

# Examining the Influence of Media System Dependency Relations on User Satisfaction, and Continuance Intention in Social Networking Services

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Received: September 4, 2023

Accepted: October 12, 2023

Online Published: October 15, 2023

doi:10.11114/smc.v11i7.6358

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i7.6358>

## Abstract

Social Networking Services (SNS) exert a substantial influence in the digital realm. For marketers and entrepreneurs, comprehending the nuances of potential consumer interaction with SNS is pivotal to craft optimal communication strategies. Consequently, deciphering the determinants that either encourage or hinder individual SNS usage behaviors becomes imperative, as it fosters deeper insights into users' continuance intentions and facilitates the building of robust relationships. Drawing upon the Media System Dependency (MSD) theory, this research addresses two main questions: 1) How do individuals' MSD relations, encompassing Understanding Dependency (UD), Orientation Dependency (OD), and Play Dependency (PD), satisfaction (ST) within the SNS context? 2) Does satisfaction subsequently enhance their continuance intention (CI) towards the SNS? To address these queries, we scrutinized data amassed from 393 online Weibo users in China. Participants, all of whom possessed prior Weibo experience, were invited to partake in a comprehensive survey. The proposed hypotheses were rigorously examined using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis revealed that the three delineated MSD relations significantly bolstered participants' ST, which in turn robustly influenced their CI. This study's findings shed invaluable light on the nexus between MSD relations and SNS engagement, offering meaningful implications for both academics and SNS practitioners. Future research endeavors are encouraged to expand upon these insights and further fortify our understanding of the topic.

**Keywords:** media dependency, satisfaction, continuance intention, SNS

## 1. Introduction

Social Networking Services (SNS) have reshaped the digital landscape, connecting hundreds of millions globally and facilitating new modes of interaction on the internet (Boyd & Ellison, 2010). SNS refers to digital platforms or websites that offer members the ability to create public profiles, interact with real-life friends, and meet other people based on shared interests or activities (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). As they've grown in influence and reach, understanding the underlying dynamics that drive their use has become crucial, especially for marketers and entrepreneurs who aim to navigate this digital terrain effectively (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The growing pervasiveness of SNS platforms like Weibo has changed the way individuals form relationships, consume content, and even shape their perceptions of the world around them (Sharma et al., 2023). For businesses, this evolution has provided new opportunities for engagement and has transformed strategies to communicate effectively with potential consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). It is no longer a luxury but a necessity for brands to align with the ever-evolving user behavior on SNS platforms (Kim & Ko, 2012).

The Media System Dependency (MSD) theory offers a compelling lens through which we can examine these behaviors and MSD theory suggests that the importance of media to individuals is predicated on how much they depend on it to fulfill certain needs (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). It suggests that individuals' reliance on media, in this case, SNS platforms, hinges on their ability to achieve specific goals using these platforms (Loges, 1994). Whether it's for understanding current affairs (UD), seeking guidance (OD), or mere entertainment (PD), individuals perceive SNS as a tool, a means to an end (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Meanwhile, Satisfaction (ST) refers to the extent to which users are content or pleased with their experience on the platform (Liu et al., 2016). Continuance Intention (CI) refers to the intention of users to continue using a service or platform in the future (Yan et al., 2021).

But as with any tool, there are factors that promote its use and factors that might discourage continued usage. This study takes a deep dive into these very dynamics (Chen, 2011). By focusing on Weibo, one of China's most prominent SNS platforms, we gain insights into how the trio of MSD relations - UD, OD, and PD - shape user satisfaction within the SNS context (Zhang & Pentina, 2012). But the exploration doesn't stop there. This research delves into whether this satisfaction, once achieved, acts as a catalyst for users to continue their engagement with the platform (Shin, 2013). To fill the knowledge gap, this study developed a theoretical model to examine the facilitators and inhibitors of individuals' continuance intention toward the SNS (Hsiao et al., 2016). Specifically, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1. How does individuals' MSD relations impact satisfaction in the SNS context?

RQ2. Does individuals' satisfaction increase their continuance intention toward the SNS?

By analyzing data from Weibo users, this study sheds light on the intricate dance between MSD relations and how they propel or deter continued SNS engagement. The use of advanced statistical methods, such as the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), ensures the robustness of the findings, making them invaluable for both academic scholars and practitioners in the SNS domain (Ringle et al., 2015). In a rapidly digitalizing world, where platforms like Weibo are not just communication tools but cultural phenomena, understanding the nuanced factors that drive their success becomes paramount. This study, by highlighting the interplay between MSD relations and SNS engagement, sets the stage for more nuanced and detailed future explorations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *The Facilitators and Inhibitors on the Social Networking Services (SNS)*

The factors influencing Social Networking Services (SNS) can either promote or inhibit its usage. Levy (1999) postulated that individuals act based on perceived value. The inclination to use SNS often arises when perceived benefits surpass potential negatives. Behavioral inhibitors encompass elements deterring sustained engagement in specific actions. Prior research, such as Ko and Chen (2009), suggested that factors like self-esteem, vibrant social life, and positive outcomes drive users to engage with blogs. In contrast, concerns over reputation, privacy, and potential negatives act as deterrents. Similarly, Posey et al. (2010) identified reciprocity as a facilitator and privacy risk as an inhibitor within online communities.

Distinct from traditional research settings, SNS emphasizes both personal and interpersonal value derived from interactions and shared content. For instance, users can acquire news or seek advice through exchanges with their connections. This study aims to bridge the gap in literature by emphasizing the interplay between Media System Dependency (MSD) relations and privacy concerns as respective facilitators and inhibitors of SNS engagement.

### 2.2 *Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory*

The Media System Dependency (MSD) theory postulates that individuals, as rational entities, are driven by the need to acquire information. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) defined individual-level MSD as a reliance on media system information resources to achieve personal goals. They highlighted three primary media dependencies: understanding (keeping abreast of one's surroundings), orientation (seeking guidance for personal challenges), and play (escaping mundane realities and tensions) (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984).

Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) further segmented these dependencies into individual and social dimensions, resulting in six distinct MSD relations: social understanding, self-understanding, action orientation, interaction orientation, solitary play, and social play (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). These relations can be perceived as distinct motivators for media consumption. In addition, these relations, described as motivators for media consumption, play an integral role in shaping how individuals perceive and engage with media platforms. Given the significance of understanding dependency, which revolves around keeping oneself informed about one's surroundings, it stands to reason that this dependency could have a direct influence on the satisfaction derived from using a media platform. Building on this premise, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1. Understanding dependency (UD) positively correlates with satisfaction.

Concerning orientation dependency, the MSD theory suggests that when real-world interactions are constrained, individuals turn to media for guidance and interpersonal connectivity. People seek advice on media platforms, forging bonds akin to physical interpersonal relationships with those offering guidance (Rubin et al., 1985). Rubin et al. (1985) argued that people develop affinities with those providing personal, empathetic counsel on their issues, referencing Levy (1979). This dependency on media for orientation amplifies feelings of warmth, attentiveness, and sociability. Ball-Rokeach (1985) emphasized that individuals embedded in social networks view media as essential to satisfying their goals. Thus, gratifying one's orientation needs via media boosts media satisfaction.

H2. Orientation dependency (OD) positively correlates with satisfaction.

Regarding play dependency, the MSD theory asserts that individuals utilize media for both escapism and recreation, often sharing enjoyable experiences with their social circle (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Engaging with SNS for pleasure and seeing it as a source of camaraderie with "friends" augments one's satisfaction with the platform. Hence, higher play dependency amplifies satisfaction.

H3. Play dependency (PD) positively correlates with satisfaction.

### 2.3 Satisfaction and Continuance Intention

Bhattacharjee (2001) articulated the notion of satisfaction by describing it as the emotional response or sentiment users have towards their previous interactions with an information system. Building on this, Deci and Ryan (1985) suggested that when individuals derive joy or pleasure from an activity, it inherently drives them to persist in that activity out of intrinsic motivation. Applying this to the realm of SNS, when users have positive experiences on these platforms, it elicits positive emotions. Consequently, these favorable emotions can serve as catalysts, influencing their decision to continue using the platform. In essence, the level of satisfaction a user feels can be a significant determinant of their future engagement intentions with the platform.

H4. Satisfaction positively affects continuance intention.

Based on the proposed hypothesis, the conceptual framework of this study was integrated (see Figure 1).

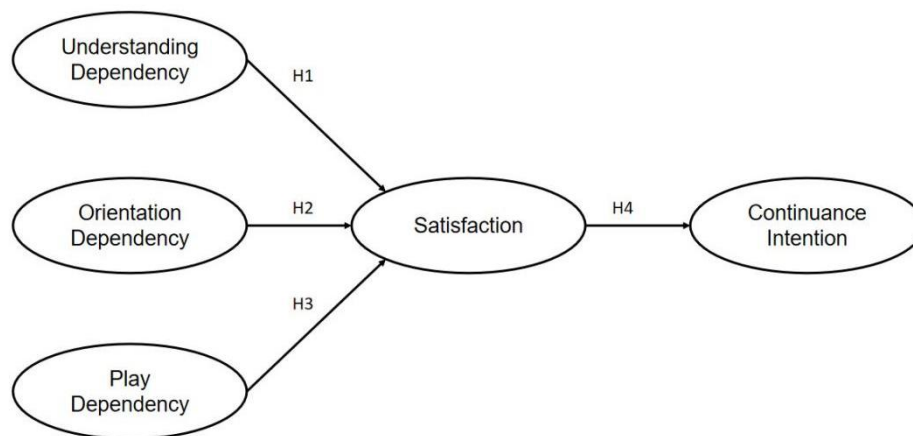


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Measurement Development

Items used for measurement in this study are sourced from established literature, though they have been subtly tailored to better fit the specific context of Social Networking Services (SNS). To gauge participants' responses, we employed a seven-point Likert scale, where a score of one represents strong disagreement and a score of seven indicates strong agreement.

Regarding dependency relations, the scale includes items that measure the three dependency relations: Understanding Dependency (UD), Orientation Dependency (OD), and Play Dependency (PD).. The instruments employed to gauge various aspects of dependency relations were derived from pivotal works in the field, ensuring a reliable and evidence-based approach to data collection. Specifically, UD was assessed using four items from Loges (1994). OD was assessed using four items from Ball-Rokeach et al. (1984), Lin (1993), and Loges (1994). PD was assessed using four items from Ball-Rokeach et al. (1984), Conway and Rubin (1991) and Svennevig (2000). In addition, Satisfaction (ST) was evaluated using four items, sourced from Bhattacharjee (2001) and Lin et al. (2017). Continuance Intention (CI) was evaluated using four items, sourced from (Li et al., 2006).

A preliminary test was initiated to ascertain the validity of our research instrument. The initial version of the questionnaire was crafted in English. Recognizing the linguistic preferences of our target audience, it was subsequently translated into Chinese, ensuring that the essence and nuances of the questions remained intact for those respondents who are more comfortable with reading in Chinese. For this crucial validation step, the translated questionnaire was shared with three scholars specializing in Information Systems (IS). These experts, all of whom have hands-on experience with SNS platforms, were entrusted with the task of ensuring that the Chinese version mirrored the conceptual intent of the original English version, rather than just offering a literal translation. Moreover, their expertise

was tapped to evaluate the clarity, phrasing, logical flow, and the contextual appropriateness of the translated instruments.

Subsequent to their feedback, we proceeded with a more extensive survey involving 45 users of Weibo to test the finalized measurement items in a real-world context. The feedback from this survey further reinforced our confidence in the instrument, as the results underscored that our measurement model satisfactorily met established benchmarks for both reliability and validity.

### 3.2 Survey Administration

The research model will be tested with data collected from online users of Weibo in China. Weibo, often dubbed the "Twitter of China", is one of China's premier social media platforms, boasting hundreds of millions of active users. Launched in 2009 by the Sina Corporation, Weibo provides a microblogging service where users can post short messages, share photos and videos, comment on and 'repost' others' updates, and engage in various social interactions (Sullivan, 2014). Weibo, with its expansive user base and diverse features, stands as a testament to the rapid evolution and significance of social media in contemporary China. Whether one is seeking entertainment, news, or social interaction, Weibo remains a central hub in the Chinese digital landscape (Huang & Sun, 2014).

Users acquainted with Weibo were warmly approached to contribute to our research through the survey. Spanning a timeframe of four weeks, from mid-July to mid-August in 2023, the survey was actively administered. Upon opening the questionnaire, participants were greeted with concise guidelines on how to proceed, an estimate of the time they would need to invest, a heartfelt note of appreciation for their willingness to partake, and a staunch commitment to safeguard their personal information and maintain confidentiality. They were gently guided to respond to each question, drawing from their personal experiences on the Weibo platform. This web-based survey proved fruitful, gathering a substantial 393 comprehensive and valid responses which were then leveraged for detailed data analysis. Demographic specifics of those who took part in the survey are comprehensively detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents (n = 393)

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	208	52.9%
	Female	185	47.1%
Education	High school or lower	39	9.9%
	Bachelor	227	57.8%
	Master	101	25.7%
	PhD or higher	26	6.6%
Age	<20	63	16.0%
	20-30	209	53.2%
	30-40	92	23.4%
	>40	29	7.4%
Usage frequency	Less than once a month	15	3.8%
	Several times a month	53	13.5%
	Several times a week	125	31.8%
	Several times a day	200	50.9%
Usage duration (in years)	<1	70	17.8%
	1-2	115	29.3%
	2-3	105	26.7%
	3-4	60	15.3%
	>4	43	10.9%

## 4 Data Analysis

In the process of data analysis, we employed a two-step approach, following the guidelines laid down by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Initially, our focus was on scrutinizing the measurement model. Subsequent to that, we delved into

evaluating the structural interconnections amidst latent variables. The primary intent behind this segmented approach is to solidify the credibility and authenticity of the measurement scales prior to plunging into the intricate assessment of the model's structural associations. To facilitate our analysis, we leaned on the capabilities of SmartPLS. One of the standout attributes of Partial Least Squares (PLS) is its inherent flexibility. It doesn't stringently bind researchers to strict prerequisites regarding measurement scales, the size of the sample in the study, or the distribution of residuals, as highlighted by Chin and Newsted (1999). This allows for a broader scope of analysis, accommodating diverse datasets and research contexts.

4.1 Measurement Model

The adequacy of the measurement model is evaluated based on the criteria of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. To determine reliability, both the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) values were utilized, following the guidelines set by Fornell and Larcker (1981). As presented in Table 2, all CA values exceeded the threshold of 0.7, with values ranging from 0.734 to 0.916, aligning with commonly accepted standards. Similarly, all CR values in Table 2 surpassed the benchmark of 0.7, with values between 0.654 to 0.846, which is considered satisfactory.

For convergent validity, Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommended that the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct should surpass the variance attributed to measurement error for that specific construct, implying AVE should exceed 0.50. In accordance with this criterion, Table 2 indicates that all AVE values lie between 0.610 to 0.813, denoting satisfactory validity. To confirm discriminant validity, diagonal elements in a correlation matrix should possess higher values than the off-diagonal elements. The outcomes from our analysis affirm good discriminant validity.

Table 2. Results of validity and reliability

	CA	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1. UD	0.795	0.765	0.742	<b>0.862</b>				
2. OD	0.842	0.654	0.813	0.704	<b>0.871</b>			
3. PD	0.734	0.708	0.610	0.612	0.548	<b>0.793</b>		
4. ST	0.855	0.846	0.631	0.242	0.614	0.116	<b>0.887</b>	
5. CI	0.916	0.706	0.772	0.315	0.416	0.349	0.484	<b>0.915</b>

Note: CA, Cronbach's Alpha; CR, Composite Reliability; AVE, Average Variance Extracted; UD, understanding dependency; OD, Orientation Dependency; PD, Play Dependency; ST, Satisfaction; CI, Continuance Intention; Discriminant validity was measured by Fornell-Larcker criterion

4.2 Structural Model

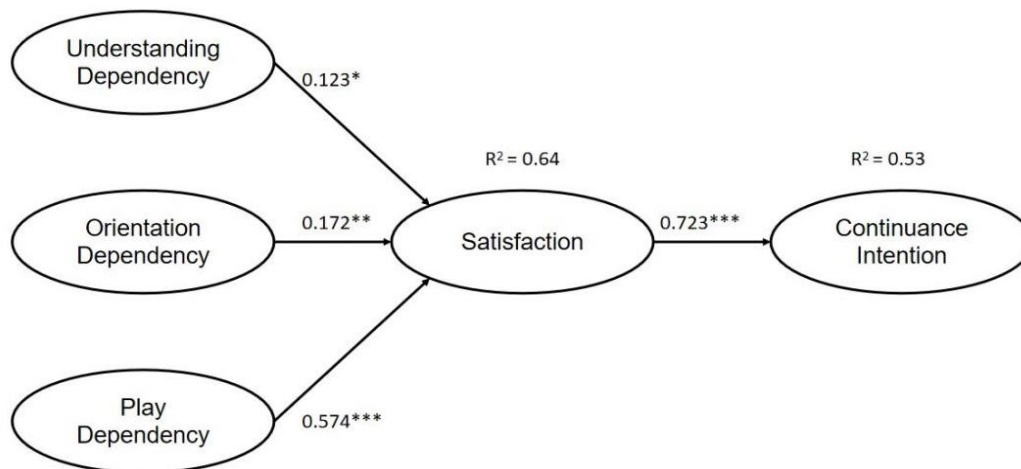
In Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis, the potency of a structural model is discerned by scrutinizing the structural pathways and the R<sup>2</sup> values associated with endogenous components. Delving into the outcomes, as graphically depicted in Figure 2, reveals pivotal insights into the structural-path examination. Each pathway under consideration secured a p-value that was notably below the 0.05 benchmark, signifying their statistical significance. To further bolster the robustness of these findings, an intensive bootstrapping technique, comprising 5000 iterations, was deployed. The subsequent revelations from this hypothesis examination are meticulously cataloged in both Table 3 and Figure 2. The path from UD to ST was significant ( $\beta = 0.123, p = 0.042$ ). The path from OD to ST was also significant ( $\beta = 0.172, p = 0.006$ ). The relationship from PD to ST proved to be robust ( $\beta = 0.574, p < 0.001$ ). The path from ST to CI was similarly strong ( $\beta = 0.723, p < 0.001$ ).

In the PLS analysis, the strength and relevance of a structural model are assessed via its structural paths and the R<sup>2</sup> scores of the endogenous variables. Notably, the R<sup>2</sup> value for ST was 0.643, indicating that about 64.3% of the variance in ST can be explained by its predictors (UD, OD, and PD). Meanwhile, the R<sup>2</sup> value for CI was 0.537, implying that 53.7% of the variance in CI can be attributed to ST. As presented in Figure 2, all paths had p-values less than 0.05. The significance of these paths was further validated using 5,000 bootstrapping runs. Detailed results from the hypothesis testing are consolidated in Table 3 and visually represented in Figure 2.

Table 3. Results of hypothesis test

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	P value	Remark
H1 UD -> ST	0.123	0.042*	Supported
H2 OD -> ST	0.172	0.006**	Supported
H3 PD -> ST	0.574	0.000***	Supported
H4 ST -> CI	0.723	0.000***	Supported

Note: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001



Note: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

Figure 2. PLS-SEM analysis of the research model

5. Discussion

In examining the factors influencing Social Networking Services (SNS) usage, this study presented a comprehensive exploration, informed predominantly by the MSD framework and an understanding of user satisfaction. The results robustly underscore the potency of the MSD theory's principles in determining SNS usage patterns. As theorized, users gravitate towards SNS driven by distinct motivations: UD, OD, and PD. Notably, PD registered the strongest influence on ST, accentuating the centrality of recreation and escapism in users' SNS behaviors. The data substantiated the idea that satisfaction is intricately linked to continued engagement. This finding is consistent with Bhattacharjee (2001), emphasizing the role of affective responses in guiding user behaviors. More pertinently, ST was seen to profoundly influence CI, underscoring its role as a critical determinant for continued SNS engagement.

Each of the dependency relations exhibited varied degrees of influence on ST. Regarding UD to ST, this path was significant but exhibited the weakest link among the dependencies, suggesting that while understanding one's environment through SNS holds value, it might not be the primary driver for satisfaction. Regarding OD to ST, the relationship, although stronger than UD, highlighted that seeking guidance and forging bonds on SNS does enhance user satisfaction, yet it isn't the dominating factor. Regarding PD to ST, as the strongest link, it was evident that users derive immense satisfaction from the recreational aspects of SNS. The element of escape from daily routine and shared pleasure experiences were critical for user satisfaction, reinforcing previous suggestions of media as both an escapism tool and a recreational outlet. The strength of our model was evident through the significant R<sup>2</sup> values for both ST and CI, suggesting a commendable explanatory power. Particularly, predictors (UD, OD, PD) could explain a substantial 64.3% variance in ST, and ST could account for 53.7% variance in CI.

The findings elucidate key drivers of SNS engagement, with satisfaction playing a pivotal role. It also prompts future research to delve deeper into other potential factors that might interact with or influence these MSD relations, ensuring a holistic understanding of the ever-evolving landscape of SNS engagement.

6. Conclusion

In this study's pursuit to unravel the intricacies governing SNS engagement, the pivotal roles of MSD relations and user satisfaction emerged as paramount determinants (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Our findings decisively validated the relevance of UD, OD, and PD in shaping user satisfaction, with PD emerging as the most influential driver (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). This underscores the significance of recreation and escapism as fundamental motivations for SNS engagement (Rubin et al., 1985). Furthermore, the robust relationship between ST and CI affirms the criticality of user

satisfaction in determining their commitment to continued platform engagement (Bhattacharjee, 2001).

The study's outcomes carry crucial implications for both practitioners and theoreticians. For SNS developers and marketers, recognizing the profound influence of play, escapism, and guidance can guide their content strategy, interface design, and engagement mechanisms (Levy, 1999). Emphasizing elements that cater to PD, in particular, could be the key to driving user satisfaction and ensuring platform loyalty. For the academic community, this research serves to broaden the applicability of the MSD framework, positioning it as a versatile tool for deciphering user motivations in varied digital domains, beyond just traditional media (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984).

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. The data collected is cross-sectional, making it difficult to infer causality or track the evolution of user sentiments over time (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). While the sample size and selection were comprehensive, they might not entirely represent all demographics, especially those from diverse cultural or socio-economic backgrounds (Chin & Newsted, 1999). Additionally, with the ever-evolving landscape of SNS, the dynamics of user engagement might shift, calling for periodic reassessments (Posey et al., 2010).

Future studies could benefit from a longitudinal approach, capturing the evolving dynamics of user behavior and satisfaction over time. It might also be insightful to explore cultural variances in MSD relations, analyzing how different global demographics perceive and engage with SNS (Ko & Chen, 2009). Given the rapid advancements in technology, understanding the impact of augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence on MSD and user satisfaction on SNS platforms could provide a fresh perspective. Moreover, a deeper exploration into the nuances of the identified dependencies, perhaps breaking them down further or integrating them with other theoretical frameworks, might yield even more comprehensive insights.

#### **Acknowledgments**

Not applicable.

#### **Authors contributions**

Ms. Ma and Ms. Feng were responsible for study design, revising and data collection. Mr. Jin drafted the manuscript and revised it. Dr. Zainudin and Dr. Abas reviewed it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

#### **Funding**

Not applicable.

#### **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**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

#### **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.

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