

FROM EMOTION TO TRANSACTION: HOW TIKTOK LIVE FORGES BUYER-SELLER BONDS IN FASHION

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how search cues and evaluation cues influence purchase intention through emotional engagement in TikTok Live fashion commerce. Focusing on Indonesia's mid-range women's fashion market, the study investigates streamer attractiveness, co-viewer involvement, social pricing, and substitutability of personal examination as antecedents of emotional engagement. A quantitative survey was conducted with 250 TikTok Live users familiar with brands such as This Is April, Ecinos, and ShopatVelvet. Data were analyzed using SEM-PLS. The results show that all four cues positively and significantly enhance emotional engagement. Emotional engagement also positively affects purchase intention and mediates the relationships between live streaming cues and purchase intention. The findings extend Information Foraging Theory by demonstrating that information cues in live commerce influence purchase intention not only through cognitive evaluation but also through affective engagement. Therefore, fashion brands should enhance streamer credibility, foster audience interaction, implement effective social pricing strategies, and improve product visualization to strengthen consumers purchase intentions.

Keywords: Search Cues; Evaluation Cues; Emotional Engagement; Purchase Intention; TikTok Live

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INTRODUCTION

The global fashion industry has grown into one of the largest economic sectors in recent decades (Asaro, 2025). This industry includes not only clothing production and sales (McKinsey & Company, 2025), but also lifestyle expression, identity formation, and social status signaling (Yasim et al., 2024). Despite this growth, the industry continues to face structural pressure from prolonged economic uncertainty and rising global inflation (McKinsey & Company, 2025). Digital transformation has created new commercial opportunities for fashion brands, but it has not fully removed consumer uncertainty in online apparel purchasing. Consumers still cannot touch, try, or directly inspect product quality before purchase (Hwang & Youn, 2022). This limitation makes information search central to online fashion decision-making. Information Foraging Theory explains that consumers seek useful cues that reduce cognitive effort and improve decision quality before making a purchase (Pirolli & Card, 1999). Live streaming commerce (LSC) responds to this need by combining live product presentation, seller interaction, and real-time consumer feedback in one digital shopping environment (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). The commercial relevance of this format is also increasing, as the global live streaming market is forecasted to grow by USD 25.89 billion during 2025–2030, with a CAGR of 17.9% during the forecast period (Research and Markets, 2026).

Indonesia provides a relevant context for examining LSC because TikTok has become one of the country's most dominant social commerce platforms. The number of TikTok users in Indonesia reached more than 160 million as of March 2025, making Indonesia the country with the fourth largest number of TikTok users in Southeast Asia (Kompas.com, 2025). TikTok Live also recorded more than 2 billion views in one week during Ramadan 2025, while Indonesian users spent an average of 44 hours per month on the application, indicating TikTok's strong position in Indonesian social media use (Marketeers, 2025). This dominance matters for fashion commerce because TikTok Live combines entertainment, social interaction, and product demonstration in a format that can stimulate consumer attention and engagement. TikTok Live is powered by real-time interaction and customer engagement, with a significant portion of sales dedicated to fashion products, which highlights its market dominance in digital fashion consumption (Rinanda et al., 2024). In the women's mid-range fashion segment, which balances quality, style, and affordability, brands such as This Is April, Ecinos, and ShopatVelvet use LSC to strengthen brand image, product visibility, and consumer engagement.

LSC reduces online fashion uncertainty through search cues and evaluation cues. Search cues, such as streamer attractiveness and co-viewer involvement, help consumers locate relevant information in a crowded live shopping environment. Streamer attractiveness shapes consumers' first impressions and perceived message appeal (Kim & Park, 2023), while co-viewer involvement provides social information and recommendations during the live session (Gao et al., 2021). Evaluation cues, such as social pricing and substitutability of personal examination. Social pricing can create urgency and collective bargaining power that influence purchase decisions (Bawack et al., 2023), while live product presentation can reduce uncertainty by mimicking some benefits of in-person product inspection (Chen et al., 2022). Yet these cues do not always work in a linear manner. Purchase intention may depend more on streamer trustworthiness and expertise than attractiveness alone (Wel et al., 2023). Overly consistent real-time comments may reduce purchase responses (Zhang & Ruan, 2024). Excessive price discounts may create negative perceptions regarding a product's ethicality, thereby reducing consumers' intention to purchase ethical products (Ryoo & Kim, 2023). Virtual product examination also cannot fully replace consumers tactile experience with apparel products (Baytar et al., 2020). These mixed effects indicate that search and evaluation cues may not directly explain purchase intention unless the affective mechanism behind consumer response is also considered.

Emotional engagement provides that affective mechanism. In the context of TikTok Live fashion commerce, consumers do not only process product information; they also experience enjoyment, closeness, excitement, social presence, and confidence during the live session. Emotional engagement refers to the intensity of consumers' emotional responses and their

affective connection with the platform, content, and live shopping interaction (Shen et al., 2022). It extends Information Foraging Theory by explaining how useful cues do more than reduce search costs. They also create emotional comfort, social attachment, and personal relevance. Search and evaluation cues may reduce uncertainty, but emotional engagement explains why these cues become persuasive in a live shopping environment. More than a fleeting response, emotional engagement is a psychological process that influences perceived product value, user trust, and consumer purchase decisions (Akram et al., 2021). However, emotional engagement does not always produce direct buying intention, as emotional responses may enhance brand evaluation without necessarily generating immediate purchase intention (Sansone & Balconi, 2022). This unresolved relationship makes emotional engagement important to test as a mediator between LSC cues and purchase intention.

This study is motivated by the rapid growth of LSC, the dominance of TikTok Live in Indonesian digital consumption, and the continuing uncertainty of online fashion purchasing. Prior research has examined live streaming cues and purchase intention, but the mediating role of emotional engagement remains underdeveloped, particularly in Indonesia's mid-range women's fashion market. This study addresses that gap by integrating Information Foraging Theory with emotional engagement to explain how consumers move from cue-based information processing to purchase intention in TikTok Live. The study examines how search cues and evaluation cues influence purchase intention through emotional engagement. Its findings are expected to contribute to live streaming commerce literature and provide practical insight for fashion brands seeking to optimize digital marketing strategies through credible streamers, interactive audiences, persuasive pricing, and effective product visualization.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Information Foraging Theory (IFT), introduced by Pirolli and Card (1999), explains how individuals select information sources that provide the highest value with the lowest cognitive effort. The theory assumes that users act adaptively in information-rich environments by searching, collecting, filtering, and processing cues that help them reach better decisions (Pirolli, 2007). In this view, consumers do not process all available information equally. They prioritize cues that appear relevant, efficient, and useful for reducing uncertainty. IFT therefore emphasizes a cost-benefit logic in decision-making, where users compare the time and effort required to obtain information with the expected value of that information. Empirical work also shows that users adjust their search strategies to optimize efficiency in complex information environments (Nwagwu, 2024). In live streaming commerce, this theory is useful because consumers face a dense flow of product demonstrations, streamer messages, viewer comments, promotional signals, and social reactions. These cues help consumers decide whether a product deserves attention, evaluation, emotional involvement, and eventual purchase consideration.

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's tendency or willingness to purchase a product or service in the future. It represents an early psychological indicator of buying behavior, even though intention does not always lead to actual purchase (Chen et al., 2017). The concept also reflects consumers planned or expected decision to buy a product or service in a future transaction (Bhutto & Rütelioné, 2025). In live streaming commerce, purchase intention is shaped not only by product attributes, but also by the fit between the endorser, the product, and the consumer's perception of the live shopping experience (Park & Lin, 2020). For this reason, purchase intention is commonly positioned as the main outcome in marketing studies because it captures the final evaluative stage before actual consumer behavior. In the context of TikTok Live fashion commerce, purchase intention becomes especially relevant because consumers must form buying interest without direct physical inspection of apparel products.

Search cues are information signals that help consumers search for and identify appropriate live-stream sessions (Liu et al., 2023). In this study, search cues are represented by streamer attractiveness and co-viewer involvement. Streamer attractiveness refers to the perceived appeal of the streamer, including visual appeal, personal charm, and value similarity

that may increase perceived product value and message effectiveness (Kim and Park, 2023). This concept also captures the tendency of consumers to form emotional understanding and reactions toward a person, which may create a sense of connection or interpersonal bond (Li et al., 2025). In TikTok Live fashion commerce, an attractive streamer can help consumers identify which products are worth noticing because the streamer becomes an informational and emotional signal within the live session. Co-viewer involvement refers to the level of viewer participation and interaction during a live streaming session. High levels of chat activity, questions, and viewer responses signal that the session contains valuable information or attractive products (Gao et al., 2021). Interactions among viewers also create a sense of community and a social shopping experience that resembles traditional shopping modes (Fei et al., 2021). Thus, co-viewer involvement works as a social search cue because consumers can use other viewers' reactions to judge product relevance and shopping value.

Evaluation cues are information signals that help consumers evaluate products during live-stream sessions (Liu et al., 2023). In this study, evaluation cues are represented by social pricing and substitutability of personal examination. Social pricing refers to pricing mechanisms that use the collaborative and interactive nature of live streaming shopping to create a sense of community among audiences with similar interests (Gao et al., 2022). In live streaming commerce, social pricing shapes product value perception because consumers evaluate price not only as an economic signal, but also as a social signal influenced by the reactions, urgency, and bargaining power of other viewers (Bawack et al., 2023). Substitutability of personal examination refers to the extent to which consumers can assess a product without direct physical inspection. In online fashion purchasing, this issue is critical because consumers cannot touch the fabric, test the fit, or inspect product details directly. Live streaming commerce can reduce this limitation through close-up displays, usage demonstrations, size comparisons, and real-time product explanations (Cai & Wohn, 2019). This capability becomes stronger when streamers provide detailed demonstrations and product presentations that help replace parts of the physical inspection experience in online shopping (Zhang, 2023).

Emotional engagement refers to the intensity of consumers emotional responses and their affective connection with the platform, content, streamer, and live shopping interaction (Shen et al., 2022). In live streaming commerce, emotional engagement operates as a key mediator because consumers do not only search for information or evaluate products rationally. They also respond to the social atmosphere, streamer presence, peer interaction, pricing excitement, and product visualization. Strong emotional engagement can enhance perceived product value, build trust in the streamer, and increase consumers willingness to purchase (Akram et al., 2021). This mediating role extends Information Foraging Theory by showing that useful information cues do not stop at cognitive evaluation. Search cues and evaluation cues may first reduce uncertainty and make the live session easier to process. They can then generate interest, enjoyment, closeness, and confidence. The mode is presented in Figure 1.

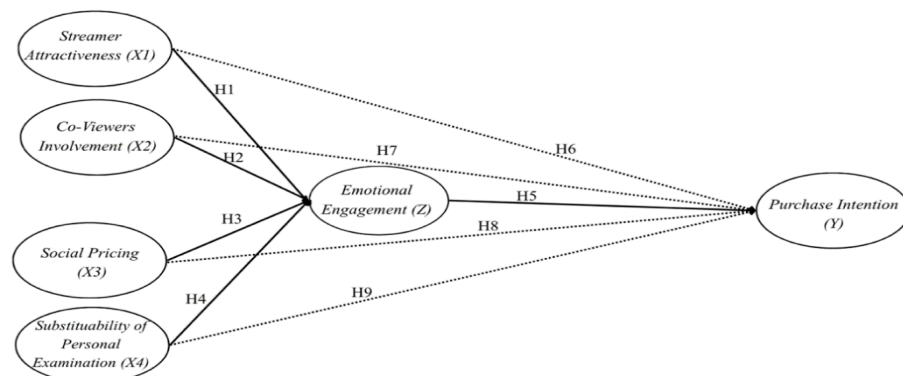


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative causal or associative approach to examine the relationships among live streaming cues, emotional engagement, and purchase intention (Sugiyono, 2019). The study was designed to test whether search cues and evaluation cues influence purchase intention directly and indirectly through emotional engagement. The independent variables consisted of search cues, represented by streamer attractiveness (X1) and co-viewer involvement (X2), and evaluation cues, represented by social pricing (X3) and substitutability of personal examination (X4). Emotional engagement (Z) was positioned as the mediating variable, while purchase intention (Y) was positioned as the dependent variable.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to TikTok Live users in Indonesia. The questionnaire consisted of respondent identity questions and closed-ended measurement items. All construct items were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The instrument contained 25 indicators: five items for streamer attractiveness, four items for co-viewer involvement, four items for social pricing, four items for substitutability of personal examination, four items for emotional engagement, and four items for purchase intention. Before completing the main questionnaire, respondents were screened to ensure that they were TikTok Live users, had watched women's fashion live streaming content, and were familiar with mid-range fashion brands such as This Is April, Ecinós, and ShopatVelvet.

The population of this study consisted of TikTok Live users in Indonesia who actively engage with women's fashion content. Because the exact population size could not be determined, this study used non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling technique. Respondents were selected based on their relevance to the research context, namely their exposure to TikTok Live women's fashion content and their familiarity with mid-range fashion brands. The sample size was determined based on Hair et al. (2021), who recommend using 5–10 times the number of indicators in SEM-PLS analysis. With 25 indicators, this study used 250 respondents, meeting the recommended sample size of 25×10 . This sample size was considered adequate for estimating the proposed SEM-PLS model (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS with SmartPLS. The analysis followed two main stages. First, the outer model was evaluated to assess the quality of the measurement model through indicator loading, convergent validity, discriminant validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability. Second, the inner model was evaluated to examine the structural relationships among variables through R-square, f-square, Q-square, path coefficient testing, and mediation testing. Hypothesis testing was conducted using bootstrapping in SmartPLS to determine the significance of direct and indirect effects. Secondary data from journals, books, and related sources were used to support the theoretical foundation and interpretation of the research findings.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the measurement model. All outer loadings range from 0.917 to 0.961, exceeding the 0.708 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha (0.950–0.969) and composite reliability (0.954–0.973) exceed 0.70, and average variance extracted exceeds 0.50 for every construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity and internal consistency are confirmed.

Table 1. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Indicator	Loading	Alpha	CR	AVE
Streamer Attractiveness	X1.1	0.956	0.969	0.973	0.891
	X1.2	0.939			
	X1.3	0.955			
	X1.4	0.917			
	X1.5	0.951			

Co-Viewer Involvement	X2.1	0.943	0.959	0.959	0.890
	X2.2	0.944			
	X2.3	0.938			
	X2.4	0.949			
Social Pricing	X3.1	0.961	0.955	0.958	0.882
	X3.2	0.938			
	X3.3	0.920			
	X3.4	0.937			
Substitutability of Personal Examination	X4.1	0.951	0.950	0.954	0.870
	X4.2	0.922			
	X4.3	0.937			
	X4.4	0.921			
Emotional Engagement	Z1	0.952	0.952	0.955	0.874
	Z2	0.927			
	Z3	0.941			
	Z4	0.919			
Purchase Intention	Y1	0.959	0.960	0.961	0.893
	Y2	0.920			
	Y3	0.946			
	Y4	0.954			

Source: Processed primary data, 2026.

Discriminant Validity

Table 2 reports the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios. All values range from 0.517 to 0.674, below the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015). Discriminant validity is established for all construct pairs.

Table 2. Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Results

Construct	CVI	EE	PI	SP	SA
Co-Viewer Involvement (CVI)	—				
Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.648	—			
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.633	0.674	—		
Social Pricing (SP)	0.517	0.606	0.603	—	
Streamer Attractiveness (SA)	0.543	0.599	0.600	0.567	—
Substitutability P Examination (SPE)	0.626	0.652	0.655	0.605	0.619

Source: Processed primary data, 2026. Note: HTMT values below 0.90 indicate that discriminant validity is established.

Structural Model

Table 3 reports the structural estimates. The R^2 values are 0.544 for emotional engagement and 0.563 for purchase intention, indicating moderate explanatory power. All five direct paths are significant ($t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$). Co-viewer involvement has the strongest effect on emotional engagement ($\beta = 0.289$), followed by substitutability of personal examination ($\beta = 0.221$), social pricing ($\beta = 0.210$), and streamer attractiveness ($\beta = 0.180$). Emotional engagement predicts purchase intention ($\beta = 0.229$). The f^2 values range from 0.040 to 0.106. All four indirect paths through emotional engagement are significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that emotional engagement mediates each antecedent's effect on purchase intention.

Table 3. Structural Model Results

Relationships		β	t-statistic	p-value	f^2 / R^2	Decision
Streamer Attractiveness	→	0.180	2.931	0.003	0.040	Supported
Emotional Engagement						
Co-Viewer Involvement	→	0.289	4.171	<0.001	0.106	Supported
Emotional Engagement						
Social Pricing	→	0.210	3.134	0.002	0.057	Supported
Emotional Engagement						
Substitutability of Personal Examination	→	0.221	2.929	0.003	0.052	Supported
→ Emotional Engagement						
Emotional Engagement	→	0.229	3.889	<0.001	0.055	Supported
Purchase Intention						
Streamer Attractiveness	→	0.041	2.363	0.018	—	Supported
Emotional Engagement	→					
Purchase Intention						
Co-Viewer Involvement	→	0.066	2.822	0.005	—	Supported
Emotional Engagement	→					
Purchase Intention						
Social Pricing	→	0.048	2.433	0.015	—	Supported
Emotional Engagement	→					
Purchase Intention						
Substitutability of Personal Examination	→	0.051	2.164	0.031	—	Supported
→ Emotional Engagement						
Emotional Engagement	→	—	—	—	0.544	Moderate
Purchase Intention		—	—	—	0.563	Moderate

Source: Processed primary data, 2026. Note: β is the original sample coefficient. f^2 is reported for direct paths and R^2 for endogenous constructs. A path is supported when $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that streamer attractiveness has a positive and significant effect on emotional engagement. This result indicates that consumers are more emotionally involved when they perceive the streamer as attractive, expressive, and suitable for the product being presented. In TikTok Live fashion commerce, streamer attractiveness works not only as visual appeal, but also as an interpersonal cue that helps viewers feel closer to the live shopping experience. This finding supports previous studies showing that streamer attractiveness strengthens trust,

enjoyment, and audience connection in live commerce (Ariffin & Fikry, 2025). Streamers who are perceived as attractive can provide a more immersive experience, thereby increasing emotional engagement, which ultimately contributes to maintaining viewer interest (Dang-Van et al., 2023). High levels of attractiveness also increase with increased audience attention span and more active consumer responses, including continued engagement intentions (Tang et al., 2024).

Co-viewer involvement also has a positive and significant effect on emotional engagement, and it shows the strongest effect among the examined antecedents. This finding suggests that TikTok Live fashion shopping is not merely a seller-to-buyer interaction. It is also a crowd-based social experience where viewer comments, questions, reactions, and participation shape the emotional atmosphere of the session. When viewers observe active participation from other consumers, they may perceive the product as more interesting, socially validated, and worth considering. This supports prior research showing that audience interaction can trigger emotional contagion, where the enthusiasm of other viewers affects individual emotional responses toward the product (Hu et al., 2017). Audience engagement also strengthens social connectedness with the streamer and fellow viewers, enhancing a more immersive experience (Kowert & Daniel, 2021), and creates a dynamic virtual social environment that strengthens emotional responses and a sense of connection in live streaming commerce (Meng et al., 2021).

The findings further reveal that social pricing has a positive and significant effect on emotional engagement. This means that price-related cues in TikTok Live can generate emotional responses when consumers perceive them as socially meaningful, urgent, or collectively beneficial. Social pricing does not operate only as a monetary incentive. It also creates a sense of participation because viewers see price offers, discounts, and promotional urgency unfold in front of a live audience. This finding aligns with prior research showing that social pricing can increase perceived engagement by rewarding social interaction and strengthening consumers' emotional attachment to the brand (Gao et al., 2022). Social pricing may also shift consumers from passive spectators into active participants in value formation, especially when the audience perceives the offer as part of a shared shopping moment (Gao et al., 2023). Group-based discounts and similar pricing mechanisms can therefore make the shopping experience more interactive, enjoyable, and satisfying (Pratono, 2018).

Substitutability of personal examination also positively and significantly influences emotional engagement. This result is important in the fashion context because online apparel shopping contains sensory uncertainty. Consumers cannot touch the material, test the fit, or directly inspect product details. TikTok Live reduces this limitation when streamers provide close-up visuals, usage demonstrations, styling examples, and real-time product explanations. These features help consumers imagine the physical qualities of the product and reduce perceived risk. The finding is consistent with previous research showing that virtual product evaluation can strengthen emotional connection to the shopping experience (Cai & Wohn, 2019). Product demonstrations also create authenticity and trust because consumers receive richer information before forming purchase interest (Wongkitrungrueng, 2017). In this sense, live streaming can partly mimic the pleasure and confidence of physical-store shopping, especially when consumers can obtain vivid product information during the live session (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020).

Emotional engagement has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. This confirms that consumers who feel interested, connected, entertained, and emotionally involved during TikTok Live sessions are more likely to develop buying interest. Emotional engagement therefore becomes a central psychological mechanism in live streaming commerce. Consumers may enter the session to search for fashion information, but their purchase intention becomes stronger when the session creates affective value. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that emotional engagement positively influences purchase intentions, through mechanisms such as parasocial relationships and perceived authenticity (Akhmad, 2025). Positive emotions also improve consumer attitudes and create more favorable perceptions of the shopping experience, thus driving purchase intentions (Al-Aziz & Metawie, 2022). A more

emotionally engaging shopping experience can make consumers perceive the product and the live session more positively, which then strengthens purchase intention (Rehman et al., 2023). The mediation results show that emotional engagement significantly mediates the relationships between streamer attractiveness, co-viewer involvement, social pricing, substitutability of personal examination, and purchase intention. These results indicate that live streaming cues do not only work through cognitive evaluation. They also work by creating emotional involvement that moves consumers closer to purchase intention. Streamer attractiveness can form an emotional bond with viewers, and this bond increases the likelihood of purchase intention (Dang-Van et al., 2023). This emotional connection is crucial because it contributes to an increased likelihood of purchase intention (Herman and Amelinda, 2025). Furthermore, a streamer's physical attractiveness is a key factor in attracting and retaining viewers' attention. Attractive streamers tend to create a more visually and emotionally engaging environment, which can ultimately increase purchase intention (Tang et al., 2024). Co-viewer involvement strengthens purchase intention because viewer participation increases perceived emotional value and makes the shopping experience more interactive (Batara & Sugiarto, 2024). Peer feedback and viewer interaction can transmit emotional responses that influence purchasing behavior (Wang & Musa, 2024), while live interactivity fosters presence and emotional connection among viewers (Wu et al., 2023).

The mediating role of emotional engagement also explains how social pricing and substitutability of personal examination affect purchase intention. Social pricing can create perceived involvement through social interaction and community-based price benefits, which then strengthens purchase intention (Gao et al., 2022). It may also increase consumption visibility and reinforce the social value of the product, thereby increasing demand (Gao et al., 2023). Pricing mechanisms that are perceived as fair, engaging, and socially relevant can generate positive emotional responses such as trust and fairness (Habib & Almamy, 2025). Similarly, substitutability of personal examination increases purchase intention because real-time product demonstrations improve consumer understanding of product features and benefits (Hwang & Youn, 2022). Product presentation in live streaming can trigger emotional responses that connect virtual product assessment with purchase behavior (Wang & Musa, 2024). Consumer engagement therefore becomes a key mechanism linking live shopping experience to purchase intention (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). Overall, these findings show that TikTok Live fashion commerce becomes persuasive when information cues are transformed into emotional engagement. The stronger the emotional connection created through streamer appeal, audience interaction, social pricing, and product visualization, the stronger the consumer's intention to purchase.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE

All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. They were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research. This study was conducted independently without any financial or commercial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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