



## Consumer Skepticism and Trust in Influencer Marketing: A Cross-Platform Analysis of Mobile and Web Users

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Grounded on the differences created among various platforms, this research on consumer skepticism and trust in influencer marketing analyzes how such differences impact consumer perceptions and purchase decisions.

**Purpose:** This study aims to understand various dynamics of influencer marketing by comparing its impact across different platforms.

**Methods:** Using an online survey as a source of data, the attitude of consumers towards products endorsed by influencers is determined both on Instagram and YouTube. Results indicate that mobile users are more favorable toward influencer marketing while web users tend to be more skeptical, especially when the endorsements seem too commercial in nature.

**Results:** A chi-square test highlighted a significant relationship between the type of platform utilized and consumer trust in the recommendations received from influencers.

**Conclusion:** The study revealed that there is not as uniform a relationship between a type of platform and the level of trust placed in the influencer recommendations, and study results indicate implications for brands to better manage their marketing efforts across disparate online platforms.

## 1. Introduction

Today, millions of users spend their days utilizing social media. It has emerged as one significant place from which relations can be made with their probable customers. People tend to believe in and are influenced by those whom they follow. Because of this factor, influencer marketing has become a pragmatic method of marketing for the brands to endorse their products and services. Partnering with influential people who have large and engaged followings can increase the offerings' visibility and reach a more extensive audience, eventually increasing conversions. However, even though it is very widely used, influencer marketing doesn't work for every business. A strategy that would be worth the considerations by companies looking to break into digital advertising is influencer marketing. However, this requires good consideration of influencer selection and usage of platforms and engaging the target audience.

Generally, influencer marketing involves the collaboration of companies with individuals who have a large social media presence and are classified by their number of followers. The further line divides influencers into five categories: tiny influencers with followers less than 10,000,

minor influencers who have 10,000 to 50,000 followers, mid-level influencers having followers between 50,000 and 100,000, large-scale influencers having followers over 500,000, and enormous influencers having followers above a million. The relevance of the chosen influencer type is important for the campaign because relevance in the message conveyed and engagement among their followers depend on it.

The increased usage of social media and the consequent influencer marketing therefore came as a necessity during the pandemic. Lockdown had resulted in consumers shifting their shopping behavior to the online domain. Influencers, therefore, became the option that the brands opted for to interact with their consumers. Consumers, during the pandemic, adopted contactless delivery and all its advantages, like savings in time. What really changed consumer shopping behavior was the increasing convenience of online shopping that saved time, as it did all those shoppers needed to do at just one click. This shift, as can be expected, has also continued, wherein digital marketing has played an important role in determining consumer choice. Digital marketing has the following benefits over traditional

marketing: It considers better segmentation, targeted communication, and use of resources. All types of companies have opened their minds to digital strategies since they can relate better with specific consumer segments. Amongst all of these, influencer marketing is a very helpful tool to tap into brand visibility. Consumers will be willing to trust the influencers they follow. Tends to increase conversion rate, which is usually created through engaging interactions. With an influencer marketing campaign, brands can access a follower base to provide promotional posts, videos, or other formats with their message.

Instead, the success of influencer marketing relies significantly not only on the choice of influencers but also on the credibility of the content. In fact, a study has shown that if consumers believe that an influencer believes in a particular product or brand, there is a greater likely chance of engagement with that content. This is because the content will be less appealing to the influencer and to the brand if it is paid or inauthentic.

With 3.6 billion users projected for 2020 and growing every year, social media has become an indispensable marketing tool. Platforms that are most favored by young adults include Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, a key demographic for many brands. Influencer marketing then moved the focus from traditional celebrity endorsements to new marketing, in which consumer engagement would come because of influencers' perceived authenticity and relatability.

The shape of consumer behavior through influencers is determined by the myriad of personal, social, cultural, and economic factors. Upon contacting the influencer, the opinion of consumers regarding these brands or products will therefore be governed by these underlying forces. For example, in the case of luxury and fashion brands, the alignment of the influencer's image with the values of the brand is significant in the formation of consumer perceptions. The findings have been that consumers respond better to influencers whose lifestyles and values are closer and similar to their own, which further enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

In short, influencer marketing has emerged to be one of the key drivers of digital advertising; however, all this depends on a host of factors that have been associated with choice of platform, kind of influencer, content authenticity, and consumer trust. The course of the marketplace in this space will depend on understanding these elements so that business houses can understand what needs to be done to develop effective marketing strategies. From this study, we aim to address the following research questions:

1. What is the difference in consumer attitudes toward products endorsed by influencers between digital platforms: mobile and web?
2. Which factors drive consumer skepticism toward influencer marketing, and might such factors differ depending on the platform?
3. How does perceived authenticity affect consumer perceptions of product appeal and how subsequently this modifies purchase decisions in the realm of influence on marketing? This study aims at investigating to what extent these aspects influence consumers and drawing conclusions to help improve influencer marketing strategies.

## 2. Literature Review

Influencer marketing is a combination of media and social media (Alboqami, 2023). Influencers advertise on social media; the most popular are Instagram and Facebook (Ooi *et al.*, 2023). Companies reward stakeholders with money or events such as free products, services, tours, or experiences (Zhou *et al.*, 2022). Influencer is derived from the word influencer, which means to influence someone or something, while influencer means a person who influences someone or something (Ahn *et al.*, 2022). The meaning of the word "marketing" is a method of meeting customer needs (Liao & Huang, 2021). Businesses can use various methods and alternatives to market and promote their products or services, namely influencer marketing, influencer-oriented marketing campaigns, and content marketing (Ahn *et al.*, 2022). The most important thing that affects people's desires and behaviors is their culture. However, culture is not static; it is constantly changing and is gradually absorbed by people. The customer behavior model proposed by (Duffy *et al.*, 2022) focuses on companies' attempts to interact with current and future customers through communication and the tendency of their methods to behave in a certain way (Lou *et al.*, 2023). Consumers will follow the recommendations of online reviewers if they believe these reviews are reliable (Caner *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, consumers need to rely on more information to reduce uncertainty and risk and increase trust. Studies have shown that consumers may trust review content but not Internet reviews (Chaudhry, 2022). Comprehensive and in-depth analysis of all aspects of customer behavior is crucial to the success of the organization because consumer behavior and its extensive research have become the foundation of every company's business. Therefore, the concept of cognitive dissonance and how it affects consumer behavior has also been included in many important research articles (De Jans *et al.*, 2021) Remember that using color can affect health, be good or bad for the heart and mind, help increase or decrease color desire, improve mood, relax customers, shorten customer waking hours, etc. Color can also help differentiate products from competitors (Bagdanavičiūtė,

2022). Social media creates a “participatory culture” where users connect with others with similar interests and engage in a collaborative process of sharing information, tracking progress, and soliciting feedback and ratings on various products, services, and efforts. Today, online opportunities have the power to change people’s behavior. Today, people trust reviews or ratings on online platforms more than they did a decade ago, when their decisions were based on advertisements or other specific information. (Tian *et al.*, 2023) claimed that consumers are frequently exposed to these advertisements designed to grab their attention. Social marketing is successful when a company creates content that appeals to its target audience and allows others to share it on their social media. The process of sharing content with others is called eWoM. Electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWoM) can be defined as the statement made to a large audience based on potential, actual, or past customers about the product, service, brand, or company, whether it is good, average, or bad.

The Innovation Adoption Process (IAP) is another instrument that provides information on a consumer’s acceptance of new technology. The IAP is the progression through which an individual goes through the innovation-decision process (Zhou *et al.*, 2023). Five steps make up the process: knowledge of innovation, forming an attitude toward the innovation, deciding to adopt or reject the innovation, implementation of the innovation, and confirmation of the decision. Knowledge of IAP can help marketers obtain a social media marketing campaign that is fulfilling (Ahn *et al.*, 2022). Influencer marketing, growing by leaps and bounds in recent years, is a major force in contemporary persuasion. For every dollar businesses spend on influencer marketing, they recoup more than \$5 in profits, and 63 percent of marketers said they intended to increase their influencer budget next year from 80 influencer marketing statistics in 2020 (Chandra, 2023).

As of 2020, approximately 3.6 billion people use social media, and this number is increasing each day. Prior to the development of social media apps and the ubiquity of the internet, marketers used celebrity endorsers to help promote their products. As attention has turned to the internet, marketers have had to develop new channels to reach their audience of potential customers. Today, popular social media platforms among the young adult population in North America and Europe include Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter (Kumar *et al.*, 2023).

Instagram fashion influencers are perceived to be more authentic when their visual appearance and luxurious lifestyle match the symbolic value of luxury brand (Simay *et al.*, 2023). When people encounter a visual image of an Instagram celebrity with a luxury product, they would

form a positive attitude toward the featured brand if they identified more with the source (Almasri, 2023). The positive disposition toward a more identifiable celebrity would transfer into a more positive attitude toward the brand (Simay *et al.*, 2023). When viewers perceive influencers as more trustworthy, they will be more welcoming toward their fashion recommendations and the brands/products they endorse (Morgan, 2020). Alipour *et al.* (2023) revealed, “13% of all consumer sales are the result of word-of-mouth sharing.” but word-of-mouth is no recent phenomenon that was developed out of the online social network era. Westbrook defined word-of-mouth already in 1987 as “an informal communication behavior about the experiences with specific services, products, or the characteristics of the providers that the consumers exchange among each other” (Lou *et al.*, 2023).

Consumers patronize different store formats to purchase products. Prior literature describes store and format choices for big, multi-item shopping baskets, but limited insights determine consumers’ unique shopping routines when they seek to buy just one or a few items while on the go. Such shopping situations might affect consumers’ format selections for both search and experience goods (Karamustafic *et al.*, 2020). Mobile short video-based product sales sharing sites like YouTube and Tudor have many established user content for creating and distributing shares (Sands *et al.*, 2022). Based on the positive and negative reinforcement of the OPT, users must repeatedly interact with short-form videos to maintain positive emotions or reduce negative emotions. Eventually, this practice will lead to addiction. Additionally, users’ procrastination moderates the relationship between feeling of withdrawal and addiction (Simay *et al.*, 2023).

The personalization recommendation system does not lead to discontinuous usage behavior through privacy concerns or perceived information narrowing. Although personalization recommendation has not an indirect effect on discontinuous usage behavior, personalization recommendation has a potential risk to create psychological pressure on users, making personalized recommendations counterproductive (Mrad *et al.*, 2022). A preliminary experiment shows that though there are significant differences in consumers’ perceived ability to evaluate product quality before purchase between search and experience goods in traditional retail environments, these differences are blurred in online environments (Soto-Vásquez & Jimenez, 2022). Facial attractiveness has a significant positive effect on the number of comments and viewers obtained, but it has no impact on the number of likes received in a livestream (Ahn *et al.*, 2022).

Social networking sites have become an important place for communication and discussion on science-related

topics. In these platforms, credibility assessment takes into account not only traditional statements (such as scientific arguments and information) but also new social teaching (Warbung *et al.*, 2023). The publication is more effective when the seller's price is low and the seller's video display is small. In addition, KOL approval is effective regardless of the product's price, but its effect is better when the seller offers a larger video (Bagdanavičiūtė, 2022).

Web 2.0 technology and social media have made commercial marketing a new phenomenon in the business world. Recently, marketing has received great attention from experts and specialists (Tian *et al.*, 2023). The mobile space of 2020 has become a vertical video update. The vertical format replaces the horizontal format and is the first format for creating and using mobile videos (Simay *et al.*, 2023). There are different motivations among users, and there is a strong relationship between motivation and behavior. TT video streaming platforms are expanding globally. Despite its increasing popularity, research on its use is limited. However, there is no understanding of interest associated with it (Karamustafic *et al.*, 2020). The use of social media by internet users for advertising and marketing purposes is called "Consumer Online Brand-Related Activity (COBRA)" (Zhou *et al.*, 2023). Media campaigns are activities that are communicated by individuals or groups to achieve certain goals, which can promote and spread both positive and negative (Gligor & Bozkurt, 2021).

### 3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

As per the data collected, it can be interpreted that most of the social media users use Instagram to engage with influencers. YouTube is the second-largest used social media platform. As per the survey conducted, it can be interpreted that approx. 81% of the consumer will not trust all product recommendations made by the influencers in making a purchase decision. Their purchase decision is also influenced by various other factors apart from influencers recommendations.

From the survey, it can be concluded that most of the social media users believed that influencer content is not always persuasive in influencing their purchase decisions. From the data analysis, it can be observed that the majority of respondents fall within the 21-30 age range, with both males and females participating in the survey. Most participants are familiar with the concept of influencer marketing, with only a few respondents indicating that they are not familiar. Participants spend an average of 2-4 hours, with Instagram and YouTube being the most used platforms for engaging with influencers.

A significant number of respondents have made purchases based on influencer recommendations, while others

have not. This suggests that influencer recommendations can have an impact on consumer behavior, but they are not universally influential. Participants had mixed opinions regarding the effectiveness of influencer marketing compared to traditional forms of advertising. While some find it more effective, others are undecided or prefer traditional advertising methods. A majority of participants believe that companies should invest more in influencer marketing strategies, indicating a positive perception of their potential value.

Performing the chi-square test, we get a chi-square test statistic of 14.42 with 4 degrees of freedom using X<sup>2</sup> (degree of freedom, N = sample size) = chi-square statistic value, p = p value. Since the obtained p-value (0.006068) is less than the significance level (0.05), we can conclude that there is a significant association between trust in influencer recommendations and the categories being tested. The results suggest that trust in influencer recommendations is unlikely to occur due to random chance alone, supporting the idea that there is a genuine association between these variables. Based on the literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Consumers show greater favorability for products endorsed by influencers from mobile compared to websites.

H2: Consumers are less likely to find marketing on mobiles less trusted compared to websites.

H3: The probability of consumers thinking that the product was less attractive in case it contained one type of obviously paid influencer marketing, regardless of platform.

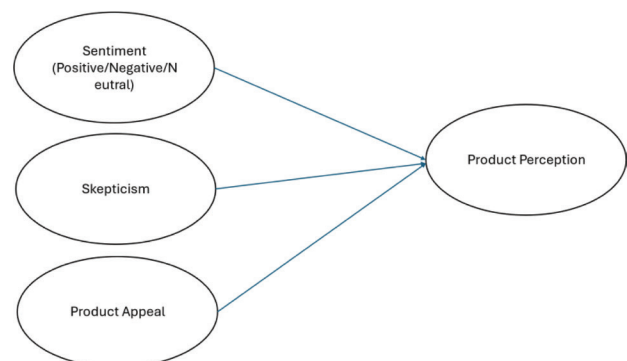


Figure 1: Proposed Framework

### 4. Result and Discussion

The Figure 2, 3, and 4 depict the response distribution to the question regarding product sales by influencers, providing the count for every type of response that could help to identify what the majority of respondents were most positive about.

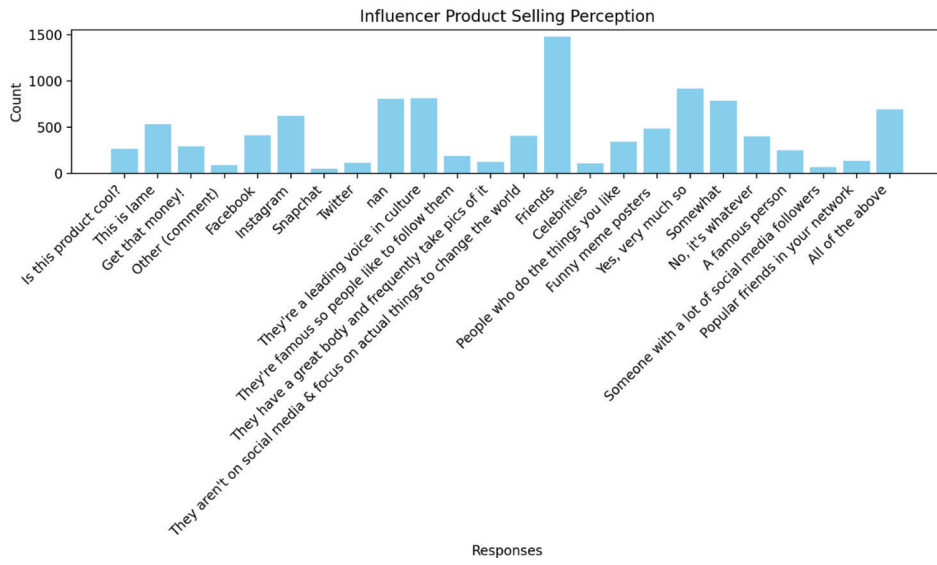


Figure 2: Influencer Product Selling Perception

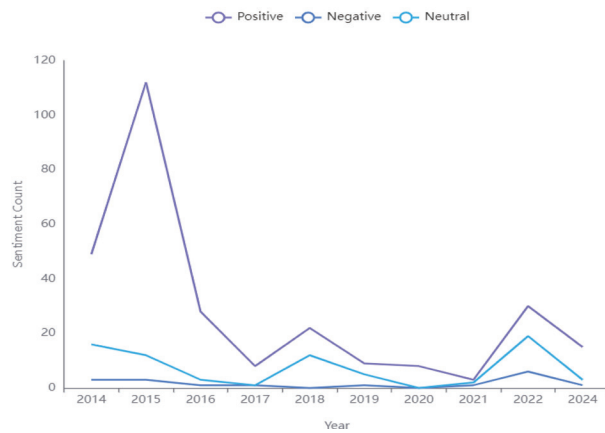


Figure 3: Sentiment Count

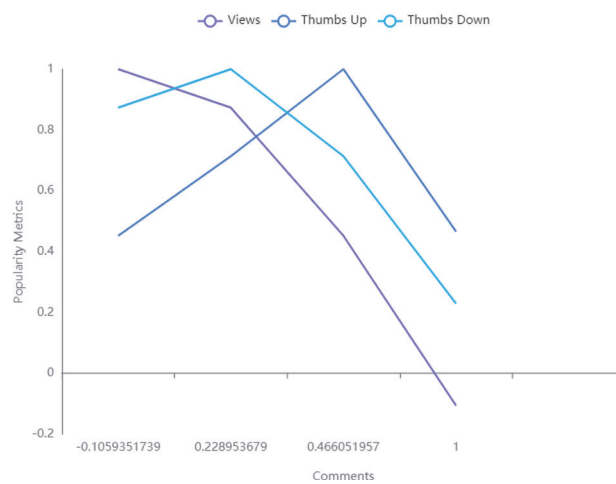


Figure 4: Popularity Metrics



#### 4.1. Sentiment Analysis: Based on Platforms

The findings include communications about influencer marketing both on the mobile and web platforms. Use, for example, the question, “What do you think when an influencer is obviously paid?” and break it down in terms of responses like:

- Positive sentiment (“Is this product cool?”) constitutes 22.6% of responses at both the mobile and web platforms and differs there very much in frequency.
- Negative sentiment (“This is lame”) manifested best, at 44.9%, and thus was the largest share of skepticism toward the potency of influencer marketing.
- Neutral sentiment (“Get that money!”) felt almost a balanced view, and as a matter of fact, 24.7% of answers expressed indifference or acceptance of sponsored content.

#### 4.2. Mobile vs. Web Platform Comparison

According to the data set, mobile platform users were positive at 22.6%, while web platform users had some instances where the positive response rate for “Is this product cool?” was highly low: 0% in some cases.

Web users have a higher tendency to respond with negative opinions. Some examples include “This is lame” because responses from the web skew toward one side, negative perceptions of influencer marketing.

#### 4.3. Dissatisfaction with Influencer Marketing

In general, a strong 44.9% of the users responded negatively, hence the proof of dissatisfaction with advertising influenced marketing, especially when the promotional activity was classified as “clearly an ad.”

This also points to the fact that web users were more critical of the endorsement by influencers, as supported by the “This is lame” reply.

#### 4.4. Consumer Neutrality

An impressive 24.7% responded neutrally towards influencer marketing, and with the “Get that money!” reply, which evinces a certain acceptance that influencers deserve to get paid for endorsements, it does not shift towards positive or negative drift.

The “Other (comment)” category, although smaller in size, at 7.7%, points to the existence of alternative opinions that failed to come within the studied categories and so provides a foundation for viewing the rather complex relations of consumer attitudes as worthy of further qualitative research.

The results show that mobile users of a platform are less skeptical and have more positive views towards influencer marketing than are those web users, who are more skeptical. A big chunk of the public is neutral or accepts the ‘commercial’ aspect of influencer marketing, especially when they concur with the fact that paid promotion is a commercial activity per se. Therefore, such results confirm Hypothesis 1 (positive sentiment more on mobile) and Hypothesis 2 (more skeptical on the web).

### 5. Conclusion

Crucially, the study provides critical understanding on how the utility of influencer marketing is so much dependent upon the variant platforms and shows a variance between the frequency at which consumers use Instagram and YouTube in interface with the influencers while not being absolutely reliant on their endorsement. Data determined that approximately 81% of consumers do not entirely depend on the influencer endorsement to make a purchase, therefore considering other factors like quality of the product, reputation of the brand, and personal choices. Platform comparison: the study found that mobile users are more accepting of influencer marketing in general; 22.6% of them are in a positive sentiment towards influencer-endorsed products. In contrast, web users exhibit skepticism and negative sentiments such as “This is lame” with greater prevalence. Mobile platforms thereby create a more receptive environment for influencer marketing, possibly because the interactivity is more personal or intimate on mobiles.

Another measure of consumer recognition of the existence of influencer marketing as a paid form of promotion is the prevalence of robust neutral sentiment at 24.7%. Respondents, for instance, accepted the commercial nature of influencer endorsements but did not necessarily correlate this acceptance into positive or negative sentiments. Neutrality here indicates that although influencer marketing is recognized as a genuine method of marketing, it does not lead to persuasion in any direct manner. Additional results of the chi-square test make it easier to understand that the category’s variables relate themselves to the trust that consumers give to the influencer’s recommendations. Therefore, trust in influencers does not diffuse randomly but has real factors such as the platform and authenticity of the endorsement. In conclusion, it is concluded that while influencer marketing can reinforce consumer behavior, influencer marketing is not one-size-fits-all. This is what brands need to carefully sculpt their influencer strategies towards: the platform, the audience, and the nature of the content. The research findings thus indicate investments in influencer marketing, predominantly through mobile-based platforms, will be valued by consumers, but skepticism

on the web points to calls for even more transparent and authentic promotional approaches to woo these more discerning audiences.

## 6. Implication

This study presents some essential findings that businesses could utilize to obtain the best out of influencer marketing practices on digital platforms. The affirmative sentiment displayed by these mobile users indicates that the mobile medium is more efficient in linking consumers to products endorsed by influencers. This, therefore, implies that brands would go for content and influencer campaigns that are more mobile-friendly and tailor-made for mobile consumers, whose perceptions of authenticity and engagement are likely to be higher.

However, this more rampant skepticism of web platforms would apparently mean that web users tend to be more discriminating or skeptical of influencer promotions, particularly if the promotion is perceived as highly commercialized. Brands should adopt strategies that are less commercialized, more authentic, and less in-your-face on web platforms in order to overcome this skepticism and win the trust of web users. Authenticity and transparency should be the core of crafting the messaging that will appeal to a more discerning public.

Further, neutrally stated attitudes toward the “Get that money!” reaction would be that, although many consumers hold ambiguous attitudes regarding the paid nature of influencer marketing, they are not against it per se. Brands can work on this by using transparency over paid endorsements but ensuring the messaging is not detached and authentic. The takeaways are that the strategy for influencer marketing must be market-specific to a particular platform or consumer attitude in order to maximize effectiveness in digital marketing campaigns, which swiftly changes in the rapidly accelerating digital landscape.

## 7. Limitation

The study has all key limitations based on self-reported data, and the bias is expected because the respondents are likely to have answered socially desirable and possibly over or underreported their personal behaviors. In addition, the study has focused on Instagram and YouTube alone and failed to capture the total gamut of consumer behavior across the length and breadth of other social media channels. The sample is also biased toward the young age group, and the results could not be generalized for older age groups. Further study may be done to expand the analysis by incorporating more heterogeneous social media sites, different age groups, or qualitative studies to see the underlying drivers of skepticism or neutrality

towards influencer marketing. Moreover, being that influencer marketing is an increasingly common tool, knowing the long-term impact of influencer marketing on consumer loyalty and retention might tell a lot in judging its success.

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## Authorship Contribution

This paper is a single author paper and the whole concept building was solely done by the author herself. There is no co-author for this study.

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## Declaration

All relevant data and methods have been disclosed and comply with journal requirements.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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