

Social Commerce of Indian Customers : Role of Social Media Usage

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Abstract

Time spent by users on social or digital media is greatly influenced by the avenues available on social media to engage the users. Social commerce constructs happen to be such avenues. Social commerce constructs influence social media usage, which, in turn, influences the purchase of products online. In this context, the role of social media usage on online purchase intentions was examined in this paper. Though there are many studies on various factors influencing online purchase intentions, this paper focused on finding the impact of social commerce and social media usage on online purchase intentions. Questionnaires were sent to 500 respondents, who were social media users covering different parts of India. Their use of social media and social commerce constructs such as recommendations, ratings and forums, and their impact on online purchase intentions were measured. The results of multiple regression showed that social commerce constructs and social media usage had a positive effect on online purchase intentions. Thus, based on the research findings, it was suggested that companies should use social media platforms to engage their customers in such a way that they are online for a longer duration. However, this would have a social implication as people who spend more time on social media must be aware that their impulse purchases might go up.

Keywords : Social commerce constructs, social media usage, online purchase intention, social media marketing, ratings and referrals, ratings and reviews, forums and communities

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The influence of social media in people's lives has become very evident. The social life of consumers today is primarily online, and they are very mobile. Businesses are also designing strategies to attract prospective customers on social networks before they check their online stores. The extent of this influence can be understood from the fact that almost 90% of consumers browse social media for assistance in buying decisions, and nearly 75% of buyers purchase it on social or digital platforms (Beese, 2016). Before purchasing a product or service, consumers look for information about it online. User ratings and reviews of the product/service give them important cues about the product/service. Organizations have ensured their presence online, which has also allowed consumers to post reviews about the services they received. Apart from the organization's website, third-party websites also provide comparisons about different product alternatives. Hence, from being company-generated information on quality (in the form of advertisements, price, brand name, etc.), perception of quality has become user-controlled (in the form of ratings and reviews). Though it is understood that social media is an important influence in carrying out social commerce, there are hardly any studies that investigate the impact of the extent of usage. The present study thus looks into this aspect and poses the following research questions :

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- ↪ **RQ1** : Is there an influence of social media usage on online purchase intentions ?
- ↪ **RQ2** : What is the influence of social constructs (Recommendations, ratings, and forums) and social media usage on the online purchase intentions of customers ?
- ↪ **RQ3** : Does the tendency to buy online increase with longer time spent on social or digital media ?

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Interpersonal communication is aided through various online communication channels. Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia – a content community, and multimedia platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, etc., provide avenues to both individuals and businesses to network, develop social and business relationships, and maintain them (Alalwan et al., 2017 ; Alryalat et al., 2017). Customers read the ratings and reviews about a product, check the recommendations, and discuss in forums. Hajli (2015) called these the social commerce constructs (SCCs). SCCs provide an avenue to engage customers with social media. Due to the opportunities social networking sites (SNS) present to marketers and the significance of these SNSs in the consumers' lives, social media usage is being studied extensively to understand customer behavior (Bulut & Doğan, 2017).

Social Media Usage (SMU)

The role played by traditional mass media, such as TV, radio, newspapers, etc., in shaping social behavior and influencing consumers' thought processes has presently been taken over by social media (“Millennials forsake TV for smart devices,” 2015 ; Uitz, 2012). This new media is now an integral part of the consumer's lifestyle, and social media usage is growing exponentially, the critical motivator being social interaction (Muhammad et al., 2017). The popularity of social media has revolutionized marketing practices (Hanna et al., 2011). Businesses utilize the opportunity provided by SNSs to interact and engage with potential customers and nurture close relationships with consumers and potential customers (Chandel et al., 2017 ; Mersey et al., 2010 ; Shimpi, 2018). The individual consumers also get a platform of SNSs to raise their voice and access information related to products they wish to purchase (Arora et al., 2018 ; Kozinets et al., 2010). The usage of SNSs is found to be influenced by many factors like cultural factors (Pookulangaran & Koesler, 2011), psychological ownership motivation (Elena et al., 2015), and obtaining product information (Millson, 2016). All of these influence the tendency to buy online. Thus, the first hypothesis formed is :

- ↪ **H01** : There is no significant influence of social media usage on online purchase intentions.
- ↪ **Ha1** : There is a significant influence of social media usage on online purchase intentions.

Social Commerce

When SNSs became a platform for purchase activities, the concept of social commerce as a subset of e-commerce was brought in (Hajli, 2014b ; Kim & Park, 2013).

The time spent on social media is greatly influenced by the avenues available in social media to engage the users. Social commerce constructs (SCC) are such avenues. These social platforms owe their existence to Web 2.0 technology, and it enabled the users to generate content (Liang & Turban, 2012). Ratings and reviews enabled individuals to post their comments, product reviews, and product ratings (Chen et al., 2011). This turned out to be beneficial to other potential customers looking for such information before making their purchase decisions. Online communities and forums provide a social environment, which enables social interaction among customers.

People obtain information about products from such communities, and they support each other (Bai et al., 2015 ; Lu et al., 2010 ; Zeng et al., 2009).

Online Purchase Intention

In this study, online purchase intention is conceptualized as consumers' intention to purchase through SNSs. The technology acceptance model is a core theory in e-commerce studies, and authors primarily included the intention to buy as a construct of TAM. Hajli (2015) found that social commerce constructs along with trust influenced the intention to buy online. The influence of activities on SNSs on online purchase intention was seen for leather products (Kosarizadeh & Hamdi, 2015), and Balakrishnan et al. (2014) proved the relationship among Generation Y.

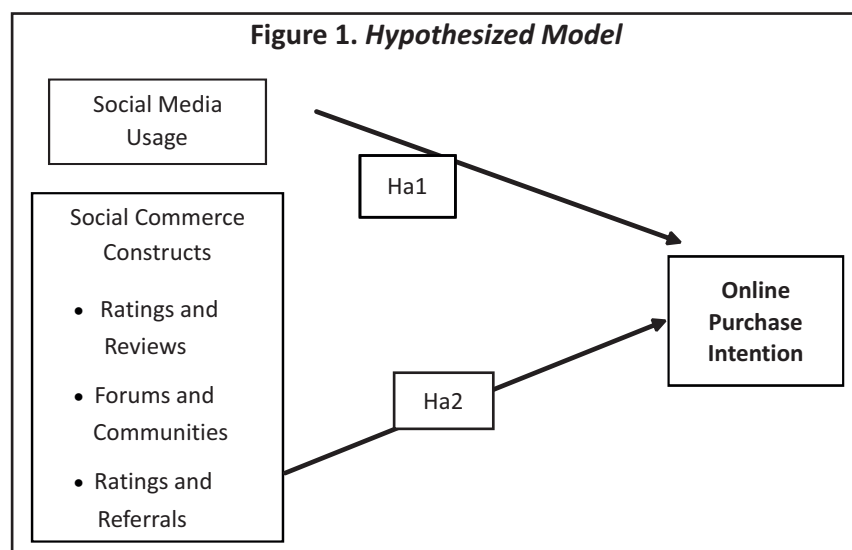
Thus, the second hypothesis being tested is stated as :

- ↪ **H02** : Social commerce constructs do not significantly influence online purchase intentions.
- ↪ **Ha2** : Social commerce constructs significantly influence online purchase intentions.

Research Gap

Though it has been proved that SMU and SCC influence online purchase intentions, it would be interesting to find the combined effect of these variables on online purchase intentions. More than that, people who participate on various social platforms tend to spend more time on SNSs and have more probability of being exposed to marketing communications on social networking sites. Thus, their intention to purchase online must be more than that of others who spend considerably less time on social media. This aspect has not been investigated so far. Thus, the third hypothesis is framed as :

- ↪ **H03** : Longer social media usage does not have a significant influence on online purchase intentions.
- ↪ **Ha3** : Longer social media usage has a significant influence on online purchase intentions.



The hypothesized model being investigated in this study is figuratively depicted in Figure 1. It can also be expressed as :

$$PI = \alpha + \beta_1(SMU) + \beta_2(SCC)$$

where,

PI = Purchase intention,

SMU = Social media usage,

SCC = Social commerce constructs.

Methodology

This study investigates the role of SMU and social commerce constructs on online purchase intentions. Hence, the study is explanatory in nature. Primary research is quantitative, and primary data were collected from the sample respondents during November 2018 – February 2019 by conducting a survey. As cited earlier, the social media usage of Indian customers increased significantly during this time period, so I decided to take up this study. Six types of social media are being considered in this study : SNSs (Facebook, Twitter) ; blogs (personal blogs) ; content communities (YouTube) ; collaborative projects (Wikipedia) ; virtual social worlds (Second Life) ; and virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft) according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). A proxy was developed for social media usage at an aggregate level to measure social media usage aggregating all these six social media types.

First, a focus group discussion was conducted involving 20 post-graduate students to understand their social media usage. The discussions revealed that all these social media types were very much in use. Second, the extent of usage of these was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*). Third, a measure of aggregate social media use was developed by aggregating all these new media usages. The extent of social media use was the sum of survey responses to the use of the six types of new media (Fichman, 2001).

The second variable in consideration is SCCs. It includes three dimensions : ratings – reviews, forums – communities, and referrals – recommendations. The items to measure these were adapted from Han and Windsor (2011). Online purchase intention was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Yoo and Donthu (2001). All these items were measured using a 5 - point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Most of the SNSs have an age restriction to access these sites. The minimum age requirement varies from 13 – 18 years for different sites (Bennett, 2014). Thus, in this study, the respondents aged 16 years and above were selected. Previous research showed that it is the youngsters whose social media usage is more ; so, care was taken to include more respondents aged between 25 – 44 years (Duggan, 2015). Thus, instead of including an equal number of respondents from different age groups, it would be more meaningful to have more respondents from those age groups that use social media more. Hence, they will be purchasing more online.

The online questionnaire was administered to more than 500 respondents from various parts of India after confirming that they used social media and had purchased from online sites as well. Since the population is large, convenience sampling was used to identify the respondents, and the questionnaire was sent as a Google form. Around 400 responses were received, out of which 309 responses were usable. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-17) was used to code and analyze the data. The influence of independent variables on the dependent variable is found using regression. ANOVA is used to determine the difference of influence on online purchase intention based on the time spent on social media, and a means plot pictorially demonstrates this effect.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean
Social Media Usage	0.746	3.05
Forums and Communities	0.857	3.06
Ratings and Reviews	0.854	3.26
Recommendations & Referrals	0.774	3.28
Online Purchase Intention	0.916	3.18

Since the research instrument is based on previous research studies, the validity of the tool is ensured. The reliability values of all three variables and the mean values are given in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha is above 0.7 for social media usage and recommendations & referrals, which is the universally accepted standard to indicate the internal consistency of a variable. The alpha value is more than 0.8 for forums and communities and ratings and reviews, thus indicating good internal consistency ; the value for online purchase intentions is above 0.9, showing high internal consistency (Pallant, 2010).

The mean value for all the variables is above three on a 5-point scale. Thus, it can be inferred that most of the respondents agreed that social media usage (SMU) and social commerce constructs (SCC) influence online purchase intentions.

Analysis and Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 presents the sample profile, social media usage details, login pattern of respondents, and time spent per

Table 2. Sample Profile and Social Media Usage Details

Particulars	Frequency	%	
Gender	Male	156	50.5
	Female	153	49.5
	Total	309	100
Age	16–24	158	51.1
	25–34	114	36.9
	35–44	16	5.2
	45–54	17	5.5
	55+	4	1.3
	Total	309	100
Education	Senior high school and less	13	4.2
	Technical school/Some college	37	12
	Graduation	138	44.7
	Post-Graduation and above	121	39.2
	Total	309	100
Social Media Usage	1–6 months	7	2.3
	6 months–1 year	18	5.8

	1–2 years	28	9.1
	2–3 years	43	13.9
	More than 3 years	213	68.9
	Total	309	100
Login Pattern	Always connected	83	26.9
	Several times a day	148	47.9
	Every 3 days	36	11.7
	Once in a week	24	7.8
	Occasionally (less than once a week)	18	5.8
	Total	309	100
Time Spent per Login Session (in minutes)	Less than 5	16	5.2
	5–15	96	31.1
	16–29	71	23
	30–60	68	22
	More than 60	58	18.8
	Total	309	100

login session. An almost equal number of males and females were selected for the study, that is, 156 and 153, respectively ; 51% of the sample comprised of respondents in the age group of 16 – 24 years and 37% were aged between 25 – 34 years. Thus, the sample included young respondents in the majority. This is in accordance with the findings of Duggan (2015) and Ioană and Stoica (2014) regarding the age profile of social media users. In the Indian context, Statista (2021a,b) reported that the age of the highest number of male and female Facebook users was between 18 and 24 years. The number of male users was around 62 million ; whereas, the number of female users was about 21 million.

Nearly 40% of the respondents had a post-graduation or above educational qualification, and around 45% were graduates. Approximately 70% of the respondents had been using various SNSs for more than 3 years, 14% of them were using it since the past 2 – 3 years, and 9% were using it for the last 2 years (see Table 2). Thus, the sampling ensured that there were respondents from varied educational backgrounds.

Approximately 48% of the respondents logged in several times a day, about one-fourth of them were always connected, 12% of them checked once in 3 days, 8% of the respondents logged in once in a week, and 6% of the respondents logged in even less than that.

Thus, the majority of the respondents were those who used social networking sites very frequently. These results match with the findings of Ioană and Stoica (2014) and Balakrishnan et al. (2014), who also obtained a similar frequency of respondents logging into SNSs ; 31.1% of the respondents spent up to 15 minutes per login session, 23% of them spent close to 30 minutes per session, 22% spent more than an hour per login session, 18.8% spent more than an hour per session, and only 5.2% respondents spent less than 5 minutes per session. Thus, it can be seen that the sample selected for the study was appropriate as the majority of the respondents showed high SMU.

Regression Analysis

Table 3 demonstrates the results of the hypotheses testing using correlation and multiple regression. A positive linear relationship between social media usage and purchase intention can be seen, and the correlation value is 0.499. Similarly, there is a positive linear relationship between SCCs and purchase intention, and the correlation

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

		Social Media Usage	Purchase Intention	Social Commerce Constructs
Social Media Usage	Pearson Correlation	1	0.499**	0.422**
	Sig. (2 tailed)		0.000	0.000
	N	309	309	309
Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	0.499**	1	0.421**
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.000		0.000
	N	309	309	309
Social Commerce Constructs	Pearson Correlation	0.422**	0.421**	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.000	0.000	
	N	309	309	309

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

Table 4. Regression Model Summary^b

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate	Durbin - Watson
1	0.550 ^a	0.303	0.298	0.86813	1.772

a. Predictors : (Constant), Social Commerce Constructs, Social Media Usage.

b. Dependent variable : Purchase Intention.

Table 5. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	100.153	2	50.077	66.446	0.000
Residual	230.616	306	0.754		
Total	330.769	308			

value is 0.421. From the correlation values, it can be understood that the variables show moderate correlation, and the correlation between the variables is significant.

Table 4 shows the regression values, and it shows that SMU and social commerce constructs explain 29.8% variation in the online purchase intentions. The Durbin–Watson test statistic is 1.772, which lies between the critical value of 1.5 and 2.5, and hence, the data is not autocorrelated (Field, 2009).

Table 5 shows the ANOVA table and explains that the model is significant. It can be seen that both SCC and social media usage are significant predictors. The *p*-values are less than 0.01, and hence, the hypotheses Ha1 and Ha2 are accepted.

Table 6 shows the values of the coefficients. The values show that social media usage has a higher impact than SCC as the beta values are 0.390 and 0.257, respectively. The regression equation can be stated as :

$$PI = 0.536 (SMU) + .355 (SCC)$$

The third aspect of this research is the impact of the duration of SMU on purchase intentions. As shown in Table 6, the beta values indicate that SMU significantly influences online purchase intentions. The results of the

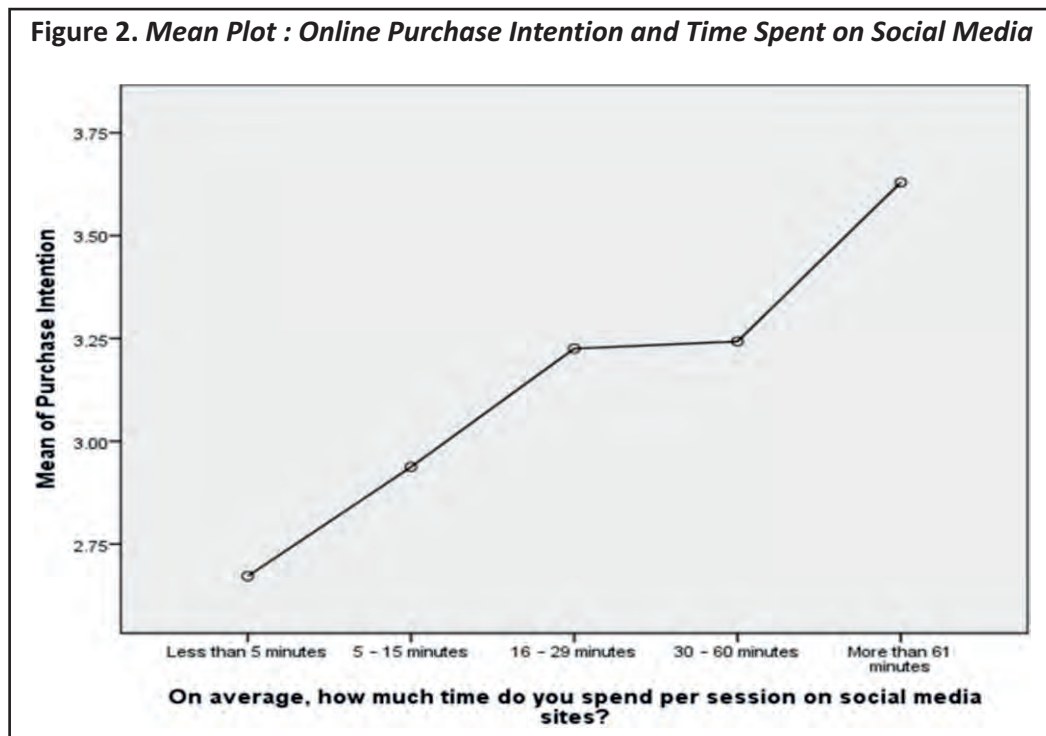
Table 6. Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coefficients	t	Sig.	Result
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
		1. (Constant)	0.410	0.250			
Ha1	Social Media Usage	0.536	0.072	0.390	7.415	0.000*	Accepted
Ha2	Social Commerce Constructs	0.355	0.073	0.257	4.873	0.000*	Accepted

Dependent variable : Purchase Intention.

Table 7. ANOVA – Time Spent Per Session

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Purchase Intention	Between groups	21.884	4	5.471	5.384	0.000
	Within groups	308.886	304	1.016		
	Total	330.769	308			
Social Commerce Constructs	Between groups	6.137	4	1.534	2.803	0.026
	Within groups	166.425	304	0.547		
	Total	172.562	308			



ANOVA test done to check this are shown in Table 7. Since the *p* - values are less than 0.05 ; hence, hypothesis Ha3 is accepted that longer SMU has a significant influence on online purchase intentions. The mean plot of

the same is also demonstrated in Figure 2, which shows that increased timespan on SNSs increases the intentions to purchase online.

Discussion

The research framework presented in Figure 1 is well supported by the results obtained after data analysis. The hypotheses (Ha1, Ha2, and Ha3) regarding the directional linkages among the variables are also supported. The empirical results support that SMU and SCC influence online purchase intentions. The correlation values (Table 3) prove that there is a positive linear relationship between SMU and purchase intention as well as social commerce constructs. The values of coefficients (Table 6) prove that SMU has more influence on purchase intention than SCCs. In other words, the more time the individuals spend on SNSs, the more prone they are to buy products online.

Several international studies have investigated the various factors influencing the usage of SNSs and their influence on purchase intentions. The findings of this study are similar to them. For instance, Balakrishnan et al. (2014) found in their study that promotions carried out by the companies utilizing online media in the form of e-WOM, communities, and advertisements in the online media produced results by showing an increase in brand loyalty and purchase intention among generation Y. It was observed in many other studies that customers used various SNSs to gather product-related information which, in turn, influences their purchase intentions (Hajli, 2014a ; Ioană & Stoica, 2014 ; Millson, 2016). The social media platforms examined in these studies included some SNSs and some of the SCCs. This study also shows that SCCs positively influence purchase intentions (refer to Table 4), which is similar to the earlier research findings.

As the degree of usage of social media increases, the chances of being exposed to SCCs like recommendations, ratings, and forums increases as companies are using SNSs extensively to promote their products. Thus, SMU leads to people getting influenced by social commerce constructs which, in turn, influences their online purchase intentions. The results of this study resonate with many other similar studies conducted in other South Asian countries. The impact of social network marketing and consumer purchase intention was seen to be partially mediated by consumer engagement in Pakistan (Husnain & Toor, 2017). Participation in social networking sites moderated the relationship between consumer satisfaction and marketing - mix elements (Sharma et al., 2019). Social media marketing was found to influence the purchase intention of fashion retailer brands in Sri Lanka (Wijegunawardhana & Weerasiri, 2017). The effectiveness of social media advertising was brought out by Padival et al. (2019).

Implications for Business Marketing Practice

The results of this study do not deviate from the findings of the earlier studies. The contribution of this study is that there are no prior studies that investigated the impact of SMU and SCCs together on online purchase intentions. This is an encouraging finding for the marketing practitioners as social media continues to be a positive tool in influencing customers' purchase intentions. Companies should use SNSs to engage the customers so that they spend more time on SNSs. The significance of social media marketing and the potential of social media in influencing the consumers in their purchase decisions is explained in the earlier part of this paper.

Marketers in India must strategically use these findings to engage the customers more with their social media marketing activities. Social marketing plans must correctly use the social commerce constructs to engage the customers with the marketing activities of a company and its products and make the customers partners in the company's marketing activities. This can be done by making the customers advocate the company's products through the social media platforms available. It would be good to offer additional support to customers through the

company's social media page, where customers are given an opportunity to air their views, reviews, and comments. Many companies are already doing this. The online marketing strategies must be continually amended and upgraded to reflect the customers' suggested changes. Newer activities to engage the customers through social media will work wonders for the companies. Similar results have been found in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Thus, multinational companies operating in South Asian nations can benefit by implementing social media marketing strategies that correspond with the present study's findings.

Conclusion

The study finds that SMU has a significant influence on online purchase intentions. Social media usage is investigated along with social commerce constructs, and the results show that SMU has more influence than social commerce constructs. Though it is good news for businesses, for society, it is not a positive finding. Hence, individuals need to judiciously decide on the time they spend on SNSs so that the usage is healthy and productive for them.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research

The sample size for the study is 309 respondents, which cannot be considered to be a large sample. The larger the sample size, the better are the results. Future studies can try to include larger samples. Though care was taken to include respondents from different age groups, educational backgrounds, etc., the sampling method was non-probabilistic. If the sample could be more diverse and random sampling methods could be used, the generalizability of the results could be enhanced. The time spent on SNSs is measured using a 5-point scale. It would have been better if the respondents could be asked to maintain a logbook and record their SMU in it. Also, in this study, the overall impact of social media usage and social commerce construct was studied. It would be more beneficial for companies if it can be investigated which particular social networking site has more influence on purchase intentions.

Author's Contribution

This is a sole author work. Complete aspects of the study, starting from the idea conception, literature review, and designing the research was done by Dr. Smitha Siji. Standard scales were adopted to measure the variables, and the questionnaire was circulated as a Google Form. The analysis and interpretation of data and writing the report – all was done by the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that she has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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