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BOURDIEU'S SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE FORMATION OF SENSE OF PLACE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Urban environment is losing its character due to unregulated development which poses challenges to maintaining its symbolic meanings, memories, and identities that are substantial for the urban community. A key factor in sustaining urban character includes fostering a sense of place of an urban community. Sense of place refers to individuals' subjective and emotional attachment to their environment, encompassing physical, social, and symbolic dimensions. Previous studies reported that sense of place is closely connected to social capital. Despite this, the positioning role of social capital towards sense of place is hardly researched and analysed systematically. This paper aims to explore the trend of studies on the relationship between social capital and sense of place through a systematic literature review using Scopus and Web of Science database. Result shows the expanding trend of this topic, however, is limited in the context of Malaysia urban area. This study contributes to the knowledge of the potential role of social capital to enhance sense of place which contributes to the sustainability of urban characters in Malaysia context.

Keywords: Bourdieu, Social Capital, Sense of Place, Urban Character, Urban Area

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INTRODUCTION

An urban area is a geographical space with continued urban settlement and higher population density than the surrounding (Mela, 2014). There is an urban character for every urban area which comprises of tangible and intangible elements, including architectural styles, massing, urban layout, and people's usage and interaction with the built environment (Cox, 2022). These elements also shape urban identity, alongside the formation of interaction between historical evolution, natural, social, and built environments (Oktay, 2006). This interaction is closely related to the sense of place in the urban area. The sense of place in an urban community is influential towards the sustainability of the urban character (Erfani, 2020). Sense of place refers to the emotional, symbolic, and spiritual affective bond between people and specific locations (Zlender & Gemin, 2020) embedded in the feelings, emotions, and behaviour towards the environment (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). Erfani (2020) defined the sense of place as a multidimensional construct with three variables: place attachment, place identity, and place satisfaction. Sense of place has also been coined as the emotional and internal relation between people and their environment (Mohammad-Moradi et al., 2020), including the elements of attitude, emotion, affect, feeling, value and consciousness (Fan et al., 2024). These various definitions elucidate the sense of a place as having symbolic meanings to an individual. Westerholt et al. (2022) mentioned the importance of the structural age of a neighbourhood building and the symbolic meanings that the urban community attaches to the feature of urban character. However, factors such as rapid and unplanned development, degradation of environmental attributes, precarious livelihoods, and resource pressures are impacting the urban character (Mpanje et al., 2018).

According to Ziyae (2018), in the modern era, there is a noticeable challenge to sustaining urban ideas which have meanings, memories, and identities for the urban community. The impact of urbanisation through the standard structures of manmade objects influenced the cultural and natural features that further diminished the urban character (Kaymaz, 2013). This enables the loss of meaningful places due to the change in material environment, which also affects the sense of place in the urban community (Westerholt et al., 2022). Alongside this impact, urbanisation also impacts interpersonal ties (Goode, 1970 c.f. Hofferth and Iceland, 1998) within the people or locals living in urban areas. Interpersonal ties are very important for urban communities as the ties reflected through trust and social networks can help lower crime figures, improve health, increase educational achievement, and improve economic growth (Ijla, 2012). In urban areas such as cities, the physical proximity between one another enables an opportunity for a speedy transition from anonymity into intimacy (Lofland, 1973 c.f. Felder, 2020). This underlying invisible network of relationships through the tie forms social capital. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) understands social capital as the

individual's resource of ties (relationships) that are also impacted by the presence of cultural and economic capital. According to Claridge (2018), the ties can be represented as internal ties, which refer to the bonding relationships within the organisation, while the external tie is the bonding relationship across and between organisations. The organisation refers to the affiliated relationship between the community, for example, residential-community association, neighbourhood-community association, and so on. This study posits that social capital values can influence the sense of place formation, which sustains the urban characters. Sustaining urban character is important for preserving urban identity and fostering community engagement. Therefore, understanding the relationship between social capital and a sense of place is critical. This paper aims to explore the trend of studies on the relationship between social capital and sense of place particularly through Bourdieu's framework. This contributes to a new application of how Bourdieu's social capital can be applied in the context of Malaysian urban planning. Bourdieu's social capital framework has been applied in various field of studies and has been largely regarded as significant. In addition to that, the impact of this study will also be to provide a foresight knowledge into the possible role of social capital in the formation of a sense of place to ensure the sustainability of urban characters in Malaysia. This knowledge contributes to the Malaysian government's policy-making in urban planning, improving public participation and collaboration, and building community-based resilience shield against climate change in urban areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The deterioration of urban character is increasingly linked to the decline of social cohesion within urban communities. As cities expand and modernise, traditional social structures often weaken, leading to fragmented communities, reduced interactions, and a diminished sense of collective identity (Putnam, 2000; Robles et al., 2021). This lack of social cohesion manifests in various forms, including weakened community bonds, loss of cultural identity, declining public spaces, increased social isolation, and heightened socio-economic segregation. Without strong social networks and shared experiences, urban environments lose their distinct character, transforming into impersonal and disconnected spaces (Jacobs, 1961; Beatley & Newman, 2013). In an urban context, strong social capital facilitates active community engagement, shared responsibilities, and a deep-rooted sense of belonging. A well-connected urban community fosters mutual trust and cooperation, strengthening local identity and contributing to urban character sustainability (Putnam, 2000; Stratford, 2016). The concept of social capital can be traced back to three notable authors: Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000). Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to possessing a durable

network of relationships with mutual recognition. His idea of social capital is closely linked with his famous Theory of Field pertaining to the field of interaction between social agents through different capital as a resource. Coleman (1988) coined social capital as the less tangible form of relationships between persons. This is similar to Putnam (2000), who refers to social capital as the connections among individuals that form the social network for a cohesive society. The word formed ‘individual’ connection is also contained in Fukuyama’s (2001) interpretations of social capital alongside formed cooperative virtues. Social capital formation within an individual may stem from the parental community ties, which develop over time through networks in different field settings, such as friendship, work colleagues, and many more. (Hofferth and Iceland, 1998). Social capital has been proven to be a critical indicator for any issue established in community-based studies. In the urban setting study, Mpanje et al. (2018) extracted social capital into three attributes: bonding, bridging, and linking. The bonding social capital refers to shared identity and personal relations, which can be measured by two components: quantity and quality of relationships. It can be reflected in strong community relationships and interactions (Rami et al., 2023). Bridging social capital is defined by the relations with distant people with quality and quantitative Meso-level connections. The linking social capital relates to the relations with external parties and is measured through the quality and structure of linkages and institutions. This encapsulation of social capital relates to Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptualisation. Bourdieu (1986) emphasised the application of mutual names in forming social capital and that it is a resource that depends on other capitals. Figure 1 visually represents Bourdieu’s (1986) definition of social capital.

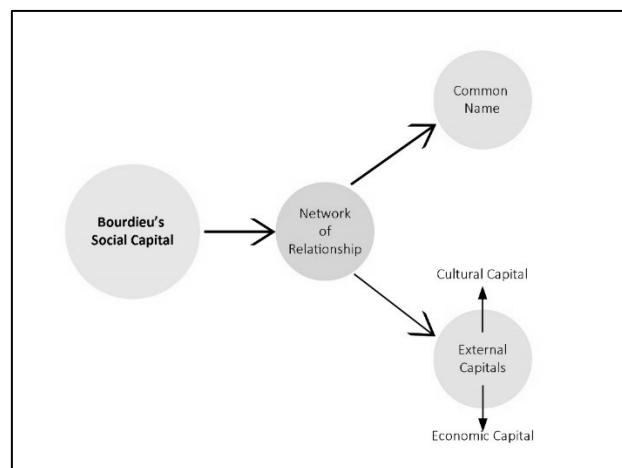


Figure 1: Bourdieu’s Social Capital Operationalisation
Source: Authors

From the figure, social capital is formed through the network of relationships (ties) influenced by the common name and the external capitals: cultural and economic capitals. This relationship stems from Bourdieu's theory of field, in which he theorised about the dynamic interaction of each capital in a field (Grenfell, 2014). Capital accumulation depends on the type of field to which the person belongs, and its formation depends on the external capital; cultural capital refers to the cultural resource of an individual reflected in three dimensions: embodied, institutionalised, and objectified. The economic capital is the monetary resource that allows the accumulation of the two capitals: social and cultural capital. This study adopted Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of social capital due to this theoretical basis to better investigate its relationship towards the sense of place.

Bourdieu (1986) stressed the dynamic property of social capital that can be reduced or expanded depending on the size of the network of connections an individual can mobilise and the volume of other capitals. This is different with, Coleman (1988) who sees social capital as goal oriented which the actors have a clear instrumental purpose on the utilisation of social capital (Tzanakis, 2013). For Putnam (2000), social capital is the organisation's features through networks, norms, and trust that encourage collaboration and collective action for shared benefits. This conceptualisation is more inclined towards a group of people, for example, community through the civic engagement (Tzanakis, 2013) and is not dependence on the other possessed capitals. These three authors have different notions of concept in terms of how the social capital is derived. The context of urban area is dynamic and evolving through the change of society (common name) through migration of individuals from one place to another. This in turns will impact the network of relationship between individuals. It is imperative to understand that the social capital possessed by the individual may be reduced or increased (Bourdieu, 1986) through this impact. Hence, the measurement of social capital in urban area context, shall consider these dynamic changes, of capital resources and the presence of other capitals as Bourdieu (1986) posited.

According to Noordin and Ngah (2018), future Malaysia policies shall be directed at social capital development in tandem with urban planning. Community social capital can change the direction of urban planning, thereby impacting the community itself (Zhai & Ng, 2013). Social capital, represented by networks, norms, and trust passed down among long-term acquaintances, plays a significant role in community development (Tong et al., 2021). A study by Cramm et al. (2013) found that the social capital of individuals and neighbourhoods is significant towards community well-being. Besides, social capital is also important to community resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015) alongside becoming a resource for mobilising community development (Kim, 2018). It also plays a role in collective action for tourism (Pramanik et al., 2019)

due to the strong bond through religious activities, family relationships, and lineage descent which help to become a catalyst towards the strength and sustainability of the community identity (Syaharuddin et al., 2021). Social capital under the dimensions of social awareness, participation and collective action, group membership, social trust, and social involvement influence rural community households' liveability during environmental crises (Savari et al., 2023). The role of social capital in any community has been proven to have a positive influence. According to Muzayanah et al. (2020), in urban areas, the formation of social capital is often influenced by the character of the urban area itself. Urban built environment influences social capital formation at actual and perceived levels through street connectivity, walkability, and incivilities (Wood et al., 2012). The placement of these physical urban planning elements also contextualises the social capital level. Said AlGhassani et al. (2024) reported that urban physical factors such as the availability of facilities, for example, grocery stores, health centres, mosques, and schools, could foster social cohesion (social capital) among the community in Muscat, Oman. The finding concurs with Muzayanah et al. (2020), who found that street connectivity of urban form has a positive association with bridging trust in social capital in Indonesia. However, they also revealed that, in Indonesian high-residential density areas, the level of social capital in the community is low. In China, there is evidence that strong ties are associated with rural migrants in urban areas more than urban residents, which may be influenced by the income disparity between each type of community (Lu, 2013). In Malaysia, the social capital level may differ depending on the locality, surrounding developments, and the period of the developed urban area (Hamdan et al., 2014). The built environment of the developed urban area may contribute towards the formation of a sense of place. The association of sense of place with social capital includes the increased level of sense of place is proportional to an increased level of social capital (Putra et al., 2023; Forouzanoghar, 2022) and the role of social capital that promotes community engagement and consequently the sense of place (Zhu, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the trend surrounding the research on social capital and sense of place in an urban area context. To achieve this, a systematic literature review was conducted. This systematic literature review follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol to ensure the study's replicability. This approach enables authors to ensure transparency in their systematic reviews while evaluating a broad range of literature (Liberati et al., 2009). Keywords such as "Social Capital Sense of Place", and "Social Capital Urban Area Malaysia" were prompted. Through PRISMA, studies from original

searches were included in the systematic review on the condition of meeting the following inclusion criteria:

- **Field of Studies**
This study focuses on exploring the role of social capital towards a sense of place in urban areas. The urban area is defined by the spatial concentration of people organized around non-agricultural activities (Weeks, 2010). The field context is urban area because the presence of social capital is strong with built environment urban factors such as street connectivity, walkability, availability of facilities and many more (Said AlGhassani et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2012).
- **Publication period**
The publication sources from 2005 to 2025 are selected to identify the trend from 20 years back.
- **Study Design**
This study considers including conceptual and empirical studies to establish an understanding of the topic of social capital and sense of place.
- **Language**
Only English-language sources were included, common in systematic reviews due to the practical challenges of translation and the need for replicability (Voorberg et al., 2015).
- **Publication Quality**
This study maintains the quality standard for systematic review studies through this inclusion criteria: peer-reviewed research papers (review articles and research articles) in scholarly journals of Scopus and Web of Science (Wos).
- **Title Scope**
A specific title with social capital and sense of place is included to ensure clarity and accurate exploration of the topic. The publication title with 'place attachment' was also chosen to broaden the scope as the term represents a close link with a sense of place (Erfani, 2020).

Figure 2 shows the flow diagram of the record selection:

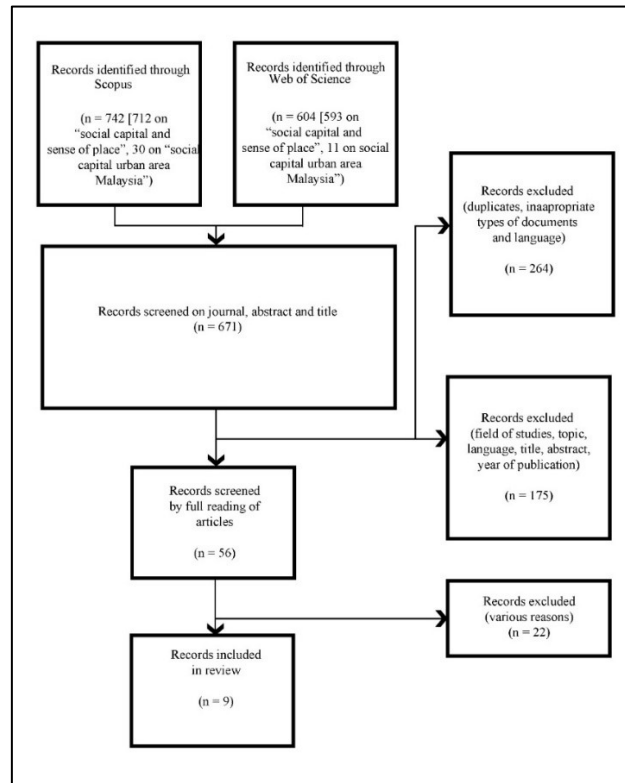


Figure 2: Flow diagram of the record selection
Source: Authors

RESULT

Nine (9) records of publication are included in the final review. The Scopus and Web of Science databases screening showed a limited number of studies specific to social capital and sense of place and social capital in urban areas of Malaysia. Table 1 shows the details of reviewed publications.

Table 1: Summary of Final Reviewed Publications

No	Authors (Year)	Journal Extracted	Title of Paper	Methodology	Samples	Geographical Location	Main Findings/Outcome
Publications keywords: Social Capital and Sense of Place							
1	Jorgensen (2010)	Journal of Economic and Human Geography	Subjective mapping methodologies for incorporating spatial variation in	Conceptual Paper	Conceptual Paper	-	Sense of Place comprises the networks of relationships constituting the social environment

No	Authors (Year)	Journal Extracted	Title of Paper	Methodology	Samples	Geographical Location	Main Findings/Outcome
		(WOS & Scopus Database)	research on social capital and sense of place				within a spatial setting as well as social relationships with the physical environment (both natural and built)
2	Acedo, Painho, and Castel (2017)	Transactions in GIS (WOS & Scopus Database)	Place and city: Operationalizing sense of place and social capital in the urban context	Conceptual Paper	Conceptual Paper	-	Recognized the spatialization of sense of place and social capital in urban context.
3	Azizi & Shekari (2018)	Interdisciplinary Journal of Management Studies (WOS Database)	Modeling the relationship between sense of place, social capital and tourism support.	Quantitative	446 residents in Shiraz, Iran	Iran	Positive relationship between Shiraz residents' sense of place and social capital
4	Lee and Jeong (2021)	Journal of housing and the built environment (WOS Database)	Residential environmental satisfaction, social capital, and place attachment: the case of Seoul, Korea	Quantitative	750 residents of Seoul	Korea	Social capital mediates the effect on all sub-components of residential environments
5	Binder et al. (2023)	American Journal of Community Psychology (WOS Database)	"Upheaval": Unpacking the dynamic balance between place attachment and social capital in disaster recovery.	Quantitative	111 American	United States of America	Increases of place dependence were associated with the increase of social capital
6	Ahmadi et al. (2024)	Journal of housing and the built environment (WOS Database)	Analyzing the relationship between place attachment and residential satisfaction through the mediation of social capital-the case of affordable housing.	Quantitative	370 residents of Pardis, Tehran	Iran	Social capital mediates the relationship between place attachment and residential satisfaction

No	Authors (Year)	Journal Extracted	Title of Paper	Methodology	Samples	Geographical Location	Main Findings/Outcome
Publications keywords: Social Capital in urban area of Malaysia							
1	Hamdan, Yusof, and Marzuki (2014)	Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences (Scopus Database)	Social Capital and Quality of Life in Urban Neighborhoods High Density Housing	Quantitative	797 households	Klang Valley, Malaysia	Variation in the level of social capital for the three neighbourhood.
2	Ahmad Marzuki et al. (2014)	Asian Social Science (Scopus Database)	Community social capital in Malaysia: A pilot study	Quantitative	41	Northern Malaysia	Dimension of social capital used demonstrated high tendency for community life setting to generate high social capital
3	Said et al. (2022)	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (Scopus Database)	Income Disparity and Mental Wellbeing among Adults in Semi-Urban and Rural Areas in Malaysia: The Mediating Role of Social Capital	Secondary data	25,512 respondents in SEACO Health Survey (2013)	Johor, Malaysia	Social capital plays a role for increased interaction between community members, thus increasing mental health status

Source: Authors

The databases' literature search indicates the lack of study centred around social capital and sense of place, and social capital in the context of urban areas in Malaysia. Six articles (Jorgensen, 2010; Acedo et al., 2017; Azizi and Shekari, 2018; Lee and Jeong, 2021; Binder et al., 2023; Ahmadi et al., 2024) were identified surrounding the topic of social capital and sense of place. Out of six articles, four are empirical and two are conceptual. All four publications applied quantitative as their research approach. For the geographical location, two of the publications (Azizi & Shekari, 2018; Ahmadi et al., 2024) are in Iran, one publication (Lee & Jeong, 2021) in Korea, and another publication (Binder et al., 2023) conducted their research in the United States of America. All empirical research done by these authors proved the positive association between social capital and sense of place. Three articles (Hamdan et al., 2014; Ahmad Marzuki et al., 2014; Said et al., 2022) were found for social capital in urban areas of Malaysia. All these articles were extracted from the Scopus database. For methodology choice, two publications (Hamdan et al., 2014; Ahmad Marzuki et

al., 2014) used quantitative methods, while the remaining publication (Said et al., 2022) used secondary data. Their geographical location, albeit in Malaysia, is scattered with Klang Valley (Hamdan et al., 2014), Northern Malaysia (Ahmad Marzuki et al., 2014) and Johor (Said et al., 2022). All research results show that social capital has a positive role in the Malaysian context.

DISCUSSION

Empirical studies on social capital and sense of place have been trending from 2018 to the present. However, it can be argued that there is still limited focus on specifying the direct relationship between social capital and a sense of place. For example, Azizi and Skehari (2018) studied the relationship between sense of place and social capital, while Lee and Jeong (2021) and Ahmadi et al. (2024) put social capital as the mediator between a sense of place relationship. According to Acedo et al. (2017), the spatialisation of the sense of place and social capital shall be recognised in both ways. This means there might be an underlying impact of social capital on the formation of a sense of place. The strong ties (social capital) are tied with memories of interaction between two individuals or groups (Smith et al., 2012) and this may influence the attachment that is rooted in the subjectivity and objectivity of the environment of the urban area (Hashemnezhad et al., 2013). The actual role of social capital in the formation of a sense of place in an urban area context is still under-researched. All studies of social capital and sense of place were conducted outside Malaysia's geographical location. Three past studies were conducted on social capital in the context of urban areas in Malaysia, although they were not linked to a sense of place. Social capital studies in Malaysia were mainly centred around organisational and economic attainment (Abdul-Hakim et al., 2010; Zal et al., 2013; Saukani, 2018; Said et al., 2022; Zahari et al., 2019; Amir Zal et al., 2020), and community establishment (Hakim et al., 2012; Jaafar, 2014; Chan et al., 2015; Md Rami et al., 2022). All the results for the studies of social capital and sense of place despite being conducted outside Malaysia's context showed significant role of social capital. This supports Acedo et al. (2017)'s proposition, that the importance of recognising the connection between social capital and sense of place in urban context and how the spatial dimension of social capital has not been highlighted by past scholars. However, it is argued that Malaysia, as a multiracial country, presents a different perspective regarding social capital's influence on the formation of a sense of place in the urban context. The varies division of racial groups in Malaysia (55.1% Malay, 24.3% Chinese, 11.9% Non-Malay, 7.4% Indian, and 1.3% other population groups in Malaysia as of 2010 (Lee & Khalid, 2016)) exemplifies the distinction between cultural inclination and dimension. Malaysia has a diverse culture with various subcultures (Ting & Ying, 2013). Different cultural dimensions a nation can exhibit are influenced by

the various subcultures (Hofstede, 1983). This underlines the gap between a study of social capital and a sense of place in the urban areas of Malaysia. There is also a lack of studies that adopted Bourdieu's framework of social capital. Bourdieu's (1986) stated that social capital involves two variables forming social capital: common name and two capitals (cultural and economic capitals). The dynamic role of cultural capital has been highlighted by Savage et al. (2018) in Belgium and the United Kingdom. Bourdieu's (1988) forces-field theory analogy underlined that the interaction of cultural and economic capitals is the result of individual distinction (Grenfell, 2014). Social capital has been understood as an independent capital by scholars (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), which is different from Bourdieu's (1986) sense of reasoning. Bourdieu (1986) made it clear that "social capital is never completely independent" (p. 21). He proposed that accrued social capital also depends on the amount of cultural and economic capital that influences the transformation of all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections. Through this adoption of Bourdieu's social capital framework, the underlying connection of influence it exerts on a sense of place in Malaysia's urban area context will provide interesting findings and an understanding of how these two elements will contribute to urban character sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Social capital is a concept that has been researched in a multidisciplinary scope. As it represents a robust concept of the relationship between persons/people, its relevancy can be considered in the field of urban environment. This paper reviewed past studies surrounding social capital and sense of place in urban areas of Malaysia to find a knowledge gap in this topic. The lack of studies of Bourdieu's social capital relationship towards a sense of place formation in Malaysia's urban areas provides a future direction for this study to be conducted empirically. The value lies under the Bourdieu operationalisation of social capital, which can influence the formation of a sense of place and the sustainability of urban character is evidenced through reviews of past studies. The adoption of Bourdieu's social capital framework could provide a unique perspective on how the network of relationship stems through common name and external capitals are interrelated with the sense of place. This contributes to a new knowledge in Malaysian urban planning field. In practical sense, this study is also significant specifically for enhancing Malaysia's urban planning policy, which shall be focused on the public's participation and collaboration in sustaining urban areas from unplanned development, climate change, and deterioration. The limitation of this study includes the limited search database that only includes articles from Scopus and Web of Science databases. This was to ensure the inclusion of peer-reviewed publications to review. However, this may limit the

broad, expanding articles published on this topic and may affect the comprehensiveness of the findings. Despite this limitation, the Scopus and Web of Science database is reliable and all the publications under these databases underwent peer-review process, thus proving their quality and robustness. Forward research on this topic is recommended to explore the relationship empirically through quantitative methodology by primary data utilisation, which may provide better generalised findings.

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