



# Understanding News Consumption Behaviors Across Media Platforms

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## ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to study the consumption behavior of news in Tunisia through different types of media. This research is exploratory. We conducted primarily qualitative research to identify the most important concepts to study. Then, we surveyed 200 participants from different age groups. The descriptive analysis of the data allowed us to understand the consumption behavior of the news. Through data analysis, we identified the variables that have a significant impact on satisfaction and consumption of news. The results showed that when the consumer considers media as credible, they are satisfied with this media.

**Keywords:** news consumption, credibility, mass media, satisfaction, interest in the news.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, Tunisian consumers, like their counterparts around the world, are completely immersed in the world of mass media: television, radio, newspapers, online media, etc. The mass media is an important forum in which journalists, public relations professionals, advertising professionals, and politicians attempt to raise awareness, inform, and influence the public (Golan, 2010). Moreover, according to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's media dependency theory (1976), media coverage could affect the audience on cognitive, affective, and behavioural levels (cited by Zhang and Boukes, 2019).

In Tunisia, the various types of media have undergone a remarkable change in terms of freedom of expression, media evaluation, neutrality, etc. This is what sparked our interest in this research project, whose main objective is to study consumer behaviour towards the mass media. It is therefore important to understand how Tunisians consume news in traditional and online media, as well as the factors that may influence their choices.

With this in mind, we conducted an exploratory study to examine media consumption behaviours in general, and those related to news consumption in particular.

Several communication researchers have taken an interest in studying the credibility of the media, the source, and the message. In this study, we are particularly interested in the credibility of news in different media, which has been little explored in the literature. We presented the concept of credibility in general and, more specifically, the credibility of news. More specifically, we wanted to understand the perception of the degree of credibility of news in different media.

In order to meet the research objective, we began by presenting the written surveys related to the main theoretical concepts, namely: news consumption, media perception, interest in current affairs, etc. We presented the results of semi-structured individual interviews conducted with twelve participants in order to understand people's opinions of the mass media. We then developed the conceptual framework, hypotheses, and research methodology. Finally, we concluded this study with a discussion of the results, a presentation of the limitations, and a presentation of future avenues for further study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### News consumption:

Individuals are influenced by mass communication, which has become a necessity and a habit for most people.

When consumers do not have information, they rely more on the media and current events to form their opinions (Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey, 1987). Indeed, news has an impact on changing levels of knowledge and perception among recipients (Lefevere, Swert, and Walgrave, 2012). In addition, it allows the public to interpret their social environment and adjust their expectations of other actors, such as politicians (Kohring and Matthes, 2007).

There are several types of news, such as economic, political, social, and entertainment news. Individuals do not consume them in the same way. Some consumers want to follow news that conforms to their tastes or prior beliefs rather than being interested in discovering any kind of reality (Xiang and Sarvary, 2007). Others do not always seek out useful and interesting news, but prefer to hear or read news that conforms to their beliefs (Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005). Indeed, according to Huang (2009), cited by Williamson, Qayyum, Hider, and Liu (2012), young people aged 15 to 30 are more interested in consuming sports news (46%), global and local news (43%), and entertainment news (34%). Thus, after surveying 1,200 students, Raeymaeckers (2004) found that young people consume news based primarily on two criteria: entertainment and relevance.

To conclude this first part, we can see that news consumption differs across different media. It is interesting to understand why individuals seek information in certain media rather than others to satisfy specific needs.

### **The choice of media sources:**

Little research had been done into the reasons for choosing one media outlet over another for following the news (Bachmann, Kaufhold, Lewis, and de Zúñiga, 2010). Indeed, to understand the factors that influence the choice of media sources, it is necessary to specify the purpose of this choice (entertainment, relaxation, or obtaining information). There are also other factors such as experience and lifestyle (Williamson, Qayyum, Hider and Liu 2012). The same authors note that most young people prefer to use multiple sources (audiovisual, social networks, etc.) to be better informed on a particular subject, while others do not consider the choice of source to be important when consuming news.

A 2008 survey of 1,000 young people aged 15 to 29 showed that television remains the most widely used source for news consumption (Cauwenberge, Haenens, and Beentjes, 2010). According to Lefevere, Swert, and Walgrave (2012), the impact of a message conveyed by a visual source is more appealing than that conveyed by non-visual sources. However, Williamson, Qayyum, Hider, and Liu (2012) mentioned that participants surf the internet to follow news that they have not found on television or radio.

However, the digital environment is becoming increasingly important in our daily lives, which is motivating most researchers (see, for example, Christie, 2009; Bachmann, Kaufhold, Lewis, and Gil de Zúñiga, 2010) to study the place of traditional media in the face of this technological evolution in news consumption. Even though there is marginalisation at the level of website organisations, consumers prefer to receive news on the internet due to mistrust and bias in traditional media (Christie, 2009). This helps to explain the assertion by Shklovski, Burke, Kiesler, and Kraut (2010) that 'the internet is the only medium that shares critical information' (cited by Glynn, Huge, and Hoffman, 2012). In this sense, social media sites allow users to consume recent and important news that other media outlets may refuse to publish (Glynn, Huge, and Hoffman, 2012).

Social media is becoming increasingly popular and influential among different demographic groups. However, there is little research examining the role of news on social media (Glynn, Huge, and Hoffman,

2012). In their article 'Profiles of news consumers on social networking sites,' Glynn, Huge, and Hoffman (2012) studied the factors related to the use of daily news on Facebook. They found that gender and life satisfaction affect how people follow recent news on Facebook.

### **Media satisfaction: Application of the "Uses and Gratification (U&G)" theory to news consumption**

The 'U&G' theory explains how individuals use different media to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals (Katz, Blumer, and Gurevitch, 1974). This theory aims to explain how and why individuals consciously choose certain types of media over others and how they satisfy their need for 'gratification'. (Cited by Thompson, Wang, and Daya (2019). This perspective makes it possible to analyse satisfaction with news consumption, identify information seeking or monitoring, and identify social utility satisfaction as one of the most relevant factors for



understanding news consumption (Eveland et al., 2003; Rubin, 1984; Katz et al., 1973; Rubin and Perse, 1987; Rayburn et al., 1984, cited by Cauwenberge, Haenens and Beentjes, 2010).

### **Trust in news consumption:**

The concept of trust has been developed in the social sciences since the 1990s (Earle and Cvetkovich, 1995; Giddens, 1990; Hardin, 2002; Misztal, 1996, cited by Kohring and Matthes, 2007). This concept is essential for ensuring social cohesion and the functioning of society (Kohring and Matthes, 2007). The survey conducted by Swift (2016) showed that people do not trust the media's ability to report the news accurately and fairly (cited by Visentin, Pizzi, and Pichierri, 2019).

Individuals have more confidence in media coverage if they are interested in following the news and if they are interested in the subject in question (Gunther and Lasorsa, 1986). Thus, Tsfati and Cappella (2005) explored the reasons that motivate people to consume news they do not trust. They found that each individual is influenced by the psychological concept of 'the Need for Cognition'. This concept plays an important role in the relationship between scepticism and news consumption. According to Visentin, Pizzi and Pichierri (2019), perceptions of news credibility affect the perceived credibility of the source, which influences trust, attitudes, and behavioural intentions.

However, research on trust in media news is grouped under the label of perceived media credibility (Kohring and Matthes, 2007). Researchers studying the concept of trust have used credibility scales to measure trust in news media (Kiousis, 2001; Tsfati and Cappella, 2005, cited by Kohring and Matthes, 2007).

### **Media credibility:**

The notion of credibility is among the most important criteria to study in media research. This concept has been studied in various fields of research, including information science, psychology, sociology, communication, health science, and marketing (Wathen and Burkell, 2002).

Sundar (1999) distinguished three types of credibility: message credibility, source credibility (Sundar, 1998), Hovland, Janis, and Kelly, 1953), and media credibility (Gaziano, 1987; Kiousis, 2001). According to the same author, message credibility is the quality of the information content; source credibility is affected by the sender of the message; media credibility is defined as the perceived reliability of the channel disseminating the information.

However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the effect of credibility on consumer behaviour. A recent study by Ismagilovaa, Sladeb, Ranac, and Dwivedic (2019) is the first meta-analytic study to examine the impact of source credibility characteristics on consumer behaviour. This research aims to synthesise the results of existing studies on the credibility characteristics of electronic word-of-mouth communications. They conclude that the expertise, reliability, and homophily of sources significantly influence perceived usefulness and credibility.

According to Johnson and Kaye (1998), gender, age, and education influence the use of online media. They find that young adults are more likely to perceive media as credible. Women perceive the web as more credible. More highly educated participants, however, tend to judge online sources as less credible.

According to Yang (2007), there is a positive correlation between perceived credibility and media use. Kiousis (2001) further adds that media use is only weakly related to perceptions of credibility. In contrast, the results of Visentin, Pizzi, and Pichierri (2019) suggest that perceptions of source credibility are consistently influenced by perceptions of news credibility. They manipulated the veracity of information and source credibility to show that the objective truthfulness of information has no direct effect on behavioral intentions toward the brand.

### **News credibility**

Although the concept of credibility is complex and lacks a clear definition, we adopted the definition proposed by Choi, Watt, and Lynch (2006), as it best fits our study, since we focus on the credibility of news rather than on source credibility in general. According to Choi, Watt, and Lynch (2006), "credibility is one of the



fundamental criteria by which people evaluate the quality of the news they receive.” According to Appelman and Sundar (2016) and Gunter et al. (2009), news credibility refers to an individual’s perception of the truthfulness of the content of a message. It is a “central concept that depends on the accuracy, authenticity, and credibility of the information” (as cited by Visentin, Pizzi, and Pichierri, 2019).

It is important to note that Kiousis (2001) found that perceptions of news credibility are influenced by the use of a particular medium as well as by interpersonal discussion. Indeed, people evaluate newspapers as more credible than online media, while television is perceived as less credible than online sources. According to Bucy (2003), young people perceive television as more credible than online media for news consumption. In contrast, adults evaluate the internet as fairer, more informative, more in-depth in its treatment of information, and more credible than television. Moreover, researchers who examine positive and negative news credibility frequently refer to attribution theory (Eisend, 2010; Golden, 1977; Settle & Golden, 1974), as cited by Jahn and Brühl (2019).

## METHODOLOGY

To address the lack of research on news consumption behavior across different media, we deemed it appropriate to begin our study with a qualitative phase in order to gain a better understanding of news consumption habits, as well as interviewees’ perceptions of the changes that have occurred in recent years. This stage enabled us to identify the most important concepts to be measured in the quantitative phase and to explore new relationships related to the topic under study.

### **Semi-structured individual interviews:**

During the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve adult participants aged between 23 and 55, including six men and six women. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Participation in the individual interviews was voluntary. There were no specific criteria for participant selection; however, we ensured an equal number of male and female participants and coverage of different age groups.

We began the interviews with a set of general questions about media consumption. In the second part, we sought to understand participants’ opinions regarding freedom of expression. In addition, we found it relevant to explore how Tunisians consume news through different media sources (audiovisual, print, and online media). In the final section of the interview guide, we aimed to understand the level of trust and credibility attributed to news disseminated across different media.

### **Results of the semi-structured individual interviews**

Before beginning the analysis of the qualitative data, we carried out a full transcription of the interviews and constructed response matrices in order to synthesize the narratives of the twelve participants.

Following a careful examination of the data, we observed disparities in the depth of responses depending on participants’ level of education and age. Participants with a higher level of education demonstrated a more critical and in-depth perspective on the topic under study; their responses were richer in information and supported by examples. Overall, participants held a rather negative perception of the media. We found that the vast majority of respondents considered foreign media to be more credible and better than Tunisian media for obtaining information about what is happening in the country. Some skeptical respondents, however, stated that there was no credible channel at either the national or international level. We also noted that this perceived lack of credibility toward both national and international channels affects the level of news consumption. The importance attributed to national news is high among all participants, regardless of age, level of education, or gender. We observed that television is the most widely used source for following the news among all participants. Older and less educated individuals are not interested in consuming news via social media; television remains their primary source. In contrast, younger participants consider social media to be their main source of news, even though it sometimes disseminates questionable or inaccurate information. Women are the ones who consume radio the most, as it accompanies them in their daily activities. The majority of participants have a negative perception of social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.) and printed newspapers. Likewise, they do not trust the information disseminated by audiovisual, print, and online media.

## Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

In this section, we present the conceptual framework that integrates the main variables of our research. We also present the different hypotheses derived from it and discuss the choice of the adopted methodology, the various stages of data collection, and the structure of the questionnaire.

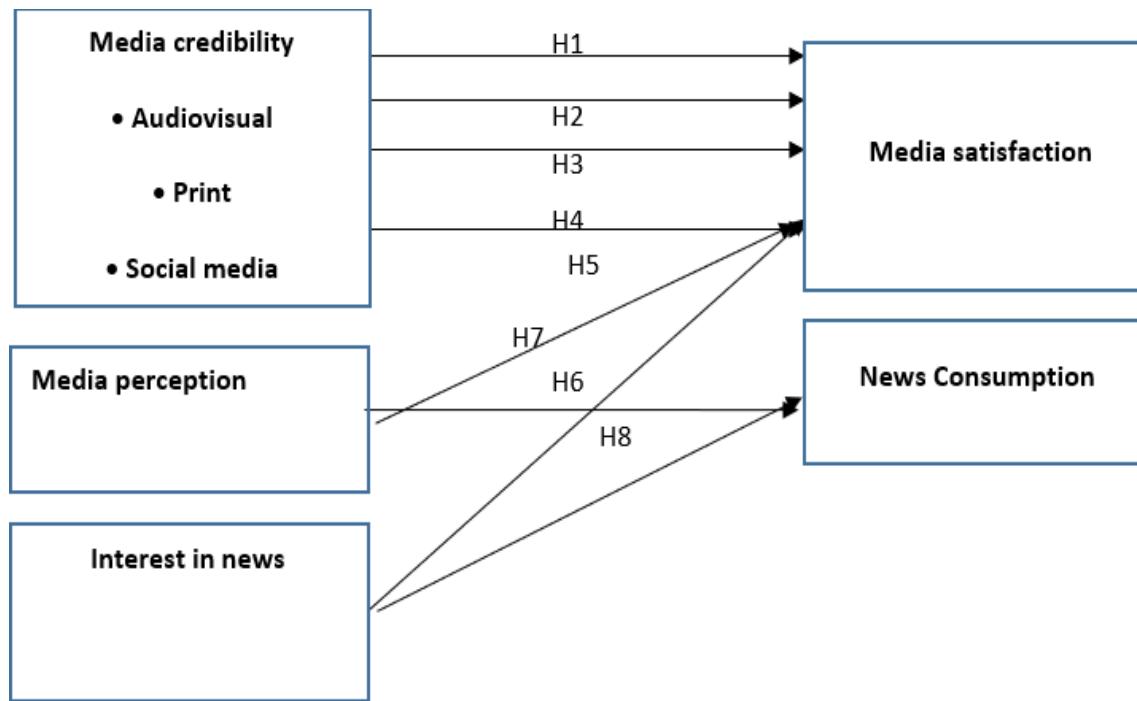


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Following the development of the conceptual framework of the study, we formulated research hypotheses in order to empirically test the relationships between the different concepts examined. Below, we present the eight hypotheses:

**H1:** Perceived news credibility in audiovisual media has a positive and significant effect on media satisfaction.

**H2:** Perceived news credibility in print media has a positive and significant effect on media satisfaction.

**H3:** Perceived news credibility on social media has a positive and significant effect on media satisfaction.

**H4:** Perceived news credibility on the internet has a positive and significant effect on media satisfaction.

**H5:** Favorable perceptions of the media have a positive and significant effect on media satisfaction.

**H6:** Interest in news has a positive and significant effect on media satisfaction.

**H7:** Favorable perceptions of the media have a positive and significant effect on news consumption.

**H8:** Interest in news has a positive and significant effect on news consumption.

To measure the different variables of the study, we relied on multi-item measurement scales drawn from the literature and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Measurement of study variables**

Measurement	Dimension	Item
	<b>Entertainment</b>	Because it entertains me Because I find it exciting Because it relaxes me

<b>« Uses and Gratification » Theory</b>  <b>Cauwenberge, Haenens and Beentjes (2010)</b>	<b>Information/surveillance</b>	To stay informed about what's happening in my environment (city, country, etc.) To follow the most important events happening in the world To stay informed about various topics
	<b>Social utility</b>	To support my ideas when discussing with others Because it helps me decide which political party to vote for Because those around me (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) expect me to be informed about current events To have a topic of conversation with others Because it is useful for my career or education
	<b>Pastime</b>	When there's no one to talk to or spend time with To pass the time When I have nothing better to do
	<b>Escape</b>	To forget about work or studies To escape daily problems

Measurement	Dimension	Item
<b>Credibility of the news</b>  <b>Gaziano et Macgrath (1986)</b>	<b>Credibility factor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell the whole story / Do not tell the whole story</li> <li>• Are concerned about the well-being of the community / Are not concerned about the well-being of the community</li> <li>• Respect people's privacy / Do not respect people's privacy</li> <li>• Can be trusted / Cannot be trusted</li> <li>• Accurate information / Inaccurate information</li> <li>• Clearly distinguish between facts and opinions / Do not clearly distinguish between facts and opinions</li> <li>• Biased information / Unbiased information</li> <li>• Care about readers' interests / Do not care about readers' interests</li> <li>• Fair / Unfair</li> <li>• Are objective / Express opinions</li> <li>• Journalists are well-trained / Journalists are poorly trained</li> <li>• Are concerned with the public interest / Are not concerned with the public interest</li> </ul>
	<b>Factor of social concern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibit morality</li> <li>• Do not exhibit morality</li> <li>• Care about public opinion</li> <li>• Do not care about public opinion</li> <li>• Disseminate sensational information</li> <li>• Disseminate factual information</li> </ul>

### **Sampling method and respondents' profile:**

The sampling method used is convenience sampling. The sample consists of 200 participants, of whom 52.7% are men and 47.3% are women. Participants' ages range from 18 to 68 years. Approximately 86.6% of respondents have a university-level education, and their income ranges between 501 and 999 dinars.

## **RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Validation of measurement scales**

This section aims to assess the psychometric quality of the measurement scales used. We conducted a principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation. We then verified whether the factors resulting from this

analysis were consistent with the original factors of the measurement scales employed. Finally, we examined the percentage of explained variance and Cronbach's alpha (Table 2).

**Table 2. Psychometric properties of the measurement scales**

Scales	Number of items	Number of dimensions after Varimax rotation	% of explained variance	Cronbach's alpha
Uses and Gratifications	16	4	63.686	0.801
Credibility of traditional audiovisual media (television, radio)	15	3	63.877	0.893
Credibility of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	15	2	64.317	0.917
Credibility of print media (newspapers, magazines)	15	3	67.687	0.916
Credibility of online media (blogs, search engines, etc.)	15	3	66.643	0.912

### **Hypotheses validation**

The main objective of this section is to test the hypotheses according to the research model (Figure 1). First, we conducted three multiple linear regressions to examine the effect of the independent variables of the study on the dependent variables. Next, we performed mean comparisons of perceived credibility across different types of media, as well as of the trust granted to news across these media.

#### **Effect of news credibility in audiovisual media, print media, social media, and the internet on media satisfaction (H1–H2–H3–H4):**

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is equal to 0.081, which allows us to conclude that credibility explains 8.1% of the variance in satisfaction. The ANOVA table indicates an F statistic of 4.288, with an associated p-value of 0.03. Therefore, the overall model is statistically significant.

Social media credibility is the only variable that is significant in the regression model, with a p-value of 0.046. The standardized beta coefficient is positive (0.221). Thus, we can conclude that the higher the perceived credibility of social media, the higher the level of satisfaction.

#### **Effect of media perception and interest in news on media satisfaction (H5 and H6):**

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is equal to 0.19, indicating that perception and interest explain 19.4% of the variance in satisfaction. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) is equal to 0.404, suggesting a moderate strength of relationship between the variables.

The ANOVA table shows an F statistic of 17.72, with an associated p-value of 0.00. Therefore, the overall model is statistically significant.

We observe that the dimension that most strongly influences media satisfaction is media perception ( $\beta = 0.425$ ). The more positively consumers perceive a medium, the more satisfied they are.

#### **Effect of media perception and interest in news-on-news consumption (H7 and H8):**

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is equal to 0.184, which allows us to conclude that perception and interest explain 18% of the variance in news consumption. The multiple correlation coefficient is equal to 0.429, indicating a moderate relationship between the variables.



The ANOVA table shows an F statistic of 16.609, with an associated p-value of 0.00. Therefore, the overall model is statistically significant.

The standardized beta coefficients for perception and interest are -0.075 and 0.428, respectively. Thus, we can conclude that interest in news is the only significant variable in the regression model, with a p-value of 0.00. Indeed, the greater the consumer's interest in news, the higher their level of news consumption.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We show that there is a considerable increase (68%) in news consumption across different media. This result confirms the findings of the qualitative study regarding the importance attributed to news by participants. While 4.7% of the total sample reported a decrease in their news consumption, 27.3% of participants stated that their news consumption remained stable.

Regarding the use of different media (audiovisual, print, and online), we observed that the most-watched television channels for consuming national news are *El Watania* and *Ettounsiya TV*. In addition, *Jawhara FM* is the most listened-to radio station among participants for national news consumption. The results also showed that *Facebook* is the most frequently consulted social network, along with the website *Babnet Tunisie*. The national news topics that interest participants the most are political and social issues.

We observed that traditional media remain important. The results of our study indicate that most participants rely on audiovisual media as their primary source of information, which is consistent with the findings of Gaziano and McGrath (1986). However, these results contradict those of Huang (2009) and Christie (2009). Moreover, participants report lower levels of trust in social media for consuming national news. To support this view, participants indicated that when contradictory information emerges regarding a particular national event, they rely on traditional audiovisual media to gain a clear understanding of the issue.

Secondly, based on the conceptual framework and the research questions, we tested the research hypotheses by conducting three multiple regressions to examine the effect of the independent variables (credibility, perception, and interest) on the dependent variables (media satisfaction and news consumption).

The results of this study show that the credibility of social media has a significant impact on media satisfaction, whereas other types of media (audiovisual, print, and online) have no significant effect on satisfaction. However, media perception has a significant effect on satisfaction, while it does not affect news consumption. Interest in news does not have a strong impact on media satisfaction, but it does have a significant impact on news consumption. Participants perceive social media as more credible than other sources of information for consuming news.

Given the changes that have occurred in news consumption since the revolution and based on these findings, we recommend that managers place greater emphasis on the framing and presentation of news. They should consider news credibility and media perception as the most important factors influencing audience satisfaction.

Finally, finding that interest in news has a positive effect on news consumption suggests that managers could leverage this factor to further develop and improve the sector.

## CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The objective of this research was to examine news consumption behavior in Tunisia. Through data analysis, we identified the variables that have a significant impact on both media satisfaction and news consumption. We were able to demonstrate that the more consumers perceive a medium as credible, the more satisfied they are with that medium. Likewise, the more favorable consumers' perceptions are, the more satisfied they are with the medium, whereas interest in news primarily influences news consumption.

Moreover, this study presents three main limitations. First, we encountered issues related to the theoretical and empirical clarity of the core concept of "credibility." Second, the questionnaire contains terms (related to the media sector) that were not clear to the majority of participants, which may have affected the quality of the results. Finally, our findings cannot be generalized to the entire Tunisian population.

We conducted an overall review of the different media and concepts related to the media. Based on this, we can offer several recommendations for future research. It would be relevant to focus on a single medium in order to gain a deeper understanding of the different concepts involved. In addition, it would be interesting to extract adjectives from the qualitative research that explain the factors affecting news consumption and that influence the choice of one medium over another for consuming news. Finally, as our research is cross-sectional in nature, it would be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study in future research.

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