Can Instagram Be Adopted as an Innovative Tool for Developing Self-Esteem? An Evaluation of Self-Esteem through Social Media User-Experience

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Abstract

Instagram has emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms. This study examined Instagram usage of young adults in an emerging market, South Africa. The research sought to establish the extent to which Instagram usage may affect self-esteem among young consumers in emerging markets. A conceptual model has been developed based on identified factors such as Instagram usage, emotional investment in Instagram, self-efficacy, sense of community and self-esteem. 361 active Instagram users were selected through convenience sampling and the feedback they provided was processed for insights. Descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used to investigate the interrelationships between the constructs. Implications for marketers include promoting adequate use of Instagram and making users aware of the potential threats of its excessive usage.

1. Introduction

Emerging markets are rapidly developing and have become contributors to the world economy (Beamond, Farndale & Härtel, 2016; Ciasullo, Montera, Cucari & Polese, 2020; Pillania, 2009). Instagram is the sixth most popular social network worldwide (Statista, 2020), and is currently the most prominent image-based network (Kocak Nasir & Turker, 2020). In 2020, Instagram reported more than 1 billion monthly active users worldwide and 500 million daily active users (Statista, 2020). Instagram is one of the most popular social media sites, with 5.51 million users on Instagram in South Africa (Statista, 2020). Instagram has received increasing attention from scholars and practitioners (Sanz-Blas Buzova & Miquel-Romero, 2019; Anderson & Jiang, 2018; De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). Due to its visual nature, it allows users (i.e. personal profiles, brands, influencers) to publish visual materials (e.g. photos, videos) that they can edit with tools available on the platform (Belanche, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020), people might feel encouraged to share only the most positive or favorable moments of their life (Kersebaum, 2020). Instagram users have been clustered as passionate, distant, and spectator users based on their usage motives (Kocak et al., 2020). Brands that target a younger generation are more likely to succeed on Instagram due to the demographic profile of its users with female consumers amongst the key users of the platform (Smith, 2014). The Generation Z consumer age group has been observed to show preference for adopting technology such as smart phones and social media (Thomas, 2011). 30% of global Instagram audiences are aged between 18 and 24 years and 3% aged between 25 and 34 years (Omnicore, 2020). As Instagram is used mainly by young people, brands targeted at the young generation have employed Instagram for marketing purposes such as branding (Na & Kim, 2019). It is therefore important to find out how the use of Instagram can influence how Instagram users specifically view themselves and how they wish others to view them.

Instagram and its use and users have recently attracted increasing scholarly attention. Posts have become selectively curated galleries of the best parts of one's life, with the number of followers becoming a representation of social capital (Phatiphong, 2020). Instagram is regarded as the natural platform for developing marketing actions with influencers, so nearly nine out of ten marketers prefer to use it in their influencer marketing campaigns (Belanche, Cenjor & Pérez-Rueda, 2019). Instagram is a major branding tool and enables users to showcase their best images and receive feedback from other users (Stokes & Price, 2017), emerging market consumers' Instagram usage and self-esteem, have not been explored in a comprehensive study. However, since Instagram is relatively new, very little research has been conducted on the specific effects that this form of social networking may have on users. The present study therefore, aims to examine how

Instagram usage is positively related to self-efficacy and sense of community, which in turn increases users' desire for self-esteem.

1.1 Research Areas to Be Addressed

This research will explore the adoption of technology, specifically within the context of social media use in marketing. The theoretical underpinning in which the present study is grounded in is provided in the following section.

2. Theoretical Grounding

The impression management theory was the basis for the present study. It is explored in the following section.

2.1 Impression Management Theory

The origins of impression management theory are attributed to Goffman (1959), who presents a dramaturgical perspective of social interactions, which views people as "actors" engaging in "performances" before "audiences" (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). The motivation for the relevance and eventual adoption of this theory for the study in question comes from its prior adoption by Al-Shatti, Ohana, Odou and Zaitouni (2022) who measured the effectiveness of using Instagram through the lens of the impression management theory. Impression management defines efforts by an individual to generate, maintain, protect, or otherwise alter an image held by a target audience (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley & Gilstrap, 2008; Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997). Impression management theory has been employed in the course of examining organizational behaviour phenomena in which image concerns may be noticeable (Bolino et al., 2008). For example, as highlighted by Bolino et al. (2008) scholars have adopted an impression management perspective to explore feedback seeking (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Morrison & Bies, 1991), organizational citizenship behaviour, Bolino, 1999; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000; Yun, Takeuchi, & Liu, 2007), and leadership and management (Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Greenberg, 1990). The literature review for the study is provided in the section that follows.

3. Literature Review

This section explores prior work done on the research topic in question. The literature review therefore provided the basis for the hypotheses that were developed and tested for purposes of this study. Literature on Instagram usage, emotional investment in Instagram, self-efficacy, sense of community and self-esteem is discussed. Instagram usage has been reviewed and analysed in numerous work (Zhao et al., 2023) who examined the platforms impact on young adult's mental health, (Walby & Wilkinson, 2023) who talked about the role played by social media police. Scholars such as Kang and Wei (2020) investigated what is known as "Finsta" which refers to fake Instagram accounts. Their study discussed how users are able to fully express themselves in a way that does not reveal their true identity. Instagram usage has played a role on how female body image is perceived (Baker, Ferszt & Breines, 2019) who conducted a study on female college students use of Instagram to gain self-promote and gain likes and comments. Self-efficacy has been a highly contentious topic which has received attention from language learning (Graham, 2022), gender based research (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020) and anxiety of health professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic (Simonetti, Durante, Ambrosca, Arcadi, Graziano, Pucciarelli, Simeone, Vellone, Alvaro & Cicolini, 2021).

Literature on self-efficacy has also covered motivation and success (Trautner & Schwinger, 2020), entreprenuership (Bergenholtz, Klyver & Vuculescu, 2023; Garaika, Margahana & Negara, 2019) with Bergenholtz et al. (2023) discussing the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted entrepreneurial efforts. Self-efficacy was even explored from the perceptive of technology acceptance from university employees (Alnoor, Al-Abrrow, Abdullah & Abbas, 2020). It terms of having of sense of community, it is said that emotions of safety and security, public participation, voting, recycling and volunteering (Francis, Giles-Corti, Wood & Knuiman, 2012) and enhanced well-being (Davidson & Cotter, 1991: Francis et al., 2012) have all been linked to a robust sense of community. The idea of self-esteem is ubiquitous in modern life and is considered to exist everywhere at the same time (Orth & Robins, 2014). Additionally, Orth and Robins (2014) postulate that self-esteem is paramount to succeeding in any field that individuals may be involved in. Self-esteem is a mechanism intended to protect humans from potential failure (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt & Schimel, 2004; Rossi, Panzeri, Pietrabissa, Manzoni, Castelnuovo & Mannarini, 2020; Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

Instagram-self-esteem specific literature has been provided by scholars which include (Dion, 2016; Dumas, Maxwell-Smith, Tremblay, Litt & Ellis, 2020; Jiang & Ngien, 2020; Martinez-Pecino & Garcia-Gavilán, 2019; Paramboukis, Skues & Wise, 2016; Romero-Rodríguez, Aznar-Díaz, Marín-Marín, Soler-Costa & Rodríguez-Jiménez, 2020; Trifiro, 2018). Dion (2016) investigates the impact of Instagram on self-esteem and life satisfaction while Dumas (2020) look at the cost of gaining likes on the platform. Martinez-Pecino & Garcia-Gavilán (2019) reviewed self-esteem problems associated with Instagram usage, more specifically likes on the platform and Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2020) also looked and problems associated with Instagram but focusing own how it distracted students from learning. Paramboukis et al. (2016) explored the linkage between Instagram usage, narcissism and self-esteem. Trifiro (2018) was a study that measured the effect of Instagram usage on well-being and self-esteem. The present research not only explores the relationship that

Instagram usage has on self-esteem but examines more issues that could be associated with Instagram which include emotional investment on the platform, self-efficacy and well as the potential association between the platform and users' sense of fulfilment and community on the platform. The study's conceptual model is presented in the following section together with the supporting literature from where the proposed hypotheses are derived from.

3.1 The Link between Literature and the Proposed Hypotheses

The link between Instagram usage and self-efficacy was proposed by Chaudhary and Dhillon (2022), while that of Instagram and sense of community was postulated by Au and Cosh (2022) with Dalkiç and Kaya (2021), Germic, Eckert and Vultee (2021) suggesting a connection between emotional investment in Instagram and self-efficacy. Blight, Ruppel and Schoenbauer (2017) suggested that an association between emotional investment in Instagram and being part of an online community existed while Au and Cosh (2022) posited that self-efficacy was closely linked to the feeling of being part of an online community through social engagement. Esteban, Mamani-Benito, Morales-García, Caycho-Rodríguez and Mamani (2022) and Zhang, Gao and Liu (2022) postulated that self-efficacy is related to self-esteem. As for the association between sense of community and self-esteem Briana (2018) concludes that Instagram builds a sense of community which builds an individual's self-esteem while Mackso, Brochu & Schneider (2019) argue that Instagram communities do not always necessarily result in higher self-esteem.

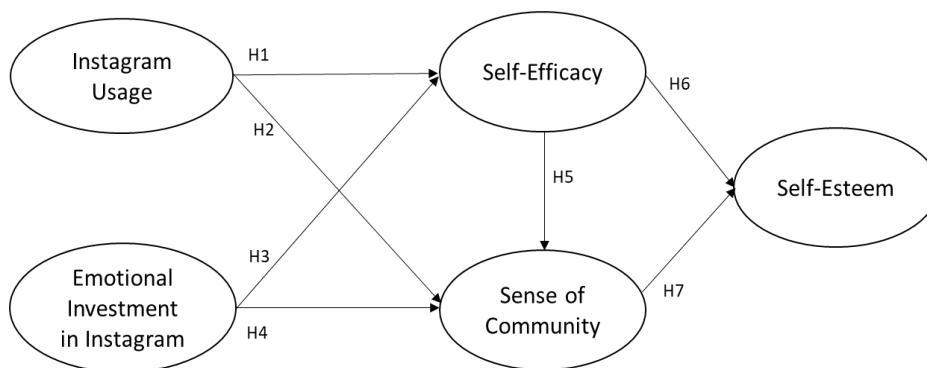## 4. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

Source: The authors (2023)

4.1 Hypotheses Development

4.1.1 Relationships between Instagram Usage, Self- Efficacy and Sense of Community

According to Nyagah, Stephen and Mwania (2015), social media gives individuals a sense of freedom and identity, boosts up the confidence level of individuals and cheers them up during hard times. Findings of Riquelme et al. (2018) present the assertion that Instagram influences female decision-making. Instagram allows women to develop self-efficacy and view themselves proficient enough to accomplish set goal thus linking self-confidence with Instagram usage (Riquelme et al., 2018). The perception of self-efficacy can be influenced by the opportunities for personal experiences and social interactions afforded by social media, particularly Instagram (Riquelme et al., 2018). Lee, Lee, Moon and Sung (2015) proposed social interaction, archiving, self-expression, escapism, and peeking as the five primary social and psychological motives that Instagram users have when uploading pictures or interacting with each other. This sense of community lends itself to another positive influence of social media: a sense of belonging (Mackson et al., 2019). According to Vincent (2016), social media has been found to contribute to positive psychosocial well-being and sense of community and increased self-esteem. Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following has been hypothesised:

H1: There is a positive relationship between Instagram usage and self- efficacy.

H2: There is a positive relationship between Instagram usage and sense of community.

4.1.2 Relationship between Emotional Investment in Instagram, Self-efficacy and Sense of Community

Emotional investment in the social networking sites (SNS) context in when users are emotionally connected to social media platforms to an extent where these platforms significantly impact their moods (Woods & Scott, 2016). Users of Instagram have been observed to show signs of despair which could be attributed to impact that their follower-count has on their self-esteem (Lowe-Calverley et al., 2019). Instagram has led its users to worry about emotional frustrations such as anxiety and stress at ultimately one's mental health (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). Researchers Lowe-Calverley et al., (2019) further propose that the level of Instagram Investment that a user experiences may be the mechanism by which one's

following translates to effects on their self-esteem, with high Instagram Investment resulting in lower self-esteem. Hence, the following has been hypothesised:

H3: There is a positive relationship between emotional investment in Instagram and self-efficacy.

H4: There is a positive relationship between emotional investment in Instagram and sense of community.

4.1.3 Relationship between Self-efficacy, Sense of Community and Self Esteem

Self-esteem is defined as individual's beliefs towards their abilities, competencies and an individual's self-perception influences one's behaviour (Venter de Villiers, Chuchu, & Chavarika, 2020). Users' photos on SNSs become a source of other users' impression, additionally, profile photos have practical implications since their appeal can raise the response rate to the friendship requests (Ahadzadeh, Sharif & Ong, 2017). Mackson et al. (2019) found that respondents with an active Instagram profile presented higher self-esteem in comparison to those who did not. Social media use, social media engagement may also be harmful for an individual's mental health and wellbeing. For example, several studies have reported a significant link between high social media use and low mood and depression, although other studies have found no evidence of a link between social media use and mood (Berry et al., 2018). Sense of belonging has been observed to intensify emotions of self-efficacy in the presence of communicative interactions (Pretic & Petrovcic, 2014). Self-efficacy contributes to a person's self-esteem (Riquelme, Rios & Al-Thufery, 2018), while sense of community has been proven to relate to self-esteem (Riquelme et al., 2018). Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following has been hypothesised:

H5: There is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and sense of community.

H6: There is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and self-esteem.

H7: There is a positive relationship between sense of community and self-esteem.

5. Research Method

The study used a quantitative research approach and a survey to collect data. Due to the absence of a publicly accessible register of Instagram users, a non-probability, convenience sampling technique was adopted in the selection of respondents for the research. In order to qualify for inclusion, participants had to have actively used Instagram at least two weeks prior to completing the questionnaire and at least 18 years of age at the time of participation. All participants were briefed on the objectives of the study and provided full consent prior to participantion. Data was collected through a self-administered an online survey tool from individuals residing in Johannesburg South Africa. A total of 361 valid response were obtained and processed in SPSS 27 and AMOS 27 for descriptive statistics and hypotheses testing though structural equation modeling respectively. The data collection instrument was based on scales measuring Instagram usage, emotional investment in Instagram, self-efficacy, sense of community and self-Esteem. To assess participants' Instagram usage, a measure was adapted from Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007), while sense of community, self-esteem and self-efficacy measures were adapted from (Riquelme et al., 2018) and emotional investment in Instagram measure was adapted from (Lowe-Calverley et al., 2019). Data was collected anonymously and participation was voluntary. The following section presents the study's findings.

6. Results and Findings

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Responses were received from 361 participants using a link to an online questionnaire created through Google forms. In terms of gender, 269 females, 90 males and 2 preferred not to say. Study participants ranged from the age of 18 years. 90.9% of respondents ranged from 18 and 25 years of age and 49.9% of respondents had +400 Instagram followers. Approximately 57.3% of respondents spend 0-2 hours per day on Instagram.

Table 1. Sample Profile Characteristics

Category	Representation
Gender	
Female	74.5%
Male	24.9%
Preferred not to say	0.6%
Total	100.0%
Age Group	
18-25	90.9%
26-35	6.4%
36 and older	2.8%
Total	100.0%
Number of Instagram followers	
0-100	11.6%
101-200	13.3%
201-300	14.1%
301-400	11.1%
More than 400	49.9%
Total	100.0%
Average time spent on Instagram per day in a week	
0 - 2 hours	57.3%
3 - 4 hours	26.3%
5 - 6 hours	9.1%
7 - 8 hours	3.3%
9 hours or more	3.9%
Total	100.0%

6.2 Measurement Model Assessment

As shown in Table 1, the present research provided acceptable loadings factor ranging from 0.502 to 0.872, as per the guideline of 0.5 by (Hair et al., 2010). The model generated through SEM produced the following satisfactory values of GFI = 0.926; AGFI = 0.898; RMSEA = 0.038; TLI = 0.961; NFI = 0.916; CFI = 0.969; and normed chi-square = 1.520.

6.3 Hypotheses Discussion

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Instagram usage would be positively associated with self-efficacy. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Riquelme et al., 2018), the hypothesis was supported *** suggesting that Instagram usage is related to self-efficacy. Hypothesis 2 predicted that Instagram usage would be positively linked to sense of community. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Mackson et al., 2019), the hypothesis was supported but insignificant, suggesting that Instagram usage is related to sense of community. Hypothesis 3 indicated a non-significant relationship between emotional investment in Instagram and self-efficacy. For Hypothesis 4, emotional investment in Instagram demonstrated strong positive associations with sense of community. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported. Hypothesis 5 predicted that self-efficacy would be positively associated with sense of community. Consistent with previous studies (Riquelme et al., 2018) the hypothesis was supported *** suggesting that self-efficacy is related to sense of community. Hypothesis 6 demonstrated a strong positive association with self-efficacy and self-esteem***. Hypothesis 7 predicted that sense of community would be positively associated to self-esteem. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Riquelme et al., 2018), the hypothesis was supported but not significant, suggesting that sense of community is related to self-esteem.

Table 2. Hypotheses Testing and Results

	Relationship	Path coefficient	P-value	Outcome
H1	Instagram Usage and Self-Efficacy	0.507	***	Supported and significant
H2	Instagram Usage and Sense of Community	0.094	0.174	Not Supported and not significant
H3	Emotional Investment in Instagram and Self-Efficacy	-0.037	0.497	Not Supported and not significant
H4	Emotional Investment in Instagram and Sense of Community	0.442	***	Supported and significant
H5	Self-Efficacy and Sense of Community	0.536	***	Supported and significant
H6	Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem	0.550	***	Supported and significant
H7	Sense of Community and Self Esteem	-0.287	0.002	Not supported but significant

Level of significance $p<0.01$

7. Discussion and Theoretical Implications

This section provides an in-depth explanation on the nexus between the results of the hypotheses testing and its implications. The first hypothesis, H_1 (Instagram usage is related self-efficacy) has an estimate of 0.507 and a p-value denoted by *** suggesting that the relationship is both supported and significant at the $p<0.01$ level of significance. This implies that Instagram has the ability to increase one's self-efficacy which is centered on individual's belief in performing certain actions. This result is similar to that of Chaudhary and Dhillon (2022) who found that Instagram is has a positive effect on self-efficacy. The second hypothesis, H_2 (Instagram usage is related to a sense of community) has an estimate of 0.094 and a p-value of 0.174 suggesting that the relationship is neither supported nor significant at the $p<0.01$ level of significance. This implies that Instagram usage does not help users feel that they are part of some community. This therefore suggests that users perceive the platform as individualistic or personal space rather than a communal space of interaction even though individuals have the ability to engage with others. This result however contradicts that of Au and Cosh (2022) who established that the use of Instagram is indeed associated with the feeling of being a member or at least being part of an online community.

The third hypothesis, H_3 (emotional investment in Instagram is related self-efficacy) has an estimate of -0.037 and a p-value of 0.497 suggesting that the relationship is neither supported nor significant at the $p<0.01$ level of significance. This implies that emotional investment not necessarily related to self-efficacy. This could mean that Instagram users do not associate their personal abilities to do something based on how Instagram makes them feel. In other words users do not believe that the platform accurately reflects the connection between their emotions and abilities. This finding however contradicts that of (Dalkiç & Kaya, 2021; Germic et al., 2021) who found a link between human emotions associated with Instagram and self-efficacy. The fourth hypothesis, H_4 (emotional investment in Instagram is related to a sense of community) has an estimate of 0.442 and a p-value denoted by *** suggesting that the relationship is both supported and significant at the $p<0.01$ level of significance. This implies that the more an individual is invested emotionally in Instagram the more that individual starts to feel they are a part of some community on the platform. This finding is in line with that of Blight et al. (2017).

The fifth hypothesis, H_5 (self-efficacy is related to a sense of community) has an estimate of 0.536 and a p-value denoted by *** suggesting that the relationship is both supported and significant at the $p<0.01$ level of significance. This implies that Instagram users feel more of being part of some community which reinforces their beliefs and individual capabilities. This outcome is in line with Au and Cosh (2022). The sixth hypothesis, H_6 (self-efficacy is related to self-esteem) has an estimate of 0.550 and a p-value denoted by *** suggesting that the relationship is both supported and significant at the $p<0.01$ level of significance. This implies that Instagram has the ability to cause an individual's beliefs in oneself to directly and positively influence that person's confidence in oneself. This connection between self-efficacy and self-esteem is supported by Esteban et al. (2022) with Zhang et al. (2022) establishing a two-way effect between self-efficacy and self-esteem.

The seventh hypothesis, H_7 (sense of community is related to self-esteem) has an estimate of -0.287 and a p-value of 0.002 suggesting that the relationship is not supported but is however significant at the $p<0.01$ level of significance. This implies that Instagram actually has a strong but negative effect on self-esteem based on the perceived sense of community that the platform provided. This could suggested that users personally felt vulnerable and less confident when they identified with their online community on Instagram possibly due to the fear of being judged or looked down upon by that community. This outcome is supported by Briana (2018) with Mackson et al. 2019 arguing that Instagram communities could either have a positive or negative effect on one's self-esteem. The conclusions for the study are outlined in the following section.

8. Conclusions

This study was an attempt to comprehend the extent to which Instagram usage could play a role in building self-esteem and favourable impressions of its users. Hypotheses were proposed and tested based on these assumptions. However, not all assumptions proved to be true, but it is important to note that in as much the platform is capable of influencing behaviour of customers, marketers should not naively assume that mere engagement on the platform is sufficient to archive organizational goals which such as higher sales, greater market share and higher profits. Marketers should therefore actively drive engagement on social media platforms such as Instagram in order to make the platform's users feel that they are part of something greater than themselves and that the marketer's brand speaks to them.

9. Limitations and Proposed Further Research

It should be noted that women were overwhelmingly the majority of the participants. The effect could be viewed in a double-fold, firstly, potential gender bias could have been created in the data and secondly, having a female-dominated audience is likely a strong indicator that the subject matter was significantly more appealing to females than males and encouraged robust feedback from an already committed and engaged audience. This therefore suggests that having a single gender dominating is not necessary a flaw in the study but a more balanced approach would be recommended for future studies in the area with even gender distribution between males and females. The same observation and recommendation could also be made for age where the entire sample was almost entirely from respondents aged 18 to 25 thus calling for a more diverse age distribution. This could also reveal potentially useful insights that could have been overlooked in this study. Future research could focus on a qualitative approach as the present study had certain limitations due to its quantitative nature which included confining respondents to the margins of a Likert-scale-based questionnaire with a pre-defined possible number of responses thus restricting the depth of analysis. A qualitative approach through in-depth interviews could allow respondents to fully express themselves as far as Instagram usage is concerned. The current study was limited to South Africa. For results comparison, subsequent researches should contemplate replicating this study in other emerging markets. From a theoretical perspective, further research could explore potential hypotheses that were not tested in the present research. For instance, Instagram usage and emotional investment on the platform and a measuring how Instagram usage would directly influence self-esteem? It could be suggested that further research incorporate additional constructs to measure Instagram usage and self-esteem. Future researchers could even consider changing the context of the study which could mean a different social media platform is investigated based on the current model or a completely different field but retain the constructs and causality of these constructs based on this study's model. These suggested future avenues of study stand to contribute new understanding to the existing body of social media literature in from an African perspective which is a context that is often most often under-researched globally.

Authors' contributions

Dr. Neo Ligaraba and Dr. Tinashe Chuchu were responsible for study design and revision. Dr. Ligaraba was responsible for data collection. Both Dr Ligaraba and Dr Chuchu drafted the manuscript and Dr Chuchu revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

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

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not

publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

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