

STUDENT EVALUATION CULTURE AND ACADEMIC DIGNITY: ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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Annotation. This article explores the impact of student evaluation culture on lecturers' professional dignity and reputation in the context of globalization. Student evaluations have become not only a mechanism for assuring study quality but also a key factor shaping academic reputation and career prospects. The aim of the study is to examine how evaluation practices affect lecturers' dignity and reputation while identifying the ethical criteria that reinforce respect within the academic community. The research draws on literature analysis, comparative methodology, and theoretical generalizations. The findings reveal that student evaluation culture is strongly influenced by market logic, the dominance of satisfaction-driven criteria, and the spread of consumerist values, all of which are intensified by globalization, transforming higher education into a competitive service market. The study concludes that respect, honesty, accountability, transparency, and professional integrity are essential ethical principles for safeguarding lecturers' dignity, reducing reputational vulnerability, and fostering trust in the academic community.

Keywords: student evaluation culture; academic dignity; ethical challenges; globalization

INTRODUCTION

Globalization processes have a profound impact on higher education, increasingly reinforcing a market logic in which studies are perceived as a service sector and the student as a client (Naidoo, 2016; Marginson, 2018). Research shows that student evaluations are not reliable indicators of teaching quality: they are often based on subjective impressions, personal attitudes, or social stereotypes (Quansah et al., 2024; Gilbert & Gilbert, 2025; Murray et al., 2020). Even a few negative or disrespectful comments can disproportionately affect a lecturer's image, working relationships, and career opportunities (Hornstein, 2017). This situation raises not only methodological but also ethical dilemmas, as it threatens the professional dignity of lecturers. This is a fundamental value of the academic community (Kouritzin et al., 2020; Roth et al., 2022).

Lecturers' experiences reveal their professional vulnerability. Sidwell et al. (2025) emphasises that academic staff often feel pressured by the evaluation culture, as satisfaction indicators can overshadow pedagogical professionalism and the principles of academic ethics. Zhao (2022) also notes that although student evaluation systems are widely applied, they do not always foster a genuine culture of quality improvement and may sometimes distort it. In the context of globalization, student evaluations become not only a tool of feedback but also a determinant of lecturers' reputation and professional success. Evaluation results influence decisions about teaching quality, career opportunities, and even continued employment. However, this raises the question of whether such practices are compatible with the values of the academic community and the principle of respect for human dignity. Against this background, a key research question arises: how can student evaluation culture be balanced in the context of globalization so that it contributes to quality assurance in higher education while also protecting lecturers' professional dignity and reputation?

It is evident that in the context of globalization, the culture of student evaluations is twofold: on the one hand, it provides feedback for the study process, while on the other, it poses a threat to lecturers' dignity and academic reputation. This article aims to highlight the impact of student evaluation culture on lecturers' professional dignity and reputation in the context of globalization, revealing the ethical criteria that can strengthen respect within the academic community.

Objectives:

1. To review the causes of the formation of student evaluation culture and the changes in higher education driven by globalization.
2. To identify the ethical criteria that can ensure the protection of lecturers' professional dignity when evaluation culture becomes an essential part of quality assurance.

Research methods: the article applies theoretical analysis and a comparative review of scientific literature. These methods were chosen to assess different authors' perspectives on the validity of student evaluations, the impact of globalization on the study process, and measures for safeguarding academic dignity.

Methodological framework. This article is based on a qualitative theoretical analysis and comparative review of international scientific literature. The methodological approach combines normative ethical analysis, comparative interpretation of empirical studies published by other authors, and conceptual modelling. The selection of sources was guided by three criteria: (1) relevance to student evaluation systems in higher education; (2) explicit engagement with issues of academic dignity, reputation, or ethics; (3) publication date prioritising recent international research (2015–2025), with exceptions made for classical ethical theory. Comparative analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and ethical risks related to the use of student evaluations in different higher education contexts. Based on

these patterns, conceptual generalisations were formulated to identify key vulnerability factors affecting academic dignity under conditions of globalisation.

THE FORMATION OF STUDENT EVALUATION CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

The Transformation of Higher Education into a “Service Sector”. Contemporary higher education is increasingly interpreted through the lenses of market, business, and consumer perspectives, with the study process framed as a service. This trend signals a reorientation of universities: from their traditional missions of science and education toward consumer-oriented structures, prioritizing satisfaction, efficiency, and competitive positioning. Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) examine how teaching and learning have become commodities in international higher education markets, emphasizing that universities act as service providers, with the diploma itself acquiring brand value. Similarly, Gupta et al. (2023) study analyzes student self-perceptions as clients in Denmark, England, and Spain, showing that students increasingly expect transparency, accountability, and clear “service value” from universities.

Plante (2016), discussing the commodification of higher education, highlights the conflict between the traditional mission of universities (academic freedom, fostering critical thinking) and market pressure to meet “customer needs.” Meanwhile, Goyzueta Mejía et al. (2025) provides a systematic review evaluating the student-as-client model as a risk to academic values, when quality is measured not by pedagogical content but by levels of student satisfaction. The lecturer’s role is also changing in this context: they become not only a transmitter of knowledge but also a service provider expected to meet consumerist demands. Such a transformation may lead to pressures on academic freedom, superficial teaching, and the vulnerability of lecturers’ professional dignity.

The Student as a Client – Implications for the Lecturer–Student Relationship. The paradigm of the student as a client transforms not only the mission of higher education institutions but also the very nature of lecturer–student relationships. In traditional academic culture, the lecturer was regarded as an authority, a source of knowledge, and an evaluator. However, with the entrenchment of consumerist logic under globalization, students increasingly see themselves as service recipients with the right to demand, criticize, and even influence the lecturer’s professional success.

Bunce et al. (2016) found that the student-as-client perspective correlates with lower academic engagement and a stronger focus on the “value for money” of study outcomes. This perspective risks encouraging superficial learning and weakening genuine motivation to study. Students’ expectations are often directed toward “customer service” aspects, such as accessibility, friendliness, and flexibility rather than academic rigour or content quality (Howson & Mawer, 2013). Evaluations are thus strongly influenced not by academic standards but by lecturers’ personal characteristics, such as communication style or course convenience (Murray et al., 2020). This trend pressures lecturers to adapt to consumerist expectations, sometimes at the expense of academic freedom and the cultivation of critical thinking.

International Trends and Research Review: Issues of Validity and the Risk of Bias. Student evaluation systems have become an integral part of quality assurance in higher education in many countries. They are used to make decisions regarding lecturer employment, career advancement, workload, and even financial incentives. However, international research emphasizes that the reliability of such evaluations is limited and that their results are influenced by a wide range of subjective factors.

The reviewed studies reveal that student evaluation systems are multifaceted and problematic from both methodological and ethical perspectives. As shown in the table, Quansah et al. (2024) emphasize methodological inaccuracies and limited validity; Gilbert & Gilbert (2025) demonstrate that student evaluations are not directly related to actual learning outcomes; Murray et al. (2020) highlight the risk of bias, where evaluations are influenced more by lecturers’ personal attributes than by academic quality. Sidwell et al. (2025) reveals lecturers’ professional vulnerability, as satisfaction indicators may overshadow pedagogical professionalism. Zhao (2022) observes that evaluation systems do not always contribute to improving study quality and may even distort the academic process. These insights suggest that while student evaluations are widely used as a feedback tool, they cannot serve as the sole measure of quality, as they pose risks to academic culture and lecturers’ professional dignity. Therefore, it is necessary to further examine how challenges to academic dignity are shaped under globalization and what significance they acquire in the life of the academic community.

Table 1

Key Studies on the Validity of Student Evaluations and the Risk of Bias

Authors, Year	Research Object	Key Findings	Problematic Aspects
Quansah et al., 2024	Systematic review of research on the validity of student evaluations	Evaluations often suffer from methodological inaccuracies, measurement errors, and subjectivity	Lack of validity, limited reliability
Gilbert & Gilbert, 2025	Relationship between student evaluations and learning outcomes	High evaluations do not necessarily correlate with better academic achievements	Discrepancy between evaluations and actual learning quality

Murray et al., 2020	Factors influencing student evaluation results	Evaluations are affected not only by teaching quality but also by lecturer's gender, age, and course difficulty	Risk of bias, danger of discrimination
Sidwell et al., 2025	Lecturers' experiences in student evaluation systems	Lecturers feel vulnerable, as evaluations are based on satisfaction rather than pedagogical professionalism	Ethical dilemmas, vulnerability of professional dignity
Zhao, 2022	Literature review on the use of student evaluations	Evaluation systems do not always promote genuine quality improvement and sometimes even distort the academic process	Distortion of academic culture, limited quality benefits

Student evaluations are used not only as a feedback mechanism but also as the basis for career-related decisions. This practice creates a paradox: although research consistently highlights the limitations and biases of evaluations, universities often treat them as objective quality indicators. This poses significant risks to lecturers' professional dignity, as even a few unfounded or emotional evaluations can disproportionately affect their reputation. International scholarly literature converges on three key points: (1) the validity of student evaluations is limited, as they often fail to reflect teaching quality; (2) evaluations are not reliably linked to students' learning outcomes; (3) evaluations are strongly influenced by bias, ranging from lecturers' personal characteristics to course design. This raises the question of how ethical it is to use student evaluations as the primary measure of lecturers' performance in the context of globalization, where reputation has become a crucial determinant of professional success.

The Vulnerability of Lecturer Reputation and Challenges to Dignity. In the context of globalization, the culture of student evaluations becomes not only a mechanism for quality assurance but also one of the most significant tools in shaping lecturers' reputations. Reputation in this case is highly fragile and vulnerable, as even a few negative or disrespectful comments can disproportionately affect a lecturer's image, career opportunities, and even employment prospects.

Classical ethical theories provide a deeper understanding of this problem. Kant linked human dignity with unconditional respect for the person, regardless of their achievements or social utility. Nussbaum (2016), in a contemporary context, emphasizes that dignity is inseparable from an individual's ability to act according to their vocation and professional standards. When lecturers are compelled to adjust academic content to consumerist student expectations, their ability to fulfil their professional vocation is constrained, which constitutes a direct threat to their dignity. Macfarlane (2004) likewise stresses that the academic profession is grounded in trust and integrity. If these principles are undermined by an evaluation system dominated by service logic, lecturers' dignity becomes a matter of negotiation, and the academic community itself loses part of its ethical foundation.

Figure 1 illustrates the key factors contributing to the vulnerability of lecturer reputation in the context of globalization. The diagram shows that the greatest risk stems from the market logic of globalization (score 9), as it structurally transforms higher education into a service sector in which reputation becomes a "commodity" in a competitive environment. The second most significant factor is students' subjective evaluations (score 8), which can disproportionately influence a lecturer's image and career. Moderate risks arise from the nature and complexity of courses (score 7) and lecturers' personal characteristics (score 7), which, as international studies indicate (Murray et al., 2020), often shape evaluation results independently of teaching quality. Methodological inaccuracies (score 6), discussed by Quansah et al. (2024), further undermine the validity of evaluations, while institutional pressure (score 6), driven by quality assurance policies, forces universities to use evaluations as objective indicators, even though their reliability is questionable.

The values presented in Figure 1 do not represent empirical measurements. They are based on a conceptual weighting derived from theoretical synthesis of the analysed literature. The scale (1–10) reflects the relative intensity with which each factor is discussed in the literature as contributing to academic reputation vulnerability. The weighting was established through qualitative comparison of recurring arguments across key studies (Quansah et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2020; Sidwell, 2025; Zhao, 2022), identifying which factors are most frequently and explicitly associated with structural or ethical risks.

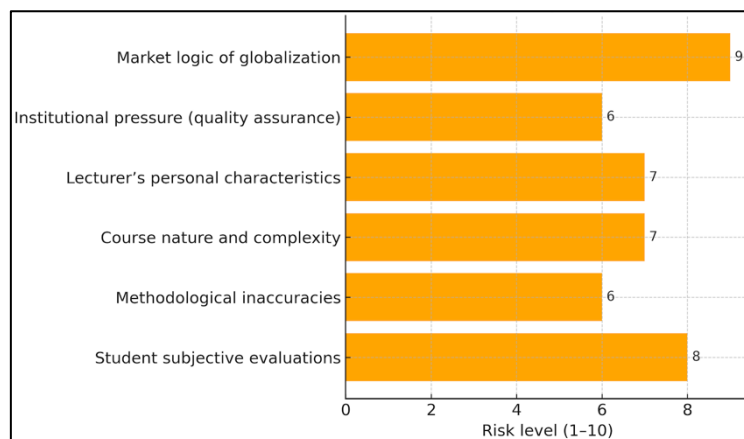


Figure 1. **Conceptual model of factors contributing to academic reputation vulnerability under globalisation**

This scheme, based on the reviewed scholarly literature (Quansah et al., 2024; Gilbert & Gilbert, 2025; Murray et al., 2020; Sidwell et al., 2025; Zhao, 2022), highlights two main risks: 1) methodological – evaluations are not reliable indicators of teaching quality; 2) ethical – evaluations may undermine lecturers' professional dignity and academic reputation. The scores presented in the diagram (on a 1–10 scale) are not empirical but derived from theoretical generalizations, which allow for assessing the relative weight of each factor in contributing to reputation vulnerability.

In summary, under globalization, lecturer's reputation is highly vulnerable, as it is shaped not only by professional achievements but also by students' subjective evaluations. This creates a situation in which human dignity may be systematically undermined, and the lecturer's role is reduced to that of a service provider expected to meet consumerist criteria. Such dynamics harm not only individual lecturers but also the academic community as a whole, as they weaken its ethical foundation built on trust, autonomy, and professional responsibility. Reputation vulnerability becomes an institutional phenomenon: by relying on evaluations as the primary quality measure, universities contribute to the devaluation of dignity. From an ethical perspective, this means that universities risk losing their fundamental mission, i. e. to educate critically thinking and independent individuals rather than merely satisfying the demands of market-driven “clients.” It is therefore essential to seek new solutions that ensure the protection of lecturers' professional dignity and enable evaluation culture to serve as constructive feedback rather than a source of reputational threat. In this light, the next step is to analyze the ethical criteria that can strengthen respect within the academic community and safeguard the true value of higher education in the context of globalization.

ETHICAL CRITERIA FOR SAFEGUARDING LECTURER'S PROFESSIONAL DIGNITY

The Principle of Human Dignity in the Academic Environment. Human dignity in the academic community means that every lecturer has the right to be treated with respect and dignity, regardless of student evaluation results, career status, gender, or other subjective factors. This principle is grounded in the insights of classical ethical theories (e.g., I. Kant, E. Levinas) as well as in modern principles of educational ethics, which focus on safeguarding the human being as an intrinsic value.

Kouritzin et al. (2020) showed that neoliberal university structures based on competition, productivity pressures, and constant accountability mechanisms generate emotional strain for academic staff and diminish their sense of dignity. The authors emphasize that lecturers often feel reduced to “units of productivity,” valued not for the quality of their scholarly or pedagogical work but for quantitative indicators: number of publications, average evaluation scores, or student satisfaction levels. Student evaluations may reflect not teaching competence but biased categories such as gender, ethnicity, or accent (Basow & Montgomery, 2005; Chávez & Mitchell, 2020). This means that lecturers' dignity and reputation may be undermined not only by judgments of teaching quality but also by social stereotypes. Studies in German universities have shown that student evaluation results often become decisive in decisions about contract extensions for young lecturers, regardless of other academic indicators (Hornstein, 2017). Such practices intensify reputational vulnerability, as a lecturer's career depends on subjective evaluations rather than professional integrity. These examples show that dignity in academia is constantly tested both structurally (through institutional market logic) and at the micro-level (through daily interactions between lecturers and students). Thus, dignity assurance is not automatically part of academic culture. It requires conscious and systematic strengthening, integrating ethical criteria into quality assurance processes and fostering a culture of respect in the academic community.

Roth (2022) argues that dignity should be seen not only as a moral or legal norm but as a core pedagogical value essential for authentic academic thinking and dialogue. Scharff (2023) supports this view, emphasizing that respect for dignity can be integrated into academic culture through both interpersonal relations and institutional measures, such as incorporating dignity principles into curricula and fostering responsibility in academic interactions.

The development of a dialogue culture is also highlighted as an effective way to strengthen the principle of dignity. In the University of Glasgow project Co-creating Feedback Dialogue Tools through Course Evaluations (Mair et al., 2024), students and lecturers collaborated in creating alternative evaluation tools. The essence of the project was a

shift from anonymous scores to constructive discussions, where feedback becomes a dialogue rather than a one-way control mechanism. In this way, the culture of evaluation becomes more grounded in respect and cooperation. Similar insights are provided by Stikholmen et al. (2022), who analyzed nursing students' experiences in Norway. The study revealed that disrespectful or unprofessional comments during evaluations can strongly undermine students' sense of dignity. Although the research focused on students, its findings indicate that vulnerability of dignity is mutual: lecturers can also suffer reputational damage when evaluations are based on subjective or emotional reactions rather than academic competence.

These insights suggest that the principle of human dignity in academia cannot be reduced to technical quality indicators or student satisfaction surveys. Safeguarding dignity is essential to ensure lecturers' professional integrity and the sustainability of the academic community. In practice, this means that universities must create structures and cultures that ensure transparency in evaluations, implement dignity-protection measures (e.g., constructive feedback, evaluation review mechanisms, stronger dialogue between students and lecturers), and provide institutional support systems. Only in this way can lecturer stress and professional burnout be reduced, while strengthening their commitment and motivation.

The Role of Professional Ethics in the Culture of Evaluations. Professional ethics in academia play a crucial role in shaping the culture of evaluations. Evaluations in higher education inevitably affect lecturers' careers, reputations, and professional dignity; therefore, ethical principles become a cornerstone in mitigating potential vulnerabilities. Student evaluations can raise serious ethical dilemmas when used unilaterally, without considering context or allowing lecturers to explain the results. Lecturers often face pressure because their performance is judged based on student satisfaction rather than pedagogical professionalism (Sidwell et al., 2025); moreover, the validity of evaluations is limited by methodological inaccuracies, the constraints of anonymity, and students' lack of motivation (Quansah et al., 2024). For these reasons, ethical criteria should become an integral part of evaluation systems.

Discussions on the importance of professional ethics increasingly emphasize the power dynamics underlying evaluation culture. Close (2024) argues that relying on student evaluations as the primary tool for making personnel decisions is inherently unethical, as it reduces the lecturer to a "service provider" and undermines the principle of professional autonomy. Such logic not only contradicts the protection of dignity but also erodes trust among members of the academic community. Crimmins et al. (2024) highlight the role of institutions in creating ethically sound evaluation processes and note that higher education leaders tend to acknowledge the limitations of evaluations. Therefore, it is important to publicly define how evaluation results are used, ensuring transparency and clear policy guidelines. Such measures reduce potential reputational vulnerability and foster shared responsibility. Another critical aspect is the risk of bias. Daskalopoulou (2024) and Murray et al. (2020) emphasize that evaluation results often depend on a lecturer's gender, ethnicity, or accent, which contradicts the principle of fairness. The impact of bias not only undermines lecturers' trust in the system but also fosters discriminatory practices. In this context, ethical principles are essential to protect lecturers from unjust reputational harm.

The Dimension of Responsibility for Words and Respect for the Academic Community. Responsibility for words is a key element of evaluation culture, as both oral and written comments can have lasting effects on lecturers' reputations and dignity. Ethical standards require that student evaluations be interpreted carefully, ensuring accountability at both the student and institutional levels. Bloxham and Boyd (2012) revealed that lecturers in the United Kingdom view evaluations as an area of responsibility, where existing academic standards and internal moderation practices help ensure transparency in decision-making. However, they note that the justification of decisions and broader contextualization (e.g., course type or student group composition) often remain limited, posing a risk that evaluation results may fail to adequately reflect the principle of dignity and may threaten the academic notion of justice. Linse (2017) adds another perspective, emphasizing that student evaluation data must be interpreted with great caution, as they often contain methodological flaws and biases. She recommends that institutions establish clear rules defining the purposes of using evaluation results. Whether they are intended only for pedagogical improvement or also for personnel evaluation and career decisions. Such guidelines enhance not only the reliability of evaluations but also the protection of lecturers' professional reputations.

Philosophically, this principle is linked to human dignity. Kant emphasized respect for individuals as ends in themselves, while Levinas stressed responsibility for the Other. In this light, disrespectful or anonymous comments undermine dignity by neglecting respect and fairness. In sum, responsibility for words must be embedded in academic culture to ensure that evaluations serve as constructive feedback tools, strengthening trust and cooperation rather than damaging reputations.

Decision-Making Models for a Responsible Evaluation Culture: Institutional Support and Balancing Quality Assurance Systems. The challenges of evaluation culture discussed in previous sections, such as vulnerability of dignity, professional ethics standards, and the dimension of responsibility for words, show that criticism and theoretical principles alone do not ensure change. In higher education, it is necessary not only to analyze the impact of evaluations but also to create clearly defined decision-making models that can guarantee an ethical, balanced, and sustainable quality assurance system.

Krooi et al. (2024) proposes the "3P" (Purposes, People, Processes) model, which aligns institutional goals, community needs, and clear evaluation processes. By involving both lecturers and students in criteria setting and fostering dialogue, evaluations become part of a constructive culture rather than a mechanical measure. Cook et al. (2024) presents a four-level model (students, peers, administration, learning outcomes) that reduces bias and strengthens trust. Chan & Jiang (2023) shows that department-level action plans (training, monitoring, clear policies) ensure feedback supports

pedagogical development and protects dignity, recognizing lecturers as academic community members rather than service providers.

Decision-making models oriented toward a responsible evaluation culture require jointly formulated criteria involving both lecturers and students; multi-layered evaluation systems that extend beyond student satisfaction; continuous professional support for lecturers; and transparent institutional policies defining how evaluation results are applied. Only an integrated, multi-dimensional approach can reconcile the goals of quality assurance and the protection of human dignity while fostering an ethically sustainable academic environment. This approach incorporates clear ethical criteria that counterbalance market logic and safeguard the professional dignity of lecturers:

- **Respect.** A lecturer should be regarded as a member of the academic community whose professional work is based not only on student satisfaction but also on pedagogical and scientific standards. International research shows that respect for academic freedom and lecturer authority is essential to ensure a sustainable academic culture (Macfarlane, 2004; Nussbaum, 2010).

- **Fairness.** In the ethical dimension, fairness means the objective and transparent use of evaluations at the institutional level. While student feedback is important, it must be analyzed responsibly, avoiding oversimplification of individual comments or results that may cause unjustified reputational harm (Linse, 2017).

- **Responsibility for words.** Student comments can have long-term consequences, and their interpretation requires a high level of responsibility. Research highlights that responsible use of feedback reduces the influence of subjective evaluations and fosters trust between students and lecturers (Bloxham & Boyd, 2012).

- **Professional integrity.** Integrity means the commitment of both lecturers and institutions to uphold academic ethical principles even when market logic pushes toward satisfaction indicators. This includes refusing to sacrifice long-term academic value for short-term reputational gain (Zhao, 2022).

Applying these criteria would help shape a responsible evaluation culture where feedback becomes a tool for learning improvement rather than a source of reputational risk.

Practical implications for institutional quality assurance. The findings of this study have direct practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to balance quality assurance and ethical responsibility. First, student evaluations should be integrated into multi-source evaluation frameworks, where they complement rather than dominate peer review, self-reflection, and learning outcome assessments.

Second, institutions should clearly define the purposes of student evaluations, distinguishing between formative feedback and summative personnel decisions. Transparency regarding how evaluation data are used reduces reputational vulnerability and enhances trust within the academic community.

Third, ethical safeguards should be embedded into evaluation systems, including moderation of comments, contextual interpretation of results, and institutional support mechanisms for academic staff. Such measures allow student feedback to function as a developmental tool rather than a reputational risk instrument.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Changes driven by globalization have led to higher education increasingly being perceived through the lens of market logic, reshaping academic culture and intensifying lecturers' reputational vulnerability. This transformation alters academic culture, as a lecturer's reputation depends more and more on students' opinions and subjective satisfaction ratings, which heightens their professional vulnerability.

2. The protection of lecturers' professional dignity is ensured by ethical criteria-respect, honesty, accountability for one's words, and professional integrity. Applying these principles strengthens trust within the academic community and helps to create a responsible culture of evaluation. Without these ethical foundations, it is impossible to sustain an academic culture that is durable, ethical, and respectful of human dignity.

Declaration on the use of AI tools

The authors declare that AI-based tools were used exclusively for language editing and stylistic refinement of the manuscript. All conceptual arguments, theoretical interpretations, structure, and conclusions were developed by the authors. Responsibility for the content, originality, and scholarly integrity of the article rests entirely with the authors.

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