

Advanced Spiritual Knowledge Management: Main Features of the Concept and Initial Ideas for Implementation in Schools and School Pastoral Care

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Abstract: Purpose: This paper aims to conceptualize and explore *Spiritual Knowledge Management (SpKM)* as an advanced and transformative paradigm within the evolving field of Knowledge Management (KM). It shifts KM's purpose from supporting predefined goals to enabling a learning journey toward the best version of the self or the organization, integrating spiritual, non-rational, and identity-forming dimensions of knowledge. **Research Methodology:** The study combines conceptual development grounded in interdisciplinary literature with empirical data from a large-scale quantitative survey on school pastoral care. The survey, conducted in the Archdiocese of Salzburg, included 844 valid student responses and explored the role of faith, identity, and expectations regarding school pastoral care. **Findings:** The empirical results confirm that spiritual aspects of knowledge are relevant and meaningful in the educational context. Students value faith and spiritual guidance particularly in times of personal challenge and see school pastoral care as a support for identity formation, hope, and holistic personal development—elements strongly aligned with the principles of Spiritual KM. **Implications of the Study:** These findings suggest that school pastoral care is a suitable and impactful domain for implementing Spiritual KM. Moreover, SpKM could inform broader educational strategies by integrating deeper learning processes and resonance-based reflection, thereby fostering wisdom and ethical orientation in knowledge development. **Practicality of the Study:** The study demonstrates how spiritual knowledge can be accessed and applied in real-world educational contexts. It proposes that SpKM principles be integrated into school systems through staff development, pedagogical methods, and strategic design of spiritual learning environments. **Value/Originality of the Study:** This is the first study to apply the emerging concept of Spiritual Knowledge Management to the context of school pastoral care. It contributes to the redefinition of KM by incorporating spirituality and purpose as central components and demonstrates its practical relevance through empirical validation.

Keywords: Spiritual knowledge management, Deep learning, resonance, School pastoral care, Wisdom, Identity, Personal development

1. Introduction

In an age shaped by digital transformation and rapidly evolving knowledge landscapes, traditional approaches to Knowledge Management are increasingly confronted with both emerging opportunities and new demands. The integration of forward-looking methods such as *Learning from the Future*, in combination with innovative practices like *Design Thinking*, presents a unique opportunity not only to adapt KM practices to current challenges but also to proactively shape the future. Technological advancements such as especially artificial intelligence are fundamentally transforming how knowledge is created, shared, and applied. In such a dynamic environment, conventional KM models are reaching their limits. By combining new future-oriented methods with creative, user-centered design approaches, organizations are now in a position to rethink their knowledge systems—or even reimagine their very understanding of knowledge and knowledge management—to better align with the demands of the digital era.

Looking back at the past few decades, we can trace a continuous evolution and shift in the core paradigms of KM itself (Serenko, 2013, 2021; Scharmer, 2001). In the last 10 to 15 years, a “future-oriented approach” has gained momentum, that emphasizes learning from the future and proactively shaping what is yet to come (e.g., Peschl, 2023). This orientation corresponds with the inside-out approach to strategy, as described by Nonaka and Takeuchi (2021).

However, there is growing evidence that the development of KM does not end here. More recent concepts—such as *Spiritual Knowledge Management* (Kaiser, 2024, 2023; Peschl et al., 2023), *Responsible Knowledge Management* (Rocha et al., 2022; Durst, 2021), and *Spiritual Knowledge* (Bratianu and Bejinaru, 2023; Bratianu, 2024)—have begun to shift the discourse. These approaches introduce spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and pronesis as additional, valuable forms of knowledge (Kodama, 2021; Bratianu and Motoc, 2022).

In this paper, we will outline some aspects of **Advanced Spiritual Knowledge Management** and will present an implementation and realization of some of these ideas in the area of school pastoral care, based on the results of an empirical study.

2. The Development of Knowledge Management and Strategy in Recent Decades

When looking at current developments in the realm of AI, one might be tempted to ask what KM is still good for? The seasoned KM professional may have already noticed the blurry distinction in the wording of the terms *knowledge* and *information* – a rookie mistake to illustrate a point that has been emphasized for almost as long as the field of KM has existed: confusing knowledge with information and respectively establishing Information Management systems instead of Knowledge Management Systems. For as simple of a mistake this appears to be, its consequences are far-reaching: Information is – in comparison to knowledge – much more tangible with the concept of information management also genuinely easier to understand. It is about extracting, storing and retrieving – making information explicit and putting into a database, ERP system, Knowledge Graph or, more recently, using it to train the corporate AI model. Overall, a mostly techno-centric approach.

With knowledge on the other hand, it is about creating, learning, understanding and doing – it has a greater action-oriented characteristic with an emphasis on human agency. Sveiby (2001) in that line of thinking speaks of a capacity-to-act that every individual possesses and uses to create value for an organization. The goal of Knowledge Management would thus be to create framework conditions for the creation of value based on the individual's capacity-to-act.

In basic terms, these two approaches are the root for the distinction between *soft* and *hard* approaches to KM that can be identified in the literature (Serenko, 2013, 2021).

Historically, the field of KM as a distinct scientific discipline emerged in the 1990s. From that time on, KM quickly gained popularity, as people had to deal with the ongoing shift towards a knowledge economy. Soon after the wider adaption of KM, the focus shifted from techno-centric to human-centered issues. Along with Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) seminal contribution about companies creating knowledge in the exchange of explicit and tacit knowledge, KM arguably reached the peak of its popularity. From the late 2000s onwards the field appeared more and more fragmented struggling to reconcile and integrate the technical and human-oriented stream into a coherent frame (Serenko, 2013). Nowadays, the landscape of KM topics is wider than ever with the field appearing as a conglomerate of interdisciplinary perspectives on knowledge related issues (Serenko, 2021).

Approaching the matter from a different perspective – and zooming out a bit, we can allocate KM in the greater field of strategic management and examine the role that knowledge and knowledge management play for organizations from a strategic perspective. Strategic Management is generally concerned with „the long-term direction of an organization“ (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 4). This includes setting long-term goals and objectives, elaborating respective courses of action and the allocation of resources, ultimately aiming to achieve competitive advantage (Drucker, 1994). Knowledge, as has been extensively argued in the field of KM, is one of those resources that can be utilized, therefore.

An important aspect of strategy-making is choosing a set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value that differentiates the organization from its competition (Porter, 1996, 1997). This activity in itself requires profound knowledge of the organization, its capabilities, resources and the market environment it is operating in. In other words, the organization requires knowledge of itself to be able to craft meaningful strategy. This reflects in the extensive analysis of the organization's position that should precede all strategic considerations of possible actions. Such an analysis usually covers both external (market share, trends, regulatory landscape, competitors, etc.) and internal aspects (resources, capabilities, human capital, values, purpose, etc.) of the organization (Johnson, Whittington and Scholes, 2017). In both areas, KM can contribute valuable inputs. Yet, what the field of KM appears to realize more recently is that there has been an extensive focus on the perspective of knowledge as a usable resource for the operative side of business. Creating new products, achieving higher levels of efficiency, maintaining customer relations, or improving service quality just to name a few examples, has been focal to most theorizing in the field of KM. The other side – knowledge about the organization as such, its values, underlying beliefs, culture, purpose or the spiritual dimension of organizing have been mostly neglected in the previous discourse in KM.

However, in recent years scholars in KM began to delve deeper into this avenue of research. We see an increase in 'different' approaches to the idea of KM, emphasizing the value of the inside-out thinking when it comes to creating strategy. Nonaka and Takeuchi (2021) speak of more future-oriented, society-focused, dynamic, and human-centric strategies that rely on organizational values. They also emphasize the role of wisdom as guideline

for doing the right things (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2019). Durst (2021) elaborates on the idea of Responsible KM, meaning that knowledge creation, sharing, and retention should be directed towards greater good (Durst, 2021, p. 6). In a similar manner Kragulj (2022) and Rocha, Kragulj and Pinheiro (2022) elaborate on practical wisdom ('phronesis') as an enabler for responsible KM. Kerschbaum (2022), with particular focus on strategy argues for the inclusion of aesthetics as a non-rational component of knowledge, required to create strategies that align with the organizations purpose.

3. Spiritual Knowledge Management and its key Aspects

Based on the development and history of knowledge management outlined in the previous chapter, we suggest that a promising direction for the future of KM lies in the development of an advanced form of Spiritual Knowledge Management (SpKM). In this chapter, we will outline the basic ideas of this new approach and then explain the most important aspects of an advanced form of SpKM.

3.1 The Basic Ideas

In recent years, the concept of **Spiritual Knowledge Management (SpKM)** has emerged as a novel and transformative extension of the Knowledge Management (KM) field (Kaiser, 2024; Kaiser & Martinez, 2023). It represents a fundamental shift in how we understand the purpose and function of KM. At its heart lies a simple yet profound idea: every individual and every organization seeks to flourish. Reaching such a state of flourishing entails nothing less than becoming the best possible version of oneself—whether on a personal or organizational level. In essence, this is a transformational journey: a continuous movement from the current self toward one's ideal or most authentic form. We use the term "best version of the self" in the sense of the concept of the phronetically enacted self as proposed in (Peschl et al., 2023).

Although this foundational notion has been explored in a variety of disciplines—including organizational behaviour (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006), change management (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), consulting and spirituality (Kelly, 2017), theology (Rohr, 2012), and psychotherapy (Frankl, 1966)—its integration into the field of Knowledge Management marks a timely and significant innovation. Why is this contextual expansion important? Because the journey toward one's best version can be seen as a deep and transformative learning process. In this process, knowledge is not only generated about the meaning and nature of this envisioned self (the *what* and *why*), but also about the practical steps required to actualize it (the *how*).

Traditionally, Knowledge Management has been defined as "the process of creating, capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge" (Davenport, 1994). Building upon this definition, Spiritual Knowledge Management can be rearticulated as: "*the process of creating, capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge in order to realize the best version of myself as a person—or of itself as an organization*" (Kaiser, 2024).

Figure 1 illustrates the core structure of the SpKM model in a simplified form.

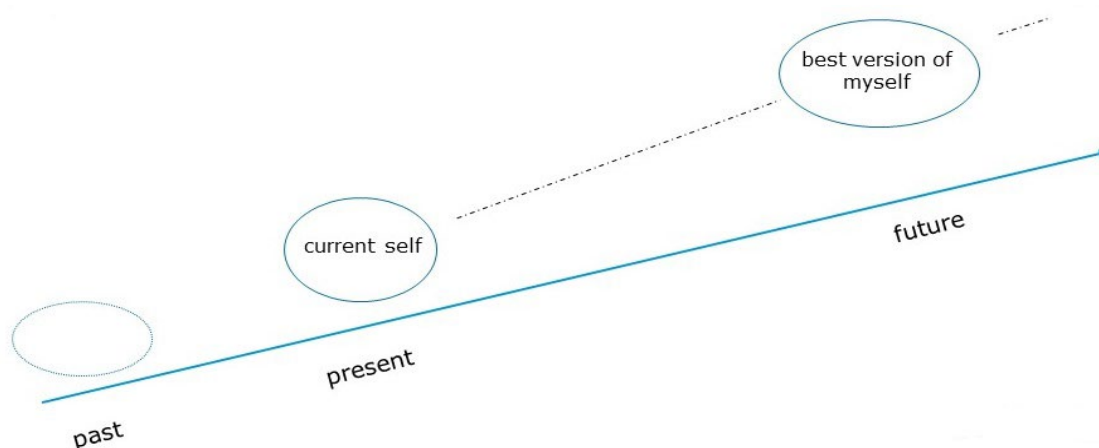


Figure 1: The basic structure and dynamics of the Spiritual Knowledge Management approach

It must be emphasized that the path toward one's best version is not a linear or straightforward process, as the diagram might initially suggest. Like all genuine learning—especially deep and transformational learning—it is a non-linear journey marked by detours, regressions, and emergent insights. Thus, it is better described as a process of *becoming* rather than a conventional change process. Crucially, the destination—the full and detailed vision of the best version—is not entirely known at the outset. Rather, it is gradually discovered along the way.

This type of learning journey demands highly specific forms of knowledge and competencies to be navigated effectively.

3.2 Advanced Spiritual Knowledge Management

However, how could such very specific forms of knowledge be acquired? A key aspect of acquiring such knowledge lies in cultivating resonant relationships with the world — whether through engagement with people, nature, or even non-rational elements such as symbols or artifacts (Rosa, 2019; Kerschbaum and Peschl, 2024). Each authentic moment of resonance carries the potential to be transformed into knowledge, provided it is attentively perceived and reflectively processed. This emerging knowledge can later serve as guidance in entirely different contexts. Over time, the accumulation of such resonance experiences—and the insights derived from them—enables a deeper understanding of what the best version of the self might look like. It is important to recognize that the pursuit of one’s best version and the aspiration to live a flourishing life are inseparably linked. The richer the variety of resonance opportunities, the greater the potential to generate meaningful knowledge. Moreover, the more such knowledge one has integrated over time, the more likely it is to foster wisdom. In this sense, wisdom and the realization of the best version go hand in hand.

Very recently, Lauritzen (2025) claimed that the third way AI poses an existential threat to humanity unfolds when people forget what it means to be human. In line with this, Kaiser et al. (2025) discussed initial ideas on how Artificial Intelligence could support this process—particularly by revealing previously overlooked opportunities for resonance that may open up new pathways for experience and learning. Artificial intelligence can significantly expand this space of possibilities by making unconventional and personalized suggestions. However, the actual decision to follow a suggestion, engage with the experience and transform it into knowledge remains in the hands of humans.

If we take Sveiby’s definition of knowledge as “capacity to act” (Sveiby, 2001), then wisdom can be understood as the capacity to act *rightly*—that is, in a way that is beneficial for all stakeholders, ethically sound, and aligned with a deeper sense of purpose. In light of the earlier discussion on the “best version of the self,” it becomes clear that what is “right” or “good” can be measured by how closely an action moves a person or organization toward that ideal version (Kaiser et al., 2025). From this perspective, Spiritual Knowledge Management is fundamentally about fostering the conditions under which such knowledge—and the wisdom it cultivates—can arise. It is about enabling resonance experiences that catalyse inner transformation and insight (Kaiser et al., 2025).

Resonance, in its most powerful form, aligns current reality with a sensed potential—what we might call the “intended reality.” Even when we are startled by what reality presents us, such moments force us to recalibrate our internal map of the world (Rosa, 2019). These are not just interruptions; they are openings. In such moments, we catch glimpses of who we truly are—and who we might yet become.

In this light, the mission of Knowledge Management in the future will be radically redefined. It will not merely serve a predefined goal by managing knowledge in a linear, goal-oriented fashion. Rather, it will be about discovering the goal itself—about unveiling the deeper “why” behind action. Knowledge will no longer be a tool to reach an endpoint; it will be the path to uncovering that endpoint in the first place. Here, artificial intelligence could play a catalytic role—not by providing answers, but by amplifying options for resonance, generating conditions that help human beings encounter themselves in new ways (Kaiser et al., 2025). We propose that an *expanded model of Spiritual Knowledge Management* offers a compelling framework for this new form of KM. It is shown very roughly in figure-2.

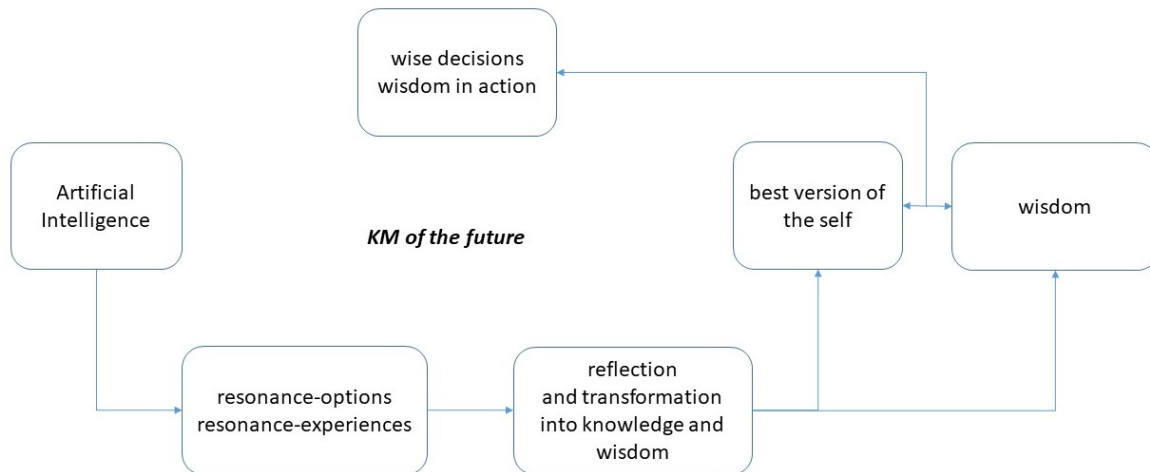


Figure 2: The advanced Spiritual Knowledge Management approach

Central to this model is the “reflection and transformation” phase—a delicate yet crucial stage in which lived experience is distilled into usable knowledge, and eventually, into wisdom. This phase is where transformation truly happens. It is in this space that *self-transcending knowledge* can emerge (Scharmer, 2001). This refers to the capacity to perceive potential before it is actualized, to recognize what is not yet present but already possible (Uotila & Melkas, 2008). Self-transcending knowledge can be seen as the knowledge about the highest future possibility (Kaiser and Fordinal, 2010).

4. Some Empirical Observations From the School Sector and the Field of Pastoral Care

Integrating spiritual aspects into knowledge management is of particular importance for the future, as these aspects address the whole person. The concept of spiritual knowledge management opens up new perspectives and fields of application that venture beyond the traditional boundaries of knowledge management. In this paper, we address school pastoral care as a practical application of the concepts of spiritual knowledge management. Based on a comprehensive empirical study conducted in the Archdiocese of Salzburg in 2024, we show the extent to which principles of spiritual knowledge management are already applied in school pastoral care and the potential that lies within.

4.1 Data Collection and Sample

The present study is based on an extensive empirical study on school pastoral care, which was conducted between October and December 2024 using a standardized online questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised a total of 164 questions, thematically divided into 14 sections. The survey was conducted using the online survey tool SurveyMonkey and was primarily aimed at students from various educational institutions in the Archdiocese of Salzburg – both church and non-church educational institutions.

A total of 867 students took part in the survey, with 23 participants not granting permission for their data to be used, so the final sample includes 844 valid responses. Answering the questions was also voluntary, so that not every question has a full number of answers. The average participation rate was about 700-750 answers per question.

Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

The participants in the study were predominantly students aged between 14 and 18 years. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 51.58% female, 46.39% male and 2.03% diverse participants. The majority of respondents (57%) were in grades 5 to 8 of secondary school at the time of the survey, with various school types represented.

The linguistic homogeneity of the sample is noteworthy: 77.4% of the respondents stated that they spoke German at home. The family situation of the participants was mostly stable, with 83.23% of the respondents stating that they lived with both parents. With regard to the educational level of the parents, the results show an above-average level, with 40.05% having a university degree and 29.39% having a high school diploma. The financial situation was assessed as “good” or “very good” by 84.39% of the respondents.

4.2 Analysis and Results with a Focus on Spiritual Knowledge Management

For the present paper, we have selected two specific areas from the study questionnaire that are particularly relevant to the concept of SpKM. These areas provide deeper insights into the spiritual dimensions of knowledge and its management in the school context.

Role of faith in the context of Spiritual Knowledge Management

In the questionnaire section "Role of faith" (section 08), the importance of spiritual and faith-related aspects and thus of facets of self-transcendence in students' lives was examined. This dimension is of particular importance for spiritual knowledge management, as it provides insights into the integration of non-rational knowledge into everyday life.

The results show a differentiated picture: 51.13% of the respondents rate their faith as "important" or "very important" in difficult life situations (question 56). This result underlines the importance of spiritual resources and non-rational knowledge as a coping strategy and resilience factor and as an essential aspect of shaping one's own self on the way to a best version.

Interestingly, the influence of faith on relationships with others is significantly lower: only 24.54% of respondents say that their faith influences their interpersonal relationships "significantly" or "strongly" (question 57). Similar tendencies can be seen in the question of support in achieving goals through faith (28.38% answer "definitely" or "very much") and in the experience of faith in everyday life (27.51% answer "definitely" or "strongly").

The question regarding the importance of faith for one's own identity is particularly relevant for Spiritual Knowledge Management. Here, 30.31% of respondents state that faith is "important" or "very important" for their identity (question 60). This indicates that spiritual aspects of knowledge have an identity-forming function for about one-third of the respondents.

Understanding and expectations of pastoral care in the context of Spiritual Knowledge Management

The second area analysed, "What does pastoral care mean to you?" (Section 12), provides insights into what students expect from school pastoral care and the extent to which it is perceived as a source of spiritual knowledge.

A key finding is that 32.77% of respondents see school pastoral care as a potential support for developing a self-confident life (question 89, answers "distinctly" or "strongly"). This corresponds with the approach of SpKM, which understands knowledge not only as a cognitive resource but also as a holistic basis for development.

The results of question 93, which deals with the growth dimension of faith, are particularly revealing for the connection between school pastoral care and Spiritual Knowledge Management: 24.66% of those surveyed see school pastoral care as an opportunity to "grow in faith that helps in life to become happy". This perspective illustrates the transformative potential of spiritual knowledge.

Another relevant aspect is the dimension of hope: 34.47% of respondents believe that school pastoral care can help them "never lose hope in life" (question 94). This future orientation corresponds to the future-oriented paradigm of Spiritual Knowledge Management.

The imparting of values is another intersection between school pastoral care and Spiritual Knowledge Management. In response to question 96, 40.82% of respondents state that it is "very" or "quite" important that "school pastoral care reminds us to believe in peace and good in people." Similarly, 41.97% agree with the statement that school pastoral care could serve as encouragement that "it is better to live with each other than against each other, regardless of belief."

The importance of reflecting on one's own values is also noteworthy: 64.39% of respondents believe that school pastoral care should support students in "reflecting on and developing their own values and beliefs" (question 102, answers "strongly" or "somewhat"). This high level of agreement underscores the role of school pastoral care as a catalyst for the development of a reflective and holistic understanding of knowledge.

4.3 School Pastoral Care as a Field of Practice for Spiritual Knowledge Management

The results of the empirical study show that school pastoral care offers numerous starting points for the practical implementation of Spiritual Knowledge Management. In particular, the following lines of connection can be seen:

- **Integration of non-rational knowledge:** School pastoral care is perceived by a considerable proportion of respondents as an instance that goes beyond rational knowledge and taps into spiritual dimensions such as hope, faith and meaning as well as self-transcending knowledge. This corresponds to the broadening of the concept of knowledge to include spiritual components.
- **Holistic view of the human being:** Expectations of school pastoral care include not only cognitive but also emotional, social and spiritual dimensions. This holistic perspective is in line with the approach of spiritual knowledge management.
- **Reflexive practice:** The high level of agreement regarding support in reflecting on one's own values points to the potential of school pastoral care as a reflexive field of practice that can contribute to the development of wisdom and phronesis.
- **Future orientation:** The hopeful dimension of school pastoral care is consistent with the future-oriented focus of modern knowledge management.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

Our analysis nicely demonstrates that school pastoral care can serve as a concrete field of application for Spiritual Knowledge Management. The empirical findings show that a significant part of the students surveyed view spiritual dimensions of knowledge as essential and express corresponding expectations toward school pastoral services.

The following implications emerge for future development:

- School pastoral care should be explicitly conceptualized as a space for Spiritual Knowledge Management, in order to fully leverage its potential for holistic education and the personal growth of young people.
- The integration of spiritual forms of knowledge into pedagogical practice should be actively promoted through targeted qualification programs and continuous professional development for school pastoral staff.
- Developing specific methods and tools for spiritual knowledge work in schools will contribute to the professionalization and systemic embedding of school pastoral care.

Within this context, further research is needed to explore how the spiritual knowledge fostered through school pastoral care can be meaningfully integrated with other—and emerging—forms of knowledge, and what impact such integration might have on both the personal and academic development of students.

The findings presented here offer a first step toward establishing school pastoral care as a relevant and forward-looking field of practice within the broader framework of Spiritual Knowledge Management. Moreover, this study highlights its benefit for fostering personal growth—empowering students to realize their potential and to approach challenges not as obstacles, but as opportunities for learning and development

Ethics Declaration: This research did not involve any sensitive personal data requiring ethical approval.

AI declaration: OpenAI's ChatGPT was used to support the linguistic refinement and stylistic editing of this paper. All conceptual work, empirical analysis and interpretation were made by the authors.

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