

Consumer Behavior Research under the Sharing Economy Model

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Abstract

With the rapid development of Internet technology, platform economy has emerged and flourished. The sharing economy, as a typical representative of platform economy, has rapidly risen globally. The sharing economy takes the sharing of idle resources as the core, and connects the supply and demand sides through the Internet platform, realizing the optimal allocation and efficient use of resources. This article aims to explore the changes in consumer behavior and their influencing factors under the sharing economy model. Through literature review and empirical research, this article analyzes the characteristics of consumer motivation transformation, personalized consumption patterns, and enhanced social attributes in the sharing economy model. Meanwhile, this article also explores the impact of economic, socio-cultural, and technological factors on consumer behavior. However, the research results indicate that there are also some problems with the sharing economy model, and this article will propose relevant suggestions based on these issues. The research in this article is of great significance for understanding the operational mechanism of the sharing economy model, optimizing consumer experience, and promoting the sustainable development of the sharing economy model in the era of platform economy.

Keywords

platform, sharing economy, consumer behavior, business model

1. Introduction

The concept of the sharing economy was first proposed in 1978 by Marcus Felson, a sociology professor at Texas State University, and Joel Spence, a sociology professor at the University of Illinois. It refers to a third-party information technology platform that acts as a bridge connecting supply and demand sides [1]. This platform overcomes the limitations of time and space, enabling individuals to exchange unused items and share their experiences, skills, and resources. This sharing model has evolved from the traditional unpaid form into a new model capable of generating economic returns. It not only meets users' diverse needs but also significantly enhances the liquidity of resources and achieves efficient utilization of resource value.

The emergence of the sharing economy model has profoundly transformed people's lifestyles and consumption habits. Under the sharing economy model, consumers can obtain the right to use required resources at a lower cost through internet platforms to satisfy their needs [2]. The advent of this model has not only brought convenience and affordability to consumers but has also impacted traditional economic

models. Therefore, researching consumer behavior under the sharing economy model holds important theoretical and practical significance.

However, China's sharing economy has developed rapidly and covers a wide range of fields, yet its development history is relatively short [3]. Currently, there are still lags in regulation and standards. Service providers may enter the market without sufficient preparation, thereby affecting service quality and consumer experience. Secondly, because the sharing economy requires strong technological support, there may be industry monopolies [1], leading to price wars and vicious competition that harm consumer rights and interests. Finally, sharing economy platforms obtain user information through the internet, which may lead to information security risks [4]. Based on the above issues, this paper will put forward relevant suggestions.

2. Current Situation of the Sharing Economy in China

According to "The Practical Dilemmas and Countermeasures of Sharing Economy Development [5]," "A Brief Analysis of the Problems and Development Countermeasures of the Sharing Economy in the New Era [6]," and "A Brief Analysis of the Sharing Economy Business Model and Development Suggestions: Taking Shared Bicycles as an Example [7]," China's sharing economy has developed vigorously over the past decade. Since June 2015, a large number of shared bicycle companies have emerged on the market, with more than 30 shared bicycle companies registered [7]. The sharing economy began to gain public recognition. In October 2015, with the introduction of the new development concept of "innovation, coordination, greenness, openness, and sharing," the sharing economy began to flourish in China [5].

At present, shared goods have become important resources in many industries, such as transportation resources, medical resources, and educational resources [6]. In the area of mobility, shared bicycles and shared cars such as "Qingju" and "Meituan" have brought great convenience to citizens, solved the problem of difficult urban travel, reduced traffic pressure, and promoted sustainable development. In the medical field, the emergence of shared medical platforms such as "Chunyu Doctor" allows patients and doctors to select each other through online platforms, thereby improving the efficiency of medical consultations. In the field of education, platforms such as "Zhangmen 1-on-1" enable employers and teachers to choose each other, making it convenient for employers to inquire and for university students to engage in part-time tutoring jobs. The sharing economy can achieve a win-win situation for platforms, sellers, and buyers across various aspects of life. According to the prediction in Analysis of Logistics Business Model Optimization under the Sharing Economy Background [12], the new forms of the sharing economy have promising development prospects in the future.

Currently, the most prominent characteristic of the domestic sharing economy is that "right to use" is more important than "right to ownership" [8]. The sharing economy generally involves individuals, enterprises, and organizations as transaction subjects. Through platform intermediaries, individuals and enterprises temporarily transfer the right to use idle resources rather than transferring ownership. For example, power bank rentals and shared bicycle services both reflect the paid temporary borrowing of usage rights [1]. The core of the sharing economy is "one item, multiple uses," which efficiently utilizes idle resources. In essence, it involves the short-term transfer of usage rights for underutilized assets, achieving "short-term leasing" [8].

3. Changes in Consumer Behavior under the Sharing Economy Model

3.1 Shift in Consumption Motivation

The sharing economy is a collaborative consumption model that transcends ownership to obtain the right to use products or services [10]. Under the sharing economy model, consumers' consumption motivations have undergone significant changes, shifting from emphasizing ownership to placing greater importance on the right to use—"not to own, but to use" [10]. In the traditional consumption model, consumers pursued the unity of product ownership and usage rights. In contrast, under the sharing economy model, consumers focus more on acquiring the right to use. In the past, people often worried about the separation of ownership and usage rights of goods. However, with the improvement of education levels, people's perceptions have

become more open, and the separation anxiety brought by the sharing economy has been alleviated [9]. People's consumption concepts have also changed, and the new consumption and development view of "valuing use over possession" has grown increasingly strong. In the sharing economy, consumption is for use rather than ownership [11]. Consumers are no longer guided by the desire for possession; instead, their primary focus has shifted to the actual utility and value of products. The principles of matching, appropriateness, and moderation have regained emphasis under the sharing economy—a new production model that stresses reciprocity, sharing, and cooperation—and are regaining new vitality in professional fields.

3.2 Personalization of Consumption Methods

Under the sharing economy model, consumers can select products and services that better meet their individualized needs according to their own requirements. Consumers are no longer limited to the standardized products and services provided under the traditional economic model; instead, they can make choices based on their personal preferences and needs. "The Dark Side of the Sharing Economy under Algorithmic Management: Conceptual Framework and Prospects" [2] points out that the matching and control of supply and demand resources is key to the development of the sharing economy. Platforms use technological means such as algorithms and data analysis to intelligently match supply and demand sides, enabling resources to be utilized in the most reasonable manner. This matching mechanism provides consumers with more personalized services.

3.3 Enhancement of Social Attributes

The essence of the sharing economy model is resource sharing. Consumers share resources with others through sharing economy platforms to achieve resource sharing and mutual benefit. Sharing platforms build social spaces where strangers share with one another, creating numerous social opportunities. For example, hosts on Airbnb often share local travel and transportation guides with their guests, and even share food recommendations [10]. Similarly, shared mobility allows passengers to obtain information from ride-hailing drivers. The consumption process in the sharing economy requires communication, interaction, and sharing with strangers [13], which strengthens the social attributes of consumer behavior.

4. Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior under the Sharing Economy Model

4.1 Economic Factors

Income Level: Consumers' income level is a key factor determining their purchasing power and consumption choices. In the sharing economy, consumers usually need to consider the cost-benefit ratio of services or products [14]. If consumers have a higher income level, they are more likely to choose high-quality, higher-priced shared services, such as short-term rentals of private apartments. Conversely, if their income level is lower, consumers may pay more attention to price factors and opt for lower-cost shared services.

Price Elasticity: The price elasticity of shared economy services or products also influences consumer behavior [15]. Price elasticity refers to the degree to which changes in price affect consumer demand. In the sharing economy, if price elasticity is high—that is, price changes have a significant impact on consumer demand—consumers tend to be more sensitive to price fluctuations and are more inclined to purchase or use services when prices are lower.

4.2 Social Factors

Income and Education Level: Income and education level significantly influence consumer behavior when facing shared goods [15]. Lutz (2018) found that there exists a demographic divide between users and non-users of the sharing economy, particularly in terms of income and education. In his survey, 25% of individuals in the high-income bracket (US\$75,000+) and high-education group (college graduates) reported having used shared services, whereas only 4% of those in the low-income bracket (less than US\$30,000) and lower-education group (high school graduates or below) had done so.

Socio-Cultural Factors: Socio-cultural factors also exert an important influence on consumer behavior. The emergence of the sharing economy model aligns with modern society's pursuit of environmental protection and sustainable development. Articles such as "Discussion on the Profit Model, Economic Consequences, and Countermeasures of the Sharing Economy [1]," "Case Study on Sustainable Operation and Management of the Sharing Economy [4]," and "How sustainable is the sharing economy? On the sustainability connotations of sharing economy platforms" [16] collectively point out that, under the sharing economy, sharing consumer goods rather than owning them exclusively can reduce resource depletion caused by consumption. Therefore, consumers who uphold sustainable values can contribute to sustainable development through the sharing economy.

Moral Climate: Due to the anonymity and lack of consumer ownership in the sharing economy consumption process [17], the sharing economy is closely related to societal moral climate. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) [18] found in their interviews that consumers tend to be more self-interested under the sharing economy model. Liu Jianxin et al. (2020) [19] also discovered that destructive unethical behaviors among consumers increase in the sharing economy. Guo Zhen et al. (2023) argued that the lack of psychological ownership over shared products is the main cause of such unethical behaviors [17]. Therefore, stronger moral norms are necessary in the sharing economy model.

Urban Construction: Urban construction also significantly affects the development of the sharing economy, especially in the area of shared mobility. For example, according to statistics from the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design, Chengdu has seen an increase in shared bicycle usage on weekends due to its greenway construction. Similarly, Hangzhou has experienced improved shared bicycle usage rates on weekends owing to the development of the West Lake scenic area [20].

4.3 Technical Factors

With the evolution of the times, technology has become an indispensable core support for the sharing economy. In the early stages, sharing economy platforms mainly served as bridges connecting supply and demand sides, with their supply-demand matching models relying primarily on manual labor to complete this core task [21]. However, with the rapid growth of demand and increasing requirements for resource matching efficiency and quality control, traditional matching models have become insufficient to meet the needs of market development.

In response to these challenges and to seize opportunities, many enterprises have begun introducing algorithmic management into sharing economy activities. This innovative measure has significantly improved the matching efficiency among consumers, digital workers, and merchants [2]. The introduction of algorithmic management not only ensures rapid and effective resource allocation but also enhances matching accuracy through intelligent methods, thereby optimizing user experience.

It is worth noting that, according to the research results of "A Study on Factors Influencing the Development Potential of China's Sharing Economy [3]," the level of internet development ranks first in its contribution to the development potential of the sharing economy. This finding further confirms the central role of science and technology in the sharing economy and also indicates that technology will play an even more important role in promoting the development of the sharing economy in the future.

5. Theoretical Modeling

Based on the above analysis, a theoretical model of consumer behavior under the sharing economy model is constructed. This model includes the following core elements:

Consumer Motivation: As an independent variable, it includes ownership-seeking motivation and usage-right-seeking motivation.

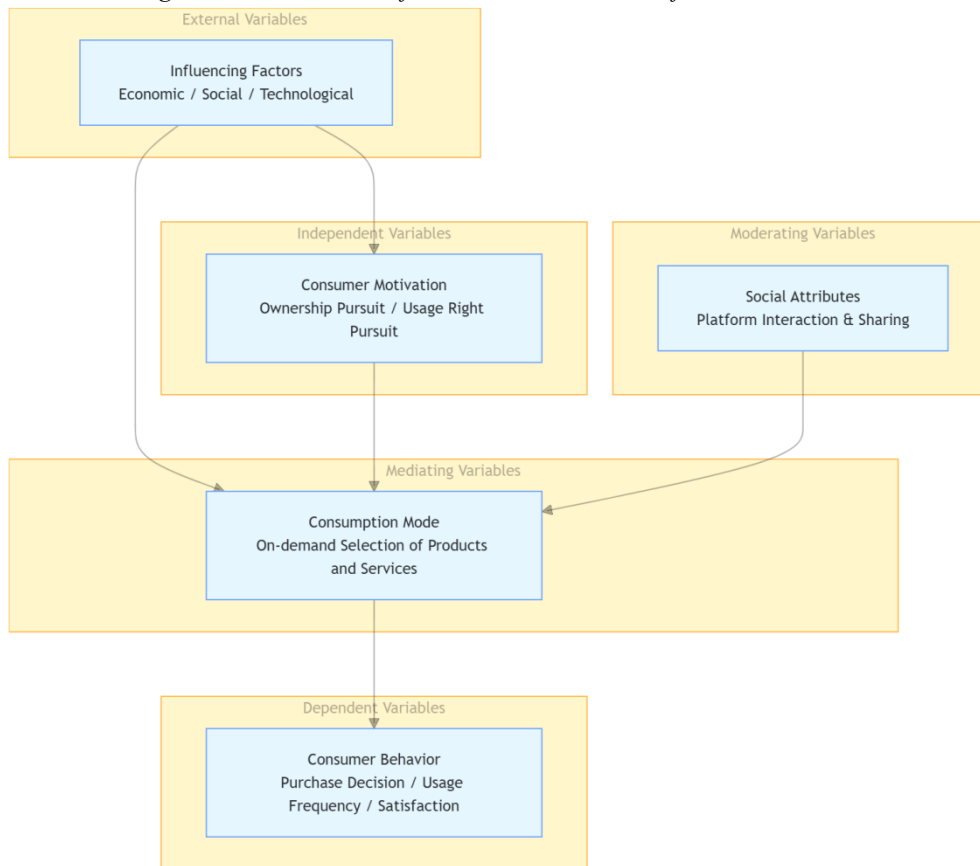
Consumption Method: As a mediating variable, it reflects how consumers select products and services according to their needs.

Social Attributes: As a moderating variable, it influences consumers' interaction and sharing behaviors on sharing economy platforms.

Influencing Factors: As external variables, including economic factors, social factors, and technical factors, these indirectly affect consumer behavior by influencing consumer motivation and consumption methods.

Consumer Behavior: As a dependent variable, it includes purchase decisions, frequency of use, satisfaction, and so on.

Figure 1: Construction of the Theoretical Model of Consumer Behavior



As shown in Figure 1, in the theoretical model of consumer behavior under the sharing economy model, the various components interact with one another and collectively constitute the behavioral logic of consumers on sharing economy platforms. The mutual influence relationships among them are elaborated in detail as follows:

1) The Influence of External Variables (Influencing Factors) on Consumer Motivation and Consumption Methods

Economic Factors:

Income level directly affects consumption methods. A higher income level may lead consumers to emphasize service quality while pursuing convenience, making them more willing to try high-end shared economy services, such as short-term rentals of private apartments. Conversely, when income levels are lower, consumers tend to focus more on price factors and opt for lower-cost shared services.

In terms of price elasticity, the pricing strategies of sharing economy platforms directly influence consumer motivation. Attractive pricing can amplify consumers' usage-right-seeking motivation and increase the likelihood of purchase decisions. For example, when shared bicycle platforms launch low-priced monthly passes, they attract more consumers to try the service and increase usage frequency.

Social Factors:

From a socio-cultural perspective, different social and cultural backgrounds influence consumers' values and consumption concepts. In cities that advocate environmental protection and sustainable development,

consumers' usage-right-seeking motivation tends to be stronger, and they are more inclined to choose the sharing economy model to reduce resource waste. This also affects consumption methods, making consumers more willing to select environmentally friendly shared products.

Regarding education level, consumers with higher levels of education are generally more open to new things and new ideas. They have a higher level of understanding and acceptance of the sharing economy, and their usage-right-seeking motivation is more pronounced. When choosing shared economy services, they tend to pay greater attention to features such as intelligence and personalization, thereby influencing their consumption methods.

In terms of moral climate, a favorable moral environment helps enhance consumers' sense of responsibility and self-discipline, encouraging them to use shared economy products in a regulated manner. For instance, in communities with a strong moral climate, incidents of shared bicycle damage and unauthorized occupation are relatively rare. Consumers are more likely to choose and use shared bicycles reasonably, which in turn affects consumption methods and usage frequency.

Urban construction also directly drives the development of the sharing economy. It influences consumer motivation and consumption methods. For example, the construction of greenways in Chengdu stimulates consumers to choose shared mobility options.

Technical Factors:

Well-developed internet infrastructure and high-speed, stable network connections enable consumers to more conveniently access information on sharing economy platforms, make comparisons, and select services, thereby strengthening their usage-right-seeking motivation. At the same time, internet technology supports diversified consumption methods, such as one-click car rental and online payment through mobile apps. In addition, intelligent technologies (such as algorithm recommendations and smart locks) can recommend suitable shared economy products and services to consumers based on their historical usage records and preferences, thereby influencing consumption methods. Technologies such as smart locks further improve the convenience and security of using shared products, stimulating consumers' usage-right-seeking motivation even more.

2) The Influence of Consumer Motivation on Consumption Methods

When the ownership-seeking motivation is weak and the usage-right-seeking motivation is strong, consumers are more inclined to choose the sharing economy model. They prefer to satisfy their needs through leasing or sharing rather than purchasing product ownership. For example, for occasional short-distance travel needs, consumers may choose shared bicycles instead of buying a personal bicycle. This motivation directly determines their adoption of sharing economy consumption methods.

When the usage-right-seeking motivation becomes dominant, consumers flexibly select different types of sharing economy services according to their own needs and usage scenarios. For instance, they may choose shared cars for long-distance travel and shared electric scooters for short-distance instant delivery. This clearly demonstrates the guiding role of motivation on consumption methods.

3) The Moderating Effect of Social Attributes on Consumer Motivation, Consumption Methods, and Consumer Behavior

Influence on Consumer Motivation: Social attributes can enhance consumers' usage-right-seeking motivation. On sharing economy platforms, interactions and sharing behaviors among consumers—such as user reviews and recommendations—allow consumers to better understand the advantages and usage experiences of shared products, thereby stimulating their desire to try them.

Influence on Consumption Methods: Social attributes influence consumers' choice of consumption methods. Consumers may select sharing economy platforms or products based on recommendations and evaluations from their social circles.

Influence on Consumer Behavior: Social attributes affect consumers' purchase decisions, frequency of use, and satisfaction. Positive social interactions and sharing can increase consumers' trust and favorable feelings toward sharing economy platforms, thereby raising the likelihood of purchase decisions. At the same time, word-of-mouth communication within social circles also influences usage frequency. If people around

them are using a particular shared service, consumers are more likely to participate more frequently. In addition, social attributes can improve consumer satisfaction through user feedback and service improvements.

4) The Influence of Consumption Methods on Consumer Behavior

Purchase Decision: The choice of consumption methods directly affects consumers' purchase decisions. Convenient and personalized consumption methods, such as quickly searching for and booking shared products through mobile apps, increase the likelihood that consumers will purchase services. Conversely, complex consumption processes may deter consumers and reduce their purchase intention.

Usage Frequency: Well-designed consumption methods can increase consumers' frequency of use. For example, flexible rental periods and diversified billing options provided by sharing economy platforms can meet consumers' different usage needs, encouraging them to use shared products more frequently.

Satisfaction: A positive consumption experience enhances consumer satisfaction. If the service process on a sharing economy platform is smooth, easy to operate, and problems encountered during use can be resolved promptly, consumers will feel satisfied with the service, thereby increasing the likelihood of reuse.

5) The Feedback Influence of Consumer Behavior on Consumer Motivation, Social Attributes, and External Variables

Influence on Consumer Motivation: Consumers' behaviors, such as purchase decisions, usage frequency, and satisfaction, in turn affect their motivations. If consumers have a positive experience after using sharing economy services and report high satisfaction, their usage-right-seeking motivation will be further strengthened, making them more willing to continue using such services. Conversely, poor experiences may weaken their motivation.

Influence on Social Attributes: Consumer behavior influences social attributes. For example, after using sharing economy services, consumers often share their experiences and evaluations on social platforms. This sharing behavior enriches the content of social interactions and affects other consumers' social experiences and participation levels.

Influence on External Variables: Consumer behavior also exerts a certain feedback effect on external variables. For instance, high-frequency use of a particular shared service by a large number of consumers may prompt platforms to further optimize pricing strategies and improve service quality, thereby affecting economic and technical factors. Meanwhile, consumer behavior can also influence socio-cultural factors, promoting the dissemination and popularization of sharing economy concepts and changing societal consumption views and moral climate.

6. Problems and Suggestions

6.1 Issues of Unfair Competition and Monopoly

With the development of the sharing economy, mainstream platforms have excessively pursued traffic, leading to unfair competition phenomena such as traffic fraud and hijacking. A few enterprises control a large amount of traffic, which restricts the market expansion of smaller platforms and exacerbates resource waste. At the same time, large platforms accumulate customers through their advantages, resulting in significant income gaps among service providers and high consumption prices for consumers. These platforms also leverage technological advantages to implement data monopolies, consolidate their positions through mergers and acquisitions, and form monopoly loops, thereby harming consumer interests [1,7,9].

6.2 Issues of Imperfect Legal Framework

The sharing economy in China is still in its early stage. Relevant laws, regulations, and supervision are insufficient, and platforms have weak legal binding force, increasing the risk of fraud. Platform management faces challenges of credit and cultural deficiencies. Although it has promoted employment, problems such as low entry barriers and non-standardized operations exist, including the lack of business licenses and unclear labor relations. If not regulated promptly, these issues may have adverse effects on society [1,5,6,7,8,9].

6.3 Information Security Issues

Sharing economy platforms accumulate large amounts of user personal information during operations, including sensitive data such as identity, bank transaction records, and addresses. However, these platforms still face problems in information security, such as illegal collection, excessive acquisition, forced authorization, information misuse, and data breaches. Once these platforms are subjected to cyberattacks, users' private information faces serious leakage risks. In addition, some large-scale sharing platforms are controlled by foreign capital, which exposes national information security to risks of cross-border data flows and may even threaten the overall information security of the country, affecting national security [1,2,7].

6.4 Suggestions

1) Strengthen Laws and Regulations to Curb Unfair Competition and Monopoly

In view of the unfair competition and monopoly behaviors in the sharing economy, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of laws and regulations to ensure the healthy development of the sharing economy. First, existing laws and regulations should be comprehensively reviewed and improved to address their deficiencies, clearly distinguishing the legal boundaries between the general economy and the sharing economy. Based on general economic laws and regulations, targeted regulations should be formulated in combination with the characteristics of the sharing economy to clarify the scope of norms. At the same time, comprehensive guidance should be provided according to the development stage of the sharing economy to protect the legitimate rights and interests of all enterprises, especially non-mainstream enterprises. The publicity of laws and regulations should be strengthened to raise enterprises' awareness of rights protection, such as encouraging patent applications. Economic behaviors should be effectively constrained through legal means to create a rule-of-law environment conducive to the development of the sharing economy.

2) Build a Robust Information Security and Regulatory System to Ensure Steady Development

While the sharing economy is developing rapidly, it faces risks such as cybercrime and information leakage. To ensure its steady development, a comprehensive information security system should be established in conjunction with a credit system to effectively resist cyberattacks and safeguard user information security and transaction security. Information security is not only an important component of enterprise competitiveness but also the cornerstone of industry development. Therefore, various industries should establish detailed and diversified regulatory systems tailored to the characteristics of the sharing economy to ensure the healthy and sustainable development of the industry.

7. Conclusion

In summary, this study systematically explores the changes in consumer behavior under the sharing economy model, with particular attention to the rapidly developing sharing economy landscape in China. Through analyzing the shift in consumer motivation from ownership to usage rights, the personalization of consumption methods, and the enhancement of social attributes on sharing economy platforms, a deeper understanding of consumer behavior dynamics under this new economic paradigm has been achieved.

The research shows that the sharing economy has promoted the transformation of consumption patterns from ownership to usage rights, driven jointly by economic, social, and technological factors. The theoretical model indicates that consumer motivation (ownership-seeking and usage-right-seeking) influences purchase decisions, usage frequency, and satisfaction through consumption methods, with social attributes playing a moderating role and external factors indirectly affecting behavior. In response to the problems of unfair competition, imperfect legal frameworks, and information security facing China's sharing economy, it is recommended to strengthen regulatory construction, build information security systems, and cultivate a healthy social culture. Enterprises represented by Meituan Bike should optimize user experience, improve service quality, strengthen technological innovation and compliance management, pay attention to the shift in consumer motivation, optimize consumption methods with the help of technology, and enhance platform social attributes to increase user stickiness and competitiveness.

In the future, with the continuous development and maturation of the platform economy, the sharing economy model will play an even more important role in promoting efficient resource utilization and

sustainable development. As consumer behavior continues to evolve and technology advances, research on consumer behavior under the sharing economy model will also face new challenges and opportunities, requiring scholars to continuously explore and deepen their studies.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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