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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Media Use and English Reading Engagement among Moroccan EFL University Students

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigated social media use and reading engagement among Moroccan university students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with particular attention to their reading habits and engagement with literary content. A quantitative research design was adopted, using an online survey completed by 111 undergraduates from the Department of English. Descriptive and inferential statistics were run in SPSS to examine patterns of literary engagement and the association between social media use and reading. The findings showed that students are highly active on social media, with Instagram and Facebook the most frequently used platforms; they also regularly encounter literary content and tend to prefer short over long-form content. A significant negative correlation was found between the overall time spent on social media and the time devoted to reading, which points to the competing demands on students' attention. However, students who followed literature-related accounts reported more daily reading than those who did not, suggesting that the effect of social media on reading depends more on how it is used than how much. This study thus recommends that educators draw on social media-based literary initiatives to support, rather than replace, reading culture in higher education.

| KEYWORDS

EFL learners, Moroccan higher education, out-of-class reading, reading engagement, reading habits, social media

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Literature has long occupied an important place in different cultures. It is more than a body of written works; it is a medium for expression, a way of preserving culture and a record of how societies and their histories have developed. As Hossain (2024) states, literature lets us become immersed in other frames of reference and step into minds other than our own. The fact that literature courses are taught in undergraduate programs across the world attests to its relevance through time and cultures, and above all to its place in education. Henning (1993, p. 24) believes that "literature allows learners to develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge, and sensitivity." Given this value, literature needs to be kept alive despite the changes the digital age has brought. Social media platforms have reached into every aspect of our lives, education included, and educators have begun to ask whether the dynamics of these spaces can be enlisted in support of formal literary education.

Literature is progressing in tandem with this technological transformation. Ferguson (2018) notes that we can now read almost anything, in many formats and on many devices. A novel can be read as a digital text, listened to as an audiobook or watched as a stage or film adaptation. It is not only the presentation of literature that is changing but also the way it is circulating. While the traditional book still carries weight among avid readers, the influence of other media on how literature is promoted cannot be ignored. Shahwan (2023) argues that distribution channels matter in their own right, since they play an essential role in how literary content is interpreted.

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While a considerable body of research has addressed the decline of reading, far less attention has been given to how students actually engage with English literature on social media, or to how this engagement relates to their reading habits when English is a foreign language, particularly in the Moroccan context.

2. Literature Review

Social media has progressively made its way into people's routines. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube have changed the way people see their personal and professional lives, and over the years they have reached the educational sector as well (Sabah, 2022). Checking these platforms for news, entertainment or connection with others is now standard practice, since they are built on the broad engagement of their communities (Greenhow et al., 2019). Young adults are the main audience of social media worldwide and use it more than older generations do (Sabah, 2022), which makes its educational side worth considering. Students are connected online most of the day, scrolling through endless content across several apps, but part of that content is educational. In a world of hashtags and online communities, literature has found its way back into the stream. People now use social media to share their interest in reading, advertise books, get closer to authors and discover literary works they would not otherwise have met. McLuhan (1964) famously argued that "the medium is the message." In the digital age, social media has become one of the main media through which literature is produced, circulated and consumed.

2.1 Literature in the Digital Age

Taking into consideration the importance of teaching literature, educators are aware of the shift toward the digital and recognize that students read and perceive literature differently. Evans (2017) explored high school students' experiences of reading a novella either as an e-book or in print and found that these experiences depended on factors such as when and where students read, the physical structure of the text and the social context, all of which teachers should keep in mind when assigning texts. Reading among students is nonetheless declining. St Clair-Thompson et al. (2018) attribute this to low reading comprehension, a lack of motivation and engagement and, most importantly, competing demands for students' time. Erdem (2015) similarly found that university students cannot spare enough time to read for pleasure, because their social lives, their studies and their time online come first.

Online social networking platforms have remarkably reshaped the way literature is promoted and distributed. According to Shahwan (2023), literature has become so accessible, and there are so many ways to express one's deepest thoughts and feelings, that there are probably more authors and readers today than at any other point in history. In the same vein, Kraxenberger and Lauer (2022) believe that despite the feared end of the book, literature has never been read and written as widely as in digital societies. Users of online platforms review and comment on the works of others, but they also upload their own stories and share how and why they wrote them (Kraxenberger & Lauer, 2022). This transformation creates tension for the teaching of English literature. Prensky (2001) notes that "today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach" (p. 1), and Baron (2015) worries about what screen-based reading does to sustained attention and deep literary engagement. Literature in the digital age is therefore a growing cultural space, but also a contested one.

2.2. Social Media, Education, and Literary Pedagogy

Research on social media in education has generally reported favorable outcomes, as students can benefit from a blended learning experience. Many studies show that students react positively when social media is integrated into their learning, mainly because it is easy to use and leaves more room for interaction and creativity (Batsila & Tsihouridis, 2016; Hamid et al., 2015; Sabah, 2022). Hamid et al. (2015), for example, found that social media improved learners' interactions with each other and with their instructors, and that learners were more motivated because they enjoyed the more interactive environment. More than that, Greenhow et al. (2019) identify three affordances of social media for learning: active learning, collaboration and community building. These are skills that higher education needs and that the workplace later demands (Greenhow et al., 2019; Orih et al., 2024). Similar results were reported in EFL contexts. In a study of 283 Saudi undergraduates, Alsaied (2017) found that frequent social media use predicted more interaction with peers and teachers, more collaborative learning and more engagement, and these factors together explained 67.7% of students' perceived learning performance. Teachers seem to agree. Alsalami (2026) surveyed 249 Saudi EFL instructors, who considered YouTube, WhatsApp and Telegram useful supplementary tools for motivating students, although they insisted that using them well requires teacher training, classroom management and institutional support. Closer to the literature classroom, Alfaruque et al. (2023) found that university students experienced the use of online platforms to communicate and share material in their literature class as both exciting and useful.

2.3. Social Media Platforms as Spaces for Literary Engagement

Nowadays, people are connected online through a multitude of platforms. Social media environments have been spaces for engaging with literature for some time (Vlieghe et al., 2016), and platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and X (previously Twitter) continue to play this role today. Literature-related content becomes more visible there because it is presented in formats that are easy to digest. Vlieghe et al. (2016) describe social media environments as leaving little room for content and exercising top-down control, all for the sake of maximizing user engagement. TikTok, for instance, shows each user short videos tailored to their interests (Jerasa, 2025).

Because these platforms bring together people who share the same interests, content creators, viewers and readers have started to change the way literature is seen, circulated and promoted (Jerasa, 2025; Vlieghe et al., 2016). The BookTok hashtag is a good example. It has become a popular hub where readers with mutual interests, values and identities meet to post book reviews, announce upcoming releases, suggest titles and reenact their favorite scenes (Jerasa, 2025).

A considerable body of research has dealt with the decline of reading among students (Meyer, 2015; Shahid & Gilani, 2025; Wang & Zhao, 2025). Research on the role of social media in university students' reading habits, however, is sparse, and even more so in the Moroccan context. This study therefore investigates social media use and English reading engagement among Moroccan EFL university students, with particular attention to their reading habits, their engagement with literary content, and the ways these intersect with their studies.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What forms of literary engagement do Moroccan EFL university students participate in on social media, and how do they perceive its role in promoting reading?
2. What is the relationship between social media use and the daily reading time of Moroccan EFL university students?

3. Methodology

The current study investigates social media use and English reading engagement among Moroccan EFL university students. In order to achieve this end, this study relied on a quantitative approach, as it allows for the collection of measurable data that can be analyzed to identify patterns and relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design was cross-sectional in nature, as it sought to capture students' social media use and its relationship with their reading habits at a single point in time.

3.1 Participants

The participants were undergraduate students of the English Department at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities Dhar El Mahraz, affiliated with Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University, Fes, Morocco. This study relied on convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on their availability and accessibility rather than randomly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, participants were approached during class time and through social media apps, mainly WhatsApp groups that host undergraduate students. In total, 111 students filled in the questionnaire.

3.2 Instruments

Due to the nature of the research design, the questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. It was designed on Google Forms for its accessibility and ease of distribution, and it consisted of 19 mostly closed-ended questions organized into three sections. The first section collected demographic information on gender and age. Since the institution sets no age requirement for enrollment, students' ages vary considerably, which made this a variable worth accounting for. The second section dealt with social media use, namely whether students had accounts, which platforms they used regularly, and how much time they spent on social media each day. The third section looked at the intersection of social media and literature; students were asked how much time they spent reading daily, whether they came across literature-related content on social media, which types of literary content they found most appealing, and whether social media had helped them with books assigned in class. In addition to yes/no and multiple-choice items, the questionnaire included one Likert-scale item and two open-ended questions, one asking about the platforms on which students read stories and another inviting any further remarks. The items were piloted with a small group of students to ensure their clarity. The questionnaire opened with a short introductory paragraph explaining the context and objectives of the study, and students were assured that their participation was voluntary and anonymous and that their responses would be used for academic purposes only.

3.3 Procedures

Data were coded and analyzed in SPSS (Version 23). Frequencies and percentages summarized participants' demographics, social media use, literary engagement, and perceptions (multiple-response items as percentages of cases). Three inferential tests were run: a Spearman correlation between daily social media time and daily reading time, a Mann-Whitney U test comparing reading time by literary-account following, and a chi-square test of the association between age and the perception that social media encourages reading.

4. Findings

The growing presence of social media in students' lives calls for an examination of its role in their reading engagement and its relationship with their reading habits. Thus, this section presents the findings obtained from the data analysis process organized around the two research questions. Descriptive statistics summarize the participants' demographic information, their patterns of social media use and literary engagement, and their perceptions of social media's role in reading; inferential tests then address the relationship between social media use and daily reading.

4.1 Demographic Information

In this study, 111 students participated willingly by filling in the questionnaire; of these, 60 (54.1%) were female and 51 (45.9%) were male. The largest age group was 18–22 years (44; 39.6%), followed by participants over 26 (34; 30.6%), those aged 23–26 (23; 20.7%), and those below 18 (10; 9.0%). Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic profile.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 111)*

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	60	54.1
	Male	51	45.9
Age	Below 18	10	9.0
	18–22	44	39.6
	23–26	23	20.7
	Over 26	34	30.6

4.2 Patterns of Social Media Use and Literary Engagement

Nearly all participants reported having at least one social media account (109; 98.2%). The platforms used most frequently were Instagram (57.7% of participants) and Facebook (36.9%), followed by YouTube (28.8%); TikTok, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, Reddit, and Telegram were each used by fewer than 8% of participants (Table 2). Daily time on social media was most commonly 1–2 hours (48; 43.2%) or 3–4 hours (36; 32.4%); 21 participants (18.9%) reported more than 4 hours, and only 6 (5.4%) reported less than 1 hour.

Table 2. *Social Media Platforms Regularly Used*

Platform	n	% of cases
Instagram	64	57.7
Facebook	41	36.9
YouTube	32	28.8
TikTok	8	7.2
Twitter (X)	6	5.4
WhatsApp	5	4.5
Other	4	3.6
Reddit	2	1.8
Telegram	2	1.8

Note. Percentages are based on the 111 participants and sum to more than 100% because participants could select more than one platform (164 selections in total).

Literary engagement on these platforms was widespread. Most participants had come across literature-related content on social media (94; 84.7%); however, 12 (10.8%) were unsure and 5 (4.5%) had not. A majority followed at least one literature-related account or page (84; 75.7%), had discovered books through social media (104; 93.7%), and had bought or read a book after seeing it recommended there (91; 82.0%). Most had also read a story on a social media platform (70; 63.1%). On the other hand, most participants were unaware of literature-related trends and hashtags such as BookTok (77; 69.4%).

In terms of the kinds of literary content participants preferred, quotes and excerpts were selected most often (56.8% of participants), followed by book summaries (48.6%), book recommendations (38.7%), and book reviews (37.8%); literature memes (24.3%) and author interviews (18.0%) were selected least often (Table 3).

Table 3. *Preferred Types of Literary Content on Social Media*

Content type	n	% of cases
Quotes/excerpts	63	56.8
Book summaries	54	48.6
Book recommendations	43	38.7
Book reviews	42	37.8
Literature memes	27	24.3
Author interviews	20	18.0

4.3 Perceptions of Social Media's Role in Reading

Participants were nearly evenly divided on whether social media encourages young people to read more (Yes = 56, 50.5%; No = 55, 49.5%). When asked whether social media is a reliable platform for discovering quality literature, the most common response was neutral (41; 36.9%), and overall disagreement (Strongly disagree = 18.0%; Disagree = 20.7%) exceeded agreement (Agree = 15.3%; Strongly agree = 9.0%) (Table 4). Participants leaned slightly toward social media (59; 53.2%) over class (52; 46.8%) when asked whether they were more likely to read a book discovered through social media or in class. Most reported that social media had helped them understand or enjoy a book assigned in class, either fully (52; 46.8%) or somewhat (36; 32.4%), while 23 (20.7%) reported that it had not.

Table 4. *Perceived Reliability of Social Media for Discovering Quality Literature*

Response	n	%
Strongly disagree	20	18.0
Disagree	23	20.7
Neutral	41	36.9
Agree	17	15.3
Strongly agree	10	9.0

A chi-square test of independence examined whether the perception that social media encourages reading varied by age. The association was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 111) = 12.68$, $p = .005$, Cramér's $V = .34$, indicating a moderate effect. Agreement was highest among participants aged 23–26 (18 of 23; 78.3%) and lowest among those aged 18–22 (16 of 44; 36.4%); the remaining groups fell between these values (Table 5).

Table 5. *Perception That Social Media Encourages Reading by Age Group*

Age group	Yes (n)	No (n)	% agreeing
Below 18	7	3	70.0
18–22	16	28	36.4
23–26	18	5	78.3
Over 26	15	19	44.1
Total	56	55	50.5

Note. $\chi^2(3, N = 111) = 12.68$, $p = .005$, Cramér's $V = .34$.

4.4 Social Media Use and Daily Reading Time

Daily time spent reading was most often less than 1 hour (42; 37.8%) or 1–2 hours (41; 36.9%); 14 participants (12.6%) reported reading 3–4 hours and 14 (12.6%) more than 4 hours.

Participants generally spent more time on social media than reading (Figure 1). A Spearman rank-order correlation further examined the relationship between daily time on social media and daily time reading. There was a significant weak negative correlation, ρ = −.22, p = .023, n = 111, indicating that participants who spent more time on social media tended to report less daily reading.

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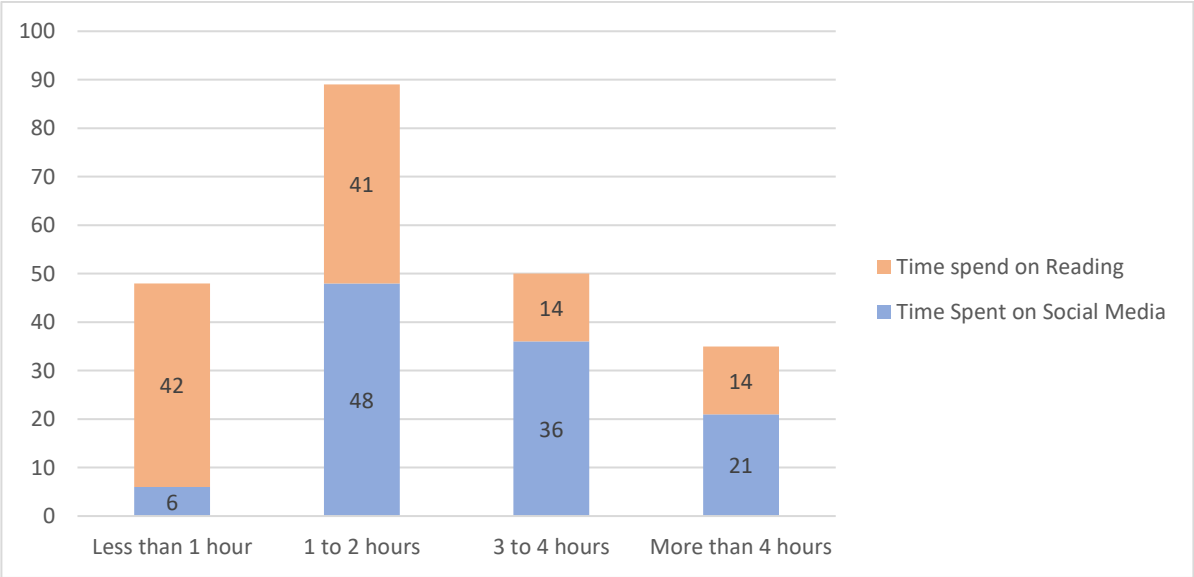


Figure 1. Daily Time Spent on Social Media Versus Daily Time Spent Reading (N = 111)

A Mann-Whitney U test compared daily reading time between participants who followed literature-related accounts and those who did not; this test was selected because reading time was measured on an ordinal scale and the two groups differed in size. Daily reading time was significantly higher among followers (n = 84, mean rank = 59.35) than among non-followers (n = 27, mean rank = 45.57), U = 852.50, z = 2.05, p = .041, r = .19, a small effect (Table 6). Thus, following literature-related accounts was associated with more, not less, daily reading.

Table 6. *Mann-Whitney U Test of Daily Reading Time by Literature-Account Following*

Group	n	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
Follows literary accounts	84	59.35	4985.50
Does not follow	27	45.57	1230.50
Total	111		

Note. U = 852.50, Wilcoxon W = 1230.50, z = 2.05, p = .041, r = .19.

5. Discussion

This study examined social media use and English reading engagement among Moroccan EFL university students, focusing on the forms of literary engagement they take part in online, their perceptions of social media's role in reading, and the relationship between their social media use and their reading habits. The present study thus addresses a literature that has rarely examined social media's role in literary reading within this specific context, and it draws a distinction between directed and

undifferentiated use that helps make sense of social media's seemingly contradictory relationship with reading. The findings describe students who are highly active online and often come across literature on social media, yet they remain uncertain about whether this presence actually leads to more reading.

The first research question sought to identify the forms of literary engagement that students take part in on social media and how they perceive its role in promoting reading. The survey revealed that almost all participants use social media on a daily basis, most often Instagram and Facebook, and that a large majority had come across literary content (84.7%), discovered books through these platforms (93.7%), and acted on the recommendations they encountered (82.0%). These patterns confirm that social media has indeed become a genuine venue for the circulation of literature, echoing Shahwan (2023), who argues that social media has reshaped the way literature is distributed, discussed, and consumed, and that the channels through which it travels carry real weight in how it is received. The students' clear preference for short and digestible formats, such as quotes, excerpts, and summaries rather than author interviews, further supports Shahwan's claim that the medium itself shapes the literary encounter. Their engagement, however, was largely informal rather than trend-driven; the majority (69.4%) were unaware of hashtag communities such as BookTok, which suggests that the online reading cultures documented elsewhere (Jerasa, 2025) have not yet taken hold in the Moroccan context.

Students' perceptions of this role were markedly mixed. They were almost evenly divided on whether social media encourages young people to read more, and they were more inclined to doubt than to trust it as a source of quality literature. This ambivalence complicates the more optimistic accounts of social media as a learning tool and suggests that studies presenting it as clearly beneficial for learning may be overstated, as the reality appears more nuanced. Alsaied (2017) found that frequent and interactive social media use predicted Saudi undergraduates' perceived learning performance; the findings of the present study suggest that Moroccan students recognize the reach of social media but remain more cautious about its reliability for literary quality in particular. Perceptions also varied significantly with age, as the 23–26 group was the most convinced of social media's encouraging role and the 18–22 group the least, which indicates that attitudes toward reading on social media are not uniform across an undergraduate cohort.

The second research question concerned the relationship between social media use and daily reading. Two findings stand out, and together they refine a common assumption. Students reported spending noticeably more time on social media than on reading, and this imbalance was reflected in a significant negative correlation between the two variables, consistent with the familiar concern that undifferentiated screen time competes with sustained reading (St Clair-Thompson et al., 2018). Yet students who followed literature-related accounts reported significantly more daily reading than those who did not. This distinction matters because it is not social media use as such that accompanies less reading, but how that use is directed. When students curate their feeds toward literary content, their online activity appears to align with, rather than displace, reading. This resonates with Alsaied's (2017) conclusion that it is engaged, purposeful use, not mere exposure, that drives positive outcomes, and it reframes social media as a potential ally of reading when it is channeled deliberately.

Students' own comments reinforced this picture. One participant maintained that "social media can boost reading yes, but if the one using social media already has interest or passion for reading. If not, social media will add no value," echoing St Clair-Thompson et al.'s (2018) emphasis on motivation as a driver of reading, something that social media may amplify but cannot supply on its own. Another cautioned that although social media "can be very beneficial," using it "in the wrong way" can "have a very negative impact on our studies or concentration," a concern that aligns with Baron's (2015) warning about the effects of screen-based reading on sustained attention. Together, these reflections mirror the study's central finding that social media's relationship with reading is conditional, depending on how, and by whom, it is used.

Altogether, these results carry a clear pedagogical implication. Students already turned to social media to make sense of assigned texts; most reported that it had helped them understand or enjoy a book set in class (46.8% fully and 32.4% somewhat), and a slight majority were more likely to read a book discovered online than one encountered in class. This positions social media as an underused resource for the teaching of literature. Alsalami (2026) reached a similar conclusion from the teachers' side, reporting that Saudi EFL instructors regarded platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram as useful supplementary tools, while insisting that using them effectively depends on training, classroom management, and institutional support. The fact that students' informal practices in the present study converge with instructors' cautious optimism suggests that the promise of social media for literary engagement is most likely to be realized not by leaving it to chance, but by integrating it into teaching in structured and intentional ways.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to understand the role of social media in reading and literary engagement among Moroccan EFL university students. What the findings show is that social media is not in itself good or bad for reading; its value depends on how it is used. For these students, social media has become an ordinary, everyday way of coming across literature, yet this exposure does not on its own lead to deeper or more sustained reading. What matters is the intention behind the engagement.

Beyond its specific findings, this study adds to the ongoing discussion on the future of reading in the digital age. On a theoretical level, it refines the common assumption that time spent on social media simply takes away from time spent reading.

The relationship, as this study shows, has less to do with the amount of use than with its orientation, and separating literature-oriented engagement from aimless scrolling gives a clearer picture than screen time on its own. By applying this distinction to Moroccan undergraduates, a group that has received little attention in previous research, the study also offers a situated account of how a wider shift toward digital literary engagement plays out in a particular cultural context. As social media keeps reshaping the way young people encounter texts, understanding this relationship and guiding it well remain an important task for educators and researchers.

The study also carries practical implications for the teaching of literature. Instead of treating social media as a distraction to be resisted, educators can build on students' existing habits and guide them toward more purposeful, literature-oriented use, such as curated reading communities and structured online discussion. Used in this way, social media can support classroom teaching and help nurture a reading culture among a generation of digital natives; left unguided, however, it risks competing with reading rather than supporting it.

These conclusions should nonetheless be read with certain limitations in mind. The study drew on a convenience sample from a single institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings to Moroccan undergraduates more broadly. Its cross-sectional design captures associations at a single point in time and therefore cannot establish the direction of the relationships observed, including whether following literary accounts encourages reading, or whether committed readers are simply more inclined to follow such accounts in the first place. The reliance on self-reported estimates of time may also introduce recall or social-desirability bias, and the effect sizes for the significant relationships were small to moderate. These constraints suggest that the findings are therefore best read as an initial picture of the Moroccan context that future research could build on.

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Authenticity: This manuscript is an original work.
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