

Enhancing customer behavior and gratitude towards the use of social commerce in Malaysia




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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the extent to which customers feel grateful towards social commerce, focusing on the satisfaction they derive from it. It also explores how social commerce has the potential to significantly change the way people shop online, particularly in a dynamic and interactive network setting. A conceptual framework was created to identify the specific gratifications that customers seek in social commerce, using the uses and gratification theory. The study utilized structured equation modeling to analyze data obtained from 262 social commerce customers in Malaysia via a questionnaire. The analysis demonstrated that convenience, hedonic value, and social influence play a crucial role in increasing customer gratitude towards social commerce. The assessment of customer acceptance and satisfaction with the implementation of social media technology in online retail heavily relies on these key factors. With a focus on the effects of social media features and functionalities, the paper offers a theoretical understanding of how use and gratification aspects affect shopping in social commerce. It indicates that social commerce is not just a choice but an essential component of the business ecosystem, requiring companies to invest in order to meet customer expectations and promote successful interaction.

Contribution/ Originality: This unique study utilizes the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) to examine customer gratitude in social commerce, focusing on convenience, hedonic value, and social influence. This research explores customers' psychological and social needs, offering a new perspective on customer satisfaction in social commerce.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social commerce is becoming a popular platform to promote and sell products due to its wide adoption (Han, Xu, & Chen, 2018; Lin, Wang, & Hajli, 2019; Meilatinova, 2021). It is revolutionizing the way online shopping transacts in a highly interactive network environment (Aydm, 2019). Both customers and businesses are communicating further and enriching the interaction for a better shopping experience. The removal of physical location constraints was not the only benefit of the use of social commerce. It is more than social media marketing

that entices customers to the retailers' web for product listings or catalogs (Wang, Chen, Ou, & Ren, 2019). It encompasses the entire business process from the beginning to the end of checkout procedures (Sukrat & Papasratorn, 2018). The entire sales process is conducted within the social media applications. It also provides customer service to support the after-sales services (Zhao & Li, 2020). This is even now with the social distancing practice in Corvid 19 era to heighten the use of social commerce. Closer relationships among the customers themselves were more willing to help each other within the social media virtual community (Ho & Teo, 2020).

Social commerce extended the electronic commerce business by further broadening the customer base and expanding sales volumes. The high impact of social media on customer attitude and behavior has been extensively proven in many existing studies (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Chu & Chen, 2019; Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016). The direct and faster communication response and feedback were critical for the customer to feel good about the company. Customers were immersed in and appreciated the user-generated content among fellow customers in social media communities. The massive and large volume of customer and product reviews was readily available on social media platforms. Hence, companies invested their resources in managing their social media accounts on the main social media apps. However, plenty of studies were devoted to profit-related aspects. Such as brand loyalty Zhang, Benyoucef, and Zhao (2016), service quality Choi and Kim (2018), and sales performance (Ogilvie, Agnihotri, Rapp, & Trainor, 2018).

The current literature supports the role of social commerce in consumer behavior. However, the expected customer gratification towards product purchases, which subsequently led to customer satisfaction, was sparsely investigated. Hence, the analysis of the precursors for social commerce derived from the gratification aspect could shed new light on the attainment of customer satisfaction. This could be crucial in unearthing the theoretical understanding of the gratification aspect. Hence, this study applied the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) for its ability to uncover the customers' social, physical, and psychological needs.

The objective of this study is to examine how the features of social commerce influence customer shopping behavior to achieve customer satisfaction. The underlying assumption of the study was rooted in customers' uses and gratification perspectives based on the three main types of gratifications, i.e., their appreciation for social, psychological, and physical gratifications. Previous studies have been investigating consumer acceptance of social commerce. However, the need to relate the adoption to the special needs of convenience, social support, and hedonicity as antecedents for purchase intention was not examined further. In addition, the connection between customers' intention to purchase and customer satisfaction examined also offers another theoretical contribution to enhancing the understanding of social commerce. Hence, this study uncovered the missing link in the existing literature by developing a conceptual framework to learn about customers' gratification towards social commerce.

1.1. Theoretical Development

1.1.1. Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) posited that the use of technological tools depends on the users' need to obtain the gratifications they expected (Ruggiero, 2000). It theorized that the basic need was the driver in cultivating appreciation and satisfaction over the tools used. Gratifications were divided into sought gratification and obtained gratification, which served as the two main outcomes of tool consumption (Curras-Perez, Ruiz-Mafe, & Sanz-Blas, 2014). Hence, it propagated the basic social and psychological requirements for the users to use the tools and subsequently achieved and appreciated the outcome of the task completed. UGT has been extensively applied to examine a plethora of technological innovations in business (Joo & Sang, 2013; Luo, Chea, & Chen, 2011; Ray, Dhir, Bala, & Kaur, 2019). For instance, Choi, Fowler, Goh, and Yuan (2016) investigated the usefulness of hotel Facebook pages to explain the tendency of customers to select hotel accommodations. A list of recent studies on electronic and mobile commerce (Azam, 2015; Huang & Zhou, 2018; Santos Corrada, Flecha, & Lopez, 2020). This study adopted this theory due to its strong predictive power in explaining the motivational needs of social

commerce. The three main tenets of this theory, i.e., hedonic, social, and utilitarian gratifications, served as the drivers of the customer's acceptance of social commerce. Therefore, we examined the determinants of the use of social commerce from the gratitude perspective of the customer.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Commerce

Social commerce is regarded as an important component of electronic business by penetrating the power of social media in operating business transactions over the Internet (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). The major role in enabling communication between customers and retailers is the myriad applications of social media (Esmaili & Hashemi G, 2019). It encompasses the main business functions, ranging from advertising, promotion, customer support, transaction platforms, and even marketing research. Hence, social commerce provides a social touch and serves as a marketing channel for connecting retailers to tap into the desired target market segments.

The enriched interactivity features of social media led to its use as another platform for conducting business. Customers and retailers communicate with the availability of a plethora of social media applications. The use of social commerce for better communication, review, and sharing of product experiences (Liu, Wu, & Li, 2019). The use of social commerce as a transaction platform, linking with a live stream, a vivid product process, and new product promotion. The use of social commerce for customer support, linked with customer relationship management, exists in the current literature (Dewnarain, Ramkissoon, & Mavondo, 2019; Itani, Krush, Agnihotri, & Trainor, 2020; Kim & Wang, 2019). Chat rooms come in a variety of forms, be they text, audio, or a live video platform. Furthermore, better collaboration is possible with the enhanced push notifications in a real-time manner with the advanced chatbot (Ho, 2021). Therefore, social commerce is efficient when we compare it with other tools that offer limited or just two-way communication for business communication. This feature augmented social media's role in connecting customers and retailers closer.

The tendency of customers to rely on feedback and product reviews from user-generated content (Banerjee, Dellarocas, & Zervas, 2021; Goes, Lin, & Au Yeung, 2014). The impact of word of mouth was considered more trustworthy than company product information (Kang & Lee, 2017). There is also a stream of research devoted to customer behavior, in achieving customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Bilgin, 2018; Nunan, Sibai, Schivinski, & Christodoulides, 2018; Shanahan, Tran, & Taylor, 2019). It was validated that social commerce can serve as a good platform to cultivate customer relationships.

2.2. Hypotheses Development

The three major aspects of the gratifications—utilitarian, hedonic, and social—serve as the fundamental explanatory power of the theory. Utilitarian gratification refers to the appreciation shown towards the achievement of task completion. This is followed by hedonic gratification, i.e., the pleasure received while performing the related activity. Furthermore, it is regarded as the enjoyment gained from the shopping process in social commerce for this study. Thirdly, social gratification is regarded as the emotion and passion obtained from the interaction with other users in social commerce. Hence, convenience was theorized as utilitarian gratification, hedonic value was proposed as hedonic gratification, and social influence would be examined for social gratification. The influence of the tenets of UGT was expected to attract the customer's intention to use social commerce. Behavioural intention is regarded as the chance of conducting a particular activity or task, i.e., buying a product. Following that, behavioural intention was the antecedent for the actual use of social commerce. Hence, the following hypothesis is developed:

H₁: Behavioral intention directly influences customers' use of social commerce.

2.3. Convenience

Convenience refers to the gratification gained from the use of handy shopping tools within an electronic commerce environment (Duarte, e Silva, & Ferreira, 2018). It has been validated as a major factor in the acceptance of innovative technological improvements for business transactions. The existing literature has confirmed that shopping benefits, i.e., simplicity and ease of use, short time, and customer service, were important to making it convenient for the customers (Beauchamp & Ponder, 2010; Palacios & Jun, 2020; Pham, Tran, Misra, Maskeliūnas, & Damaševičius, 2018). The nature of social commerce combines both the benefits of social media and online shopping. It has many new features and interactive functionalities to facilitate the purchase process (Ho, 2019). This includes shoppable image and video galleries, direct buy buttons from social media apps, hash tagging, customer auto-reviews, and other related shopping assistance. The application of shopping features in social commerce could enhance the convenience envisaged by customers (Larson & Shin, 2018). Online sellers have been investing in the innovation of mobile apps to make full use of the social media functionalities for business transactions (Ho, Amin, Ryu, & Ali, 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed for this study:

H₂: Customers' convenience directly affects the behavioral intention of social commerce.

2.4. Hedonic Value

One of the main drivers for online purchases is undoubtedly the enjoyment gained from the shopping experience (Horváth & Adıgüzel, 2018). Hedonic value is defined as the pleasure and fun feelings sought during the performance and completion of tasks. Its importance has been validated in both traditional storefronts as well as electronic commerce (Barakat, 2019; Sina & Kim, 2019; Wong, Osman, Jamaluddin, & Yin-Fah, 2012). This also applied in other contexts, such as when Ho (2022) examined the importance of enjoyment in using a mobile wallet for traditional purchases. Hence, the gratification gained from the hedonic motivation affects the anticipated consumer behavior. This study proposed that the hedonic value was highly sought by the customers and drove them to participate in virtual communities on social networks. The customers assumed greater enjoyment associated with social media communication while shopping. This study predicted that the hedonic value would have a greater impact on customers' willingness to use social commerce. This is because the right purchase mindset could be derived from the hedonic need leading to customer involvement in social media shopping. Therefore, hedonic value exerts influence on the intention to purchase in a social commerce setting. With that, we developed the following hypotheses:

H₃: Hedonic value directly influences the behavioral intention of social commerce.

2.5. Social Influence

Social influence is defined as the impact of the guidance, sharing, and inspiration offered by other members of our social network (Kulviwat, Bruner II, & Al-Shuridah, 2009). It is also the social support embedded in our social relationships with other people who participate in social media applications. In general, customers were having more regular collaboration and rapid communication on the social network to share their buying and transaction experiences. Collaboration among themselves enhances the absorptive capacity for learning (Ho & Chua, 2015). Furthermore, encouragement or even dissuasion could also determine the consumer's decision to purchase or transact with the retailers (Ho & Cheng, 2020). Peer pressure from a social network played an important role in deciding the customer's choice of retailer. This is because the direct influence of friends and peers led to shopping basket abandonment prior to checkout (Javadi, Dolatabadi, Nourbakhsh, Poursaedi, & Asadollahi, 2012). The existing literature has indicated the impact of social influence on online purchases because customers would seek advice from their peers in their social network (Fu, Lu, Chen, & Farn, 2020; Hahn & Kim, 2013). Hence, we formulated the following hypothesis for this study:

H₄: Social influence from social networks directly influences behavioral intention of social commerce.

Figure 1 showed the conceptual framework of this study.

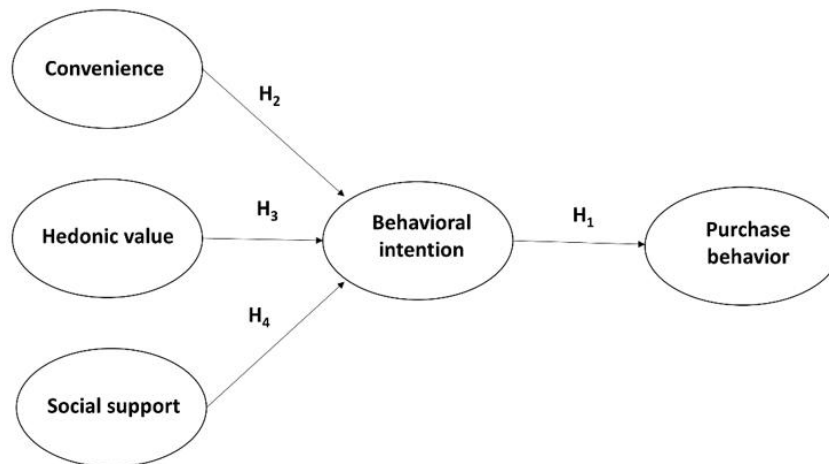


Figure 1. The conceptual framework.

3. METHODS

3.1. Sample

The respondents to this study were social media users in Malaysia. The selection was based on the premise that they were actively involved in social media and well-versed in the use of social commerce. Respondents who had purchased products or services in the past three months qualified to be included in the sample. The questionnaire was developed with a Google Form, and respondents were invited via Instagram to participate for one month. A total of 262 completed forms were obtained. Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics and sample characteristics.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (N=262).

	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	129	49.23%
	Female	133	50.77%
Age	Between 18 – 29	140	53.43%
	Between 30 – 39	90	34.35%
	Between 40 – 49	29	11.07%
	More than 50	3	1.15%
X1: No. of years – use of social commerce	Less than 1 year	10	3.82%
	1 < X1 ≤ 4 years	50	19.08%
	More than 4 years	202	77.10%
X2: No. of monthly purchase via social commerce	1 time	72	27.48%
	1 < X2 ≤ 4 times	121	46.18%
	More than 4 times	69	26.34%

3.2. Survey Design

The item measurement of the survey questionnaire was carefully selected from the established scale of the previous studies. The source of the items is shown as follows: The scale for convenience was adapted from Jiang, Yang, and Jun (2013). Hedonic value was taken from Sarkar (2011). Social influence was derived from Okumus, Ali, Bilgihan, and Ozturk (2018). Purchase behavior was altered by Bai, Yao, and Dou (2015). The behavioral intention was copied and modified from Pavlou (2003).

3.3. Data Analysis

This study applied the structured equation modeling method for the two-stage confirmatory factor analyses. We used SmartPLS to interpret the inter-path relationship among the variables. Therefore, we were able to analyze

the measurement model and the structural model. The use of SEM was relevant for this study because two levels of latent variables were contained in the conceptual framework. By employing this approach, we would be able to scrutinise the array of hypotheses and then evaluate the interconnectedness among the variables in this research. We used SmartPLS as our data analysis software to examine the path correlations.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model

We evaluated the measurement model's reliability and validity. Because the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and communality were above the threshold value, the results were satisfactory. This indicated that the model's internal consistency had been achieved. Cronbach's alpha values for the variables in this study were also higher than the required acceptance value of 0.7. As a result, we achieved convergent validity with Composite reliability (CR) and AVE values that exceeded the threshold value. Table 2 shows the measurement model's summarized results.

Table 2. Summary results for the measurement model.

Variables	Indicators	Loadings	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha
Behavioral intention	BE1	0.848	0.685	0.867	0.770
	BE2	0.827			
	BE3	0.807			
Convenience	CN1	0.863	0.684	0.868	0.769
	CN2	0.836			
	CN3	0.781			
Hedonic value	HV1	0.741	0.558	0.834	0.734
	HV2	0.789			
	HV3	0.774			
	HV4	0.778			
Purchase behavior	PB1	0.788	0.627	0.834	0.702
	PB2	0.816			
	PB3	0.769			
Social influence	SI1	0.845	0.706	0.878	0.792
	SI2	0.833			
	SI3	0.843			

We used the Fornell-Larcker criterion method to evaluate the discriminant validity, and the result was acceptable. Kindly refer to Table 3 for the attainment of discriminant validity. In short, our measurement model was considered good with all the validity tests within the acceptable range.

Table 3. Discriminant validity.

No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Behavioral intention	0.828				
2	Convenience	0.567	0.827			
3	Hedonic value	0.647	0.659	0.747		
4	Purchase behavior	0.728	0.585	0.657	0.792	
5	Social influence	0.564	0.445	0.490	0.550	0.840

4.2. Structural Model

The bootstrapping re-sampling technique was applied to measure the structural model. We followed the guidelines designed by Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted (2003). Figure 2 depicts the structural model obtained from SmartPLS. Furthermore, the blindfolding technique was applied. Table 4 contains the results of the R² and Q² values gained. Both values demonstrated the predictive power of the structural model. The R² values for behavior

intention and purchase behavior were 51.8% and 53.0%, respectively, based on the blindfolding process. This showed that the gratifications gained were able to explain consumer shopping behavior significantly. Furthermore, the first-order constructs exerted their influence on the behavior intention under social commerce. The assessment was conducted by applying Stone-Geisser’s predictive test. The scores of Q^2 values for convenience, hedonic value, and social influence were 0.486, 0.252, and 0.444, respectively.

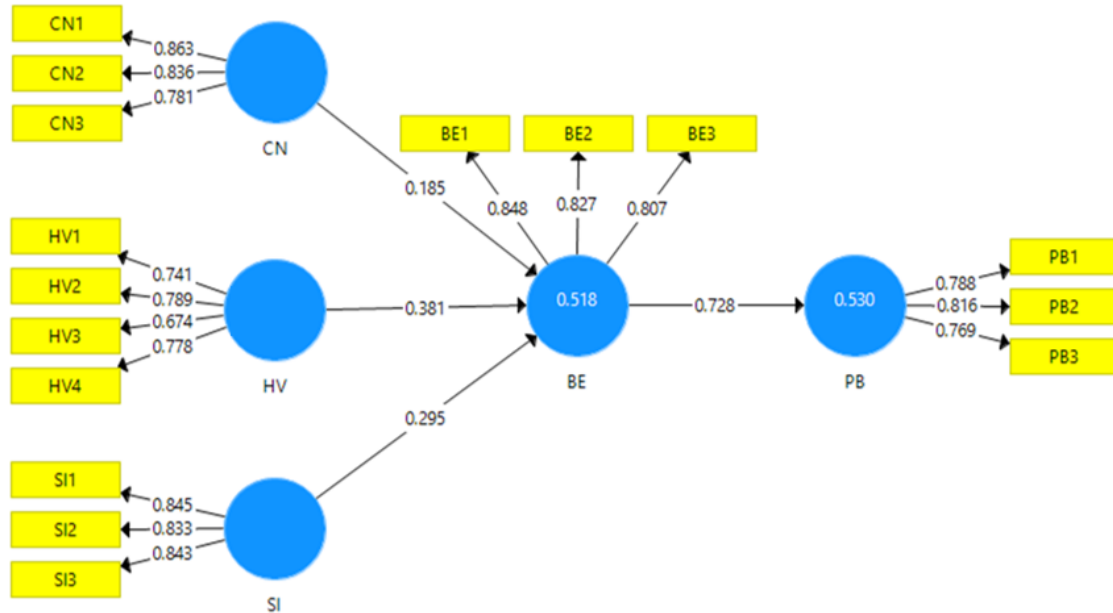


Figure 2. Structural model.

Table 4. Blindfolding indexes for constructs.

Construct	R ²	Q ²
Behavioral intention	0.518	0.350
Convenience	N/A	0.486
Hedonic value	N/A	0.252
Purchase behavior	0.530	0.215
Social influence	N/A	0.444

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

Table 5 shows the standard error, t-value, and p-value of the model while path analysis was conducted. These findings, derived from the structural model, showed that hypotheses were supported. The hypotheses were tested, and all of them were supported. Convenience was supported with a path coefficient = 0.185, t = 2.702, and p = 0.007. Similarly, this applied to the hedonic value with a path coefficient = 0.381, t = 2.702, and p = 0. The result for social influence was also encouraging, with a path coefficient = 0.295, a t = 5.763, and a p = 0. Hence, all three constructs derived from UGT theory indicate their importance for the use of social commerce. Therefore, all the hypotheses derived from this study were significant and confirmed their inclusion in the conceptual framework.

Table 5. Test results for structural model.

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	Standard deviation	T-value	P-value (2-tailed)	Supported
H ₁ : BE → PB	0.728	0.033	21.910	0.000	Yes
H ₂ : CN → BE	0.185	0.068	2.702	0.007	Yes
H ₃ : HV → BE	0.381	0.074	5.124	0.000	Yes
H ₄ : SI → BE	0.295	0.051	5.763	0.000	Yes

5. DISCUSSION

This research aimed to investigate, from the user's gratification standpoint, the factors that influenced the adoption of social commerce. The conceptual framework proposes three main constructs derived from utilitarian, hedonic, and social dimensions based on UGT theory. Convenience was conceptualized as utilitarian gratification, hedonic value as hedonic gratification, and social influence as social gratification. The data analysis results validated the hypotheses developed from the conceptual framework. It confirmed the critical requirements of convenience, hedonic value, and social influence to drive social commerce adoption. The findings supported previous research on the use and acceptance of innovative online applications.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The theoretical contribution was to support the use of social commerce from the point of view of user satisfaction by identifying the main factors as ease of use, hedonic value, and social influence. All the hypotheses in the conceptual framework were supported. This further indicated that the three types of gratifications derived from utilitarian, hedonic, and social dimensions were critical in providing the theoretical explanation of the acceptance of social commerce. Convenience rooted in utilitarian gratification was found to be a more influential factor. This is followed by the next factor, i.e., social influence from the peers in the social network. Hence, social gratification was significant in providing guidance and assistance to customers while transacting in the social media space. The hedonic value derived from hedonic gratification was equally important, although recorded slightly lower in terms of importance when compared to the first two constructs. In conclusion, this study derived the gratifications from UGT theory and offered a clearer answer to uncover the reasons behind the popularity of social commerce. Therefore, this study sheds new light on the need for customers' gratitude in the integration of social media with online shopping. Social commerce is expected to grow, and a better appreciation of customer involvement would be beneficial in its future development.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The use of social commerce is one of the main platforms for selling and purchasing on the Internet. Previously, it was a big obstacle for retailers to interact with customers closely. The traditional shopping method was often restricted to one-way communication and limited opportunities to target the right customer segment. This study offers insight into understanding the business operations of social commerce from a customer's gratification perspective. The practical implications of the study provide three different kinds of gratifications needed to serve the customer better. Firstly, there is a need for the retailer to fulfill the utilitarian gratification by emphasizing the convenience feature. This implies that retailers should ensure easy use and simple interface design for the shopping and checkout procedures (Kuo-Wei, Shih-Chih, Po-Hung, & Ching, 2020). Secondly, the provision of additional functionalities to satisfy the hedonic gratification of the customer. We suggest the retailers provide useful by-products functionalities such as price comparisons, footage and images from renowned key opinion leaders, and related product reviews (Ho & Rajadurai, 2020; Rungsrisawat, Sriyakul, & Jernsittiparsert, 2019). Furthermore, social influence is equally important in influencing the purchase decision (Kaur et al., 2023). Hence, user-generated content from peers in customers' social networks should be ready to be accessed and linked to by the customers.

5.3. Limitation and Future Direction

There were a few limitations, although the study has achieved its research objectives. The respondents in the sample were restricted to one particular social media app, i.e., Instagram. Hence, the study did not cover other social media apps, which reduced the generalizability of the findings. The result is likely to be distinctive and offer diverse conclusions if we include other popular social media applications. This study is devoted to the customers' gratification aspect of social commerce adoption. However, we only focus on three main constructs, i.e.,

convenience, hedonic value, and social influence. Therefore, we suggest that other gratifications from the customer should also offer a rich avenue for future research. This includes gratification derived from affection, brand authenticity, and cultural perspective. Furthermore, future research directions could also investigate the inclusion of sales-related features, such as price discounts, peer product reviews, and influencers as moderators, to delve further into social commerce operations.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the INTI International University, Malaysia has granted approval for this study (Ref. No. INTI/UEC/2023/022).

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Data Availability Statement: Upon a reasonable request, the supporting data of this study can be provided by the corresponding author.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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