-------|-------|---------|---------|-----------|
| H1 | FA <--- CQ | 0.317 | 0.048 | 6.624 | *** | Supported |
| H2 | FA <--- PI | 0.212 | 0.049 | 4.311 | *** | Supported |
| H3 | FA <--- RI | 0.226 | 0.05 | 4.532 | *** | Supported |
| H4 | JA <--- CQ | 0.143 | 0.051 | 2.82 | 0.005 | Supported |
| H5 | JA <--- PI | 0.204 | 0.05 | 4.068 | *** | Supported |
| H6 | JA <--- RI | 0.331 | 0.049 | 6.786 | *** | Supported |
| H7 | OE <--- PO | 0.319 | 0.056 | 5.673 | *** | Supported |
| H8 | OE <--- IS | 0.092 | 0.059 | 1.577 | 0.115 | Supported |

Source: Author’s own

Figure 3 - Structural Model Results



Source: Author’s own

Table 7 – Mediation Analysis

| Path Relationship (H9 & H10) | Estimate | Lower (BCa) | Upper (BCa) | p | Mediation |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-----------|
| Via Judgment Accuracy (JA) | | | | | |
| RI → JA → OE (indirect) | 0.007 | 0.002 | 0.015 | .00 | Partial |
| PI → JA → OE (indirect) | 0.011 | 0.004 | 0.021 | .00 | Partial |
| CQ → JA → OE (indirect) | 0.017 | 0.007 | 0.031 | .00 | Partial |
| Via Felt Accountability (FA) | | | | | |
| RI → FA → OE (indirect) | 0.072 | 0.042 | 0.108 | .00 | Partial |
| PI → FA → OE (indirect) | 0.068 | 0.037 | 0.104 | .00 | Partial |
| CQ → FA → OE (indirect) | 0.101 | 0.059 | 0.151 | .00 | Partial |
| Total Indirect (JA + FA) | | | | | |
| RI → OE (total indirect) | 0.079 | 0.046 | 0.123 | .00 | Partial |
| PI → OE (total indirect) | 0.078 | 0.042 | 0.128 | .00 | Partial |
| CQ → OE (total indirect) | 0.119 | 0.066 | 0.185 | .00 | Partial |

Source: Author's own

The results offer robust empirical support for the motivational and cognitive pathways posited under Tetlock's Social Contingency Model of Accountability (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). All six direct paths from the dimensions of professional skepticism to the mediators are positive and statistically significant, thereby confirming H1 through H6.

Specifically, Critical Questioning exerts the strongest influence on felt accountability ($\beta = 0.317$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Resilient Independence ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.001$) and Proactive Inquiry ($\beta = 0.212$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that practicing accountants and auditors who routinely question assumptions (Opiso et al., 2023), and delay judgment experience a heightened sense of personal answerability for their decisions (Hardies et al., 2024), consistent with Tetlock's pre-emptive self-criticism mechanism (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999).

For judgment accuracy, Resilient Independence shows the largest effect ($\beta = 0.331$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Proactive Inquiry ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.001$) and Critical Questioning ($\beta = 0.143$, $p = 0.005$). Such a pattern suggests that self-confidence and autonomy in professional judgment most strongly reduce bias and enhance evidence-based precision (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023), aligning with behavioral auditing evidence linking skeptical traits to improved cognitive judgment quality (Brazel et al., 2025).

Regarding the direct effects on oversight effectiveness, felt accountability demonstrates a substantial positive influence ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H7. This underscores its role as a key internal motivational driver that translates skeptical traits into robust monitoring and risk-oversight practices, particularly in emerging-economy contexts where external regulatory accountability may be less

consistent (Pérez-Durán, 2024). In contrast, judgment accuracy shows a positive but statistically non-significant direct effect on oversight effectiveness ($\beta = 0.092$, $p = 0.115$), providing only directional support for H8 (Overman et al., 2021). The absence of statistical significance at the 0.05 level suggests that judgment accuracy may exert its primary influence indirectly through mediation, a pattern commonly observed in PLS-SEM mediation frameworks where motivational mechanisms dominate direct outcome relationships (Pérez-Durán, 2024).

Overall, these direct-effect results affirm the proposed conceptual framework and highlight felt accountability as the more dominant proximal determinant of oversight effectiveness in the emerging economy's accounting and auditing context, extending prior research by demonstrating how specific dimensions of professional skepticism differentially activate motivational and cognitive mechanisms that shape governance-related outcomes.

The mediation/indirect effects through judgment accuracy and felt accountability are all positive and highly significant, confirming partial mediation for each dimension of professional skepticism on oversight effectiveness, with bootstrap confidence intervals excluding zero (Hair et al., 2019). Moreover, felt accountability dominates as the mediator, carrying substantially larger indirect effects than judgment accuracy (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023), highlighting that motivational perceptions of answerability transmit stronger influence from skepticism traits to oversight outcomes than cognitive precision alone (Brazel et al., 2025). Therefore, the total indirect effects are moderate, positive, and significant, with the highest for Critical Questioning, affirming that professional skepticism enhances oversight effectiveness primarily via these dual pathways in the emerging-economy context, where internal accountability mechanisms compensate for institutional gaps (Opiso et al., 2023).

5. Discussion

The present research demonstrates that professional skepticism (Critical Questioning, Proactive Inquiry, and Resilient Independence) significantly enhances oversight effectiveness in an emerging economy's accounting and auditing context, primarily through partial mediation by felt accountability and judgment accuracy, with felt accountability transmitting the larger indirect effects. These findings strongly support Tetlock's Social Contingency Model of Accountability (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), which predicts that accountability expectations trigger preemptive self-criticism, effortful, accuracy-oriented processing that produces defensible judgments. The dominance of felt accountability as mediator confirms that motivational mechanisms (perceived answerability) outweigh purely cognitive ones in converting skeptical traits into effective oversight (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023), especially in emerging economies where external enforcement is inconsistent (Opiso et al., 2023).

The robust pathways align with Tetlock's framework: questioning heightens defensibility concerns (motivational activation), while autonomy and self-confidence enable bias-resistant processing (cognitive enabler) under accountability pressure (Brazel et al., 2025). The weaker direct link from judgment accuracy to oversight effectiveness further underscores that, per Tetlock, accountability-driven motivation is the primary bridge from traits to behavioral outcomes in real-world auditing settings (Pérez-Durán, 2024).

By validating a parsimonious three-dimensional structure of Hurtt (2010) trait model and demonstrating its indirect operation through dual Tetlock-inspired pathways in a non-Western emerging context, this research addresses key gaps in the literature (Opiso et al., 2023). Practically, firms and regulators should prioritize interventions that strengthen felt accountability, such as structured reviews, consequence communication, and ethical leadership, to amplify skepticism's impact on oversight quality amid institutional challenges. To sum up, the study confirms that professional skepticism bolsters oversight effectiveness in emerging economies mainly via felt accountability, the core motivational pathway

predicted by Tetlock's model, offering both theoretical extension and actionable guidance for improving audit quality in resource-constrained environments.

5.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the mechanisms through which professional skepticism influences oversight effectiveness among accountants and auditors in an emerging economy characterized by institutional and cultural challenges. Drawing on Tetlock's Social Contingency Model of Accountability (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999) and building on Hurtt (2010) multidimensional trait framework, the results confirm that the three dimensions of professional skepticism, Critical Questioning, Proactive Inquiry, and Resilient Independence enhance oversight effectiveness primarily through partial mediation by felt accountability and judgment accuracy, with felt accountability serving as the dominant pathway.

The empirical findings reveal that skeptical traits activate motivational (felt accountability) and cognitive (judgment accuracy) processes, as predicted by Tetlock's model, leading to stronger perceived answerability and more defensible judgments (Opiso et al., 2023). In a context where external regulatory enforcement is often inconsistent, internalized accountability perceptions prove more effective than cognitive precision alone in translating skepticism into robust monitoring, risk assessment, and reliable financial reporting. These results extend prior behavioral auditing research by validating a parsimonious three-dimensional structure of skepticism and demonstrating its indirect operation through dual psychological mechanisms in a non-Western, emerging-market setting (Brazel et al., 2025).

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study extends the trait model by Hurtt (2010) by validating a three-dimensional skepticism structure in an emerging economy's accounting and auditing context, revealing distinct motivational and cognitive pathways (Brazel et al., 2025). Integrating the Social Contingency Model demonstrates felt accountability's dominance as mediator (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), where preemptive defensibility outperforms cognitive precision in oversight effectiveness (Donnelly & Donnelly, 2023). These partial parallel mediations fill gaps in emerging-market research, showing internal accountability compensates for institutional weaknesses (Opiso et al., 2023).

5.3 Practical Implications

Firms should foster felt accountability via structured reviews, consequence awareness, and ethical leadership to amplify skepticism's impact (Gajewski et al., 2025). Regulators like the board of revenue and taxation can enhance programs with defensibility training to counter enforcement gaps in collectivist settings. Overall, prioritizing motivational drivers offers cost-effective oversight improvements in opaque emerging economies.

5.4 Limitation

Limitations include the cross-sectional design (limiting causality), self-reported measures (potential common method variance), and convenience sampling (restricted generalizability).

5.5 Prospect Research

Future work could test longitudinal effects, experimental manipulations of accountability, or additional moderators (e.g., time pressure, cultural collectivism).

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