International Journal of Finance and Investment
ISSN: 3078-6002 (Print), ISSN: 3078-2295 (Online) | Vol. 6, No. 2, 2026

Dual-route Effects of Live-Streaming E-Commerce Cues on Consumers' Purchase Intention: A SOR–ELM Integration with Perceived Value and Social Presence as Mediators

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Abstract: This study investigates how live-streaming e-commerce cues influence consumers' purchase intention through dual rational and affective pathways. Integrating the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), it distinguishes a central route—information quality and promotional incentives—from a peripheral route—interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility—and examines perceived value and social presence as parallel mediators. Data were collected from 200 valid questionnaires and analyzed using regression and bootstrap mediation tests. The results show that information quality and promotional incentives positively affect perceived value, whereas interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility positively affect social presence. Both perceived value and social presence significantly enhance purchase intention and mediate the respective route effects. Contrast tests further reveal that perceived value media tes central-route cues more strongly, while social presence mediates peripheral-route cues more strongly. These findings clarify the dual-route mechanism underlying live-streaming purchase decisions and suggest that streamers, brands, and platforms should combine credible product information and value-based promotions with immersive interaction, entertaining content, and trustworthy streamer personas to achieve precise conversion from traffic to retention.

Keywords: Live-streaming e-commerce, purchase intention, SOR, ELM, perceived value, social presence.

1. Introduction

With digital technologies and mobile internet expanding rapidly, live-streaming e-commerce has become a dynamic component of China's digital economy. Forecasts suggest that by 2025 its market scale will reach 7 trillion RMB, with users exceeding 100 million and covering nearly all internet users. Its real-time interaction, visual display, and streamer resonance are reshaping consumer attitudes and purchase paths. However, rapid growth has exposed fundamental problems: product quality issues, exaggerated claims, and difficult returns undermine consumer confidence, while content homogenization and low-price competition make sustainable growth difficult. Consumers are thus more deliberate, comparing "hard" factors such as product information and price with "soft" factors such as trust in and identification with streamers.

Traditional one-way behavioral theories cannot fully capture this dual-process context. This study therefore integrates the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to examine how rational cues (central route) and emotional cues (peripheral route) jointly shape consumers' cognitive and affective processing in live-streaming rooms. It identifies key central-route cues, including product information quality and price incentives, and peripheral-route cues, including streamer attractiveness and social presence. It then builds a dual-route model of "information input–organism processing–behavioral response," with perceived value and social presence as mediators. Using questionnaire data and multiple regression, it compares the two routes' relative weights and interactions in driving purchase intention.

Theoretically, this research advances consumer behavior explanations in live-streaming contexts and reveals the asymmetric mediating roles of perceived value and social presence. Practically, it guides streamers, MCN agencies, brands, and platforms to improve content, interaction, and interface design. As traffic dividends decline, it helps the industry move from extensive harvesting to precise reach and from "traffic" to "retention," supporting healthier development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Live-streaming e-commerce

E-commerce live streaming redefines the "people, goods, and place" of commerce by enabling real-time, interactive, scene-based communication between streamers and viewers (Wei, Gao, & Duan, 2021). Early studies by Wohn and Freeman (2020) focused on gaming live streaming, tipping, and emotional attachment, treating live streaming mainly as a communication medium. Later research recognized its commercial value. Liu et al. (2024) describes it as a "new consumption norm" that addresses the utilitarian and hedonic shortcomings of traditional e-commerce. Scholars have disaggregated its attributes: Zuo and Li (2024) identify online celebrities, website design, and content; Zou and Fu (2024) use dramaturgical theory to highlight streamer appearance, sincerity, and expertise. These studies further classify information quality, promotional incentives, interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility. This shift from single-platform to multi-dimensional analysis marks a move from traffic dividends to refined operations.

2.2. Perceived Value

Perceived value is central to consumer behavior. Liu et al. (2025) propose a trade-off between gains and sacrifices in terms of time, money, and effort, which remains foundational. In live streaming, Ji et al. (2021) distinguishes functional and emotional value: detailed product introductions and visual demonstrations enhance functional value, while entertaining interaction satisfies emotional needs. Li (2025) shows that exclusive discounts and flash sales reduce perceived costs and raise overall value. Zheng et al. (2024) argues that perceived value bridges information quality and purchase, acting as both the endpoint of information transmission and a key link in trust conversion.

2.3. Social Presence

Short et al. introduced social presence as the sense of being with another in mediated communication. Huang et al. (2021) argues that mobile live streaming reduces the "lack of touch" in online shopping through vivid images and interaction, creating strong social presence. Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) proposes a three-dimensional framework: platform, viewer, and streamer presence, which has influenced later work. Social presence increases immersion and reduces security concerns in virtual spaces; Lu (2022) shows that the "co-presence" illusion produces social facilitation, shifting consumers from rational vigilance to affective engagement. Lee and Chen (2021) links parasocial interaction and social presence, arguing that social presence is a precondition for emotional bonds. Despite terminological differences, scholars agree that presence fosters trust and reduces purchase hesitation.

2.4. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the best predictor of actual buying. Traditional e-commerce research emphasizes product quality, brand influence, and delivery service (Bai et al., 2008). In live streaming, however, its antecedents are more complex. Li (2025) finds that purchase intention results from perceived value and flow experience, with notable temporality. Lu and Chen (2021) adopt an uncertainty-reduction view: alternative experiences such as streamer try-ons reduce product-matching risk and convert potential desire into immediate orders. Tao et al. (2021) notes that purchase intention is driven by positive factors but constrained by product homogenization and uneven streamer quality. Thus, purchase intention is continuously shaped by information, affect, and social connection.

2.5. Theoretical Foundations: SOR and ELM

The SOR model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) holds that environmental stimuli (S) affect behavioral responses (R) through the organism (O). It is widely used in live-streaming research. Ji et al. (2021) treat discounts, content, and design as stimuli that shape perceived value; Liu et al. (2022) validates SOR for impulsive buying. Wei et al. (2021) use SOR to explain how information exchange induces social presence and subsequent responses. Its inclusiveness allows diverse live-streaming attributes to be modeled as external stimuli.

ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) distinguishes central and peripheral routes. Central-route processing involves effortful evaluation of product function and price; peripheral-route processing relies on cues such as celebrity liking or atmosphere. Li (2025) positions product quality and promotional advantage as central-route bases for perceived value; Zheng et al. (2024) argue that interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility operate peripherally, shortening psychological distance and generating social presence. Empirical studies generally find that central routes build trust and value, while peripheral routes facilitate rapid conversion and resonance.

Existing research has matured from single-factor determinism to dual rational-affective perspectives. Earlier work, such as Wei et al. (2021), emphasized interactivity, while Zheng et al. (2024) noted that viewers evaluate both rational and emotional cues. However, gaps remain. First, although Kim (2014) emphasized perceived value and social presence, few studies incorporate both as parallel mediators within an ELM dual-route model. Second, prior work often examines variables separately, without comparing how central and peripheral cues jointly influence purchase intention through distinct psychological mechanisms. This study therefore integrates SOR and ELM, classifying information quality and promotional incentives as central-route stimuli and interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility as peripheral-route stimuli, and tests the dual mediating roles of perceived value and social presence in live-streaming purchase intention.

3. Hypotheses Development

This study integrates the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework to explain how live-streaming cues influence purchase intention. ELM distinguishes a central route, which involves effortful evaluation of argument quality, from a peripheral route, which relies on heuristic and affective cues. SOR posits that external stimuli shape an organism's internal states, which subsequently drive behavioral responses. Accordingly, information quality and promotional incentives are treated as central-route stimuli; interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility are treated as peripheral-route stimuli. Perceived value and social presence serve as organismic mediators, and purchase intention is the final response.

3.1. Central Route and Perceived Value

Information quality reflects the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of product information in live streaming. When streamers clearly present product parameters, functions, and usage details, consumers can more efficiently evaluate product utility and reduce cognitive uncertainty. High-quality information lowers search costs and enhances perceived benefits. Thus:

H1: Live-streaming information quality positively affects consumers' perceived value.

Promotional incentives refer to price discounts, limited-time offers, coupons, and gifts. These cues directly touch consumers' economic interests and stimulate cost-benefit calculations. Exclusive discounts and "lowest price" claims can increase perceived gains and make purchases seem worthwhile. Therefore:

H2: Live-streaming promotional incentives positively affect consumers' perceived value.

3.2. Peripheral Route and Social Presence

Interactivity is a defining feature of live streaming. Real-time Q&A, bullet-screen comments, and immediate feedback create mutual presence and virtual social connection,

reducing loneliness and uncertainty in online shopping. Thus:

H3: Live-streaming interactivity positively affects consumers' social presence.

Entertainment refers to humorous language, performances, or a relaxed atmosphere that arouses pleasure. It weakens the commercial hardness of persuasion and immerses viewers in a hedonic experience. When consumers feel amused and relaxed, they are more likely to perceive the streamer and other viewers as "being there" with them. Thus:

H4: Live-streaming entertainment positively affects consumers' social presence.

Source credibility includes the streamer's expertise, sincerity, and trustworthiness. As a heuristic cue, it helps consumers make quick judgments under time pressure. A credible streamer functions as a trust shortcut and humanizes the virtual interface, strengthening perceived social presence. Thus:

H5: Source credibility positively affects consumers' social presence.

3.3. Organismic States and Purchase Intention

Perceived value is a central organismic response in SOR. When consumers believe that benefits -such as product quality and price advantages- outweigh costs, their purchase intention increases. Thus:

H6: Perceived value positively affects consumers' purchase intention.

Social presence reflects an affective and relational state. It creates warmth, trust, and group belonging, compensating for the inability to touch products online. Strong social presence can reduce defensive processing and stimulate immediate purchase desire. Thus:

H7: Social presence positively affects consumers' purchase intention.

3.4. Mediating Roles of Perceived Value

Information quality provides rational evidence for evaluating product utility. By reducing uncertainty and enhancing perceived benefits, it indirectly promotes purchase intention through perceived value. Thus:

H8: Perceived value mediates the relationship between information quality and purchase intention.

Promotional incentives offer direct economic gains. Consumers who perceive greater price advantages form higher perceived value, which in turn strengthens purchase intention. Thus:

H9: Perceived value mediates the relationship between promotional incentives and purchase intention.

3.5. Mediating Roles of Social Presence

Interactivity generates timely social feedback and co-presence. This heightened social presence shortens psychological distance and facilitates purchase intention. Thus:

H10: Social presence mediates the relationship between interactivity and purchase intention.

Entertainment creates pleasurable and immersive experiences. Such positive affect enhances social presence, making consumers feel as if they are shopping in a physical store, thereby increasing purchase intention. Thus:

H11: Social presence mediates the relationship between entertainment and purchase intention.

Source credibility establishes trust and safety. A credible streamer makes interaction feel more authentic and interpersonal, strengthening social presence and subsequently purchase intention. Thus:

H12: Social presence mediates the relationship between source credibility and purchase intention.

This model thus specifies a dual-route, dual-mediation mechanism linking live-streaming stimuli to purchase intention.

4. Methodology

4.1. Variable Measurement

This study operationalizes the dual-route model using validated scales adapted to the live-streaming e-commerce context. All items are measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The central-route independent variables include information quality (IQ) and promotional incentives (CX). IQ, adapted from Sun [5], uses three items assessing whether live-streaming content is rich, comprehensive, accurate, and timely. CX has three items capturing price advantages, exclusive discounts, and perceived value for money. The peripheral-route independent variables include interactivity (HD), entertainment (YL), and source credibility (KX). HD contains three items concerning streamer responsiveness, viewer interaction, and problem resolution. YL includes three items measuring fun, relaxation, immersion, and enjoyment. KX includes three items on truthful product information, sincere streamer attitude, and trustworthy product quality. The mediators are perceived value (GZ) and social presence (SH). GZ has three items on obtaining comprehensive product information, facilitating purchase decisions, and meeting consumer needs. SH contains three items on experiencing a realistic shopping scene, a relaxed atmosphere, and warmth and trust toward the streamer. The dependent variable, purchase intention (GM) uses three items on shopping desire, willingness to recommend, and repurchase intention. Together, these instruments provide a comprehensive measurement of the SOR–ELM framework.

4.2. Data Collection

The questionnaire was designed specifically for live-streaming e-commerce and consists of two sections. The first section collects demographic and background information, including gender, age, education, occupation, monthly disposable income, and frequency of watching live-streaming shopping. The second section measures the focal constructs. To ensure reliability and validity, all measurement items were adapted from established domestic and international scales and modified to fit the live-streaming context. Information quality, promotional incentives, interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility serve as independent variables; perceived value and social presence serve as mediators; and purchase intention is the dependent variable. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") is used throughout, allowing respondents to report their perceptions based on actual live-streaming experiences.

The target population comprises internet consumers who have watched live-streaming commerce and made purchases. A total of 225 questionnaires were distributed through WJX.com (also called Questionnaire Star), a professional online survey platform, and shared via WeChat Mini Programs and Rednote (also called Xiaohongshu) using snowball sampling and targeted distribution. To ensure data

quality, a screening question ("Have you watched live-streaming e-commerce and purchased products?") was placed at the beginning to exclude ineligible respondents. Additional quality controls included an answer-time limit and a restriction preventing repeated submissions from the same device or IP address. After removing invalid responses—including contradictory answers, patterned choices, and failures on the screening item—200 valid questionnaires remained, yielding a valid response rate of 88.9%.

The final sample showed reasonable representativeness. Female respondents accounted for 59.5%, while males accounted for 40.5%. Respondents aged 18–25 represented 46.5%, and those aged 26–30 represented 39.0%, together accounting for 85.5%. Those holding a bachelor's degree or above accounted for 78.5%. Private enterprise employees represented 43.0%, and state-owned enterprise or public institution employees represented 22.0%. Monthly disposable income was concentrated in the 3,001–5,000 RMB range, accounting for 37.5%. These characteristics are consistent with the main user profile of live-streaming e-commerce. The data were imported into SPSS 26.0 for cleaning and subsequent descriptive statistics, reliability and validity testing, and path analysis.

A total of 200 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. The sample was slightly female-dominated (59.5% female, 40.5% male), consistent with the gender composition of live-streaming e-commerce consumers. Respondents were predominantly young: 46.5% were aged 18–25 and 39.0% were aged 26–30, together accounting for 85.5%. Most respondents were highly educated, with 63.0% holding a bachelor's degree and 15.5% holding a master's degree or above. In terms of occupation, 43.0% were private enterprise employees, 22.0% worked in state-owned enterprises or public institutions, and 20.5% were students. Monthly disposable income was concentrated in the 3,001–5,000 RMB range (37.5%), followed by 5,001–8,000 RMB (23.5%). Regarding live-streaming shopping experience, 24.5% reported frequent purchases, 55.0% occasional purchases, 14.0% rare purchases, and only 6.5% had never purchased. Overall, the sample was diverse and representative of the primary live-streaming e-commerce user base.

4.3. Reliability and Validity

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All eight constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70: information quality ($\alpha = 0.856$), promotional incentives ($\alpha = 0.841$), interactivity ($\alpha = 0.824$), entertainment ($\alpha = 0.823$), source credibility ($\alpha = 0.858$), perceived value ($\alpha = 0.898$), social presence ($\alpha = 0.946$), and purchase intention ($\alpha = 0.951$). These results indicate high internal consistency.

Table 1. Rotated Component Matrix for Variables

Independent Variables						
Information Quality	IQ1	0.876				
	IQ2	0.861				
	IQ3	0.846				
Source Credibility	KX1		0.872			
	KX2		0.865			
	KX3		0.855			
Promotional Incentives	CX2			0.859		
	CX1			0.858		
	CX3			0.825		
Interactivity	HD3				0.852	
	HD1				0.849	
	HD2				0.832	
Entertainment	YL1					0.853
	YL3					0.835
	YL2					0.822
Mediating Variables				Dependent Variables		
Social Presence	SH2	0.932		Purchase Intention	GM2	0.959
	SH3	0.916				
	SH1	0.912			GM1	0.954
Perceived Value	GZ3		0.89			
	GZ1		0.888		GM3	0.951
	GZ2		0.869			

Note: Extraction method: principal component analysis; rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The KMO value was 0.928, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 3949.377$, df = 276, $p < 0.001$), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Using principal component analysis with varimax rotation, eight factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted, explaining 78.49% of the total variance. All items loaded strongly on their intended factors, with loadings generally above 0.80, demonstrating good convergent and discriminant validity.

4.4. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis showed that all focal variables were significantly and positively correlated at the 0.01 level. Information quality ($r = 0.702$) and promotional incentives ($r = 0.676$) were strongly correlated with perceived value. Interactivity ($r = 0.595$), entertainment ($r = 0.574$), and source credibility ($r = 0.666$) were strongly correlated with social presence. Both perceived value ($r = 0.803$) and social presence ($r = 0.804$) were strongly correlated with purchase

intention. These results provide preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis

Variables	IQ	CX	HD	YL	KX	GZ	SH	GM
IQ	1							
CX	0.239**	1						
HD	0.144*	0.221**	1					
YL	0.295**	0.312**	0.129	1				
KX	0.212**	0.206**	0.280**	0.182**	1			
GZ	0.702**	0.676**	0.240**	0.430**	0.238**	1		
SH	0.350**	0.361**	0.595**	0.574**	0.666**	0.483**	1	
GM	0.583**	0.603**	0.471**	0.553**	0.480**	0.803**	0.804**	1

Note: N = 200. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

5. Result

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the direct effects. For perceived value, the model was significant (adjusted $R^2 = 0.772$, $F = 136.087$, $p < 0.001$). Information quality ($\beta = 0.546$, $p < 0.001$) and promotional incentives ($\beta = 0.505$, $p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects, supporting H1 and H2. Information quality exerted a slightly stronger effect than promotional incentives. No serious multicollinearity was detected, as all VIF values were below 10.

For social presence, the regression model was also significant (adjusted $R^2 = 0.807$, $F = 167.641$, $p < 0.001$). Interactivity ($\beta = 0.397$, $p < 0.001$), entertainment ($\beta = 0.408$, $p < 0.001$), and source credibility ($\beta = 0.458$, $p < 0.001$) all positively influenced social presence, supporting H3, H4, and H5. Source credibility had the strongest effect, highlighting the importance of streamer trustworthiness in creating a sense of co-presence.

For purchase intention, the model with perceived value and social presence was significant (adjusted $R^2 = 0.869$, $F = 662.746$, $p < 0.001$). Both perceived value ($\beta = 0.541$, $p < 0.001$) and social presence ($\beta = 0.542$, $p < 0.001$) had strong positive effects, supporting H6 and H7. Their nearly equal coefficients suggest that rational evaluation and affective connection are equally important in driving purchase intention.

Mediation effects were tested using Hayes's PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The results showed that all five indirect paths were significant, as the 95% confidence intervals did not include zero. For the central route, perceived value mediated the effects of information quality (effect = 0.3672, 95% CI [0.2930, 0.4527]) and promotional incentives (effect = 0.3319, 95% CI [0.2698, 0.3976]) on purchase intention, supporting H8 and H9. Contrast tests indicated that the perceived value mediation path was significantly stronger than the social presence path for both information quality (contrast = 0.1776, 95% CI [0.0792, 0.2878]) and promotional incentives (contrast = 0.1375, 95% CI [0.0523, 0.2318]).

For the peripheral route, social presence mediated the effects of interactivity (effect = 0.3124, 95% CI [0.2440, 0.3855]), entertainment (effect = 0.3076, 95% CI [0.2493, 0.3674]), and source credibility (effect = 0.3697, 95% CI [0.2966, 0.4487]) on purchase intention, supporting H10, H11, and H12. Contrast tests showed that the social presence mediation path was significantly stronger than the perceived value path for interactivity (contrast = −0.1823, 95% CI [−0.2770, −0.0941]), entertainment (contrast = −0.0757, 95% CI [−0.1640, −0.0105]), and source credibility (contrast = −0.2411, 95% CI [−0.3449, −0.1362]).

Overall, all twelve hypotheses were supported. Information quality and promotional incentives positively influenced perceived value (H1, H2); interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility positively influenced social presence (H3–H5); perceived value and social presence positively influenced purchase intention (H6, H7); and perceived value and social presence significantly mediated the relationships between the respective central- and peripheral-route cues and purchase intention (H8–H12). These findings confirm the dual-route, dual-mediation mechanism proposed in this study.

Table 3. Mediation Effects (Bootstrap Test)

Path					Conclusion
	Effect	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	
IQ → GZ → GM	0.3672	0.0409	0.2930	0.4527	Mediation supported
IQ → SH → GM	0.1896	0.0341	0.1214	0.2548	Mediation supported
Contrast (C1): IQ paths	0.1776	0.0539	0.0792	0.2878	GZ path stronger
CX → GZ → GM	0.3319	0.0326	0.2698	0.3976	Mediation supported
CX → SH → GM	0.1945	0.0323	0.1248	0.2529	Mediation supported
Contrast (C1): CX paths	0.1375	0.0457	0.0523	0.2318	GZ path stronger
HD → GZ → GM	0.1301	0.0360	0.0571	0.1982	Mediation supported
HD → SH → GM	0.3124	0.0361	0.2440	0.3855	Mediation supported
Contrast (C1): HD paths	−0.1823	0.0464	−0.2770	-0.0941	SH path stronger
YL → GZ → GM	0.2319	0.0308	0.1711	0.2931	Mediation supported
YL → SH → GM	0.3076	0.0304	0.2493	0.3674	Mediation supported
Contrast (C1): YL paths	−0.0757	0.0442	−0.1640	-0.0105	SH path stronger
KX → GZ → GM	0.1286	0.0356	0.0553	0.1976	Mediation supported
KX → SH → GM	0.3697	0.0387	0.2966	0.4487	Mediation supported
Contrast (C1): KX paths	−0.2411	0.0537	−0.3449	-0.1362	SH path stronger

Note: Bootstrap resampling = 5,000. C1 = contrast between the two indirect effects. A confidence interval excluding zero indicates a significant effect.

6. Conclusion

Integrating the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, this study examined how dual routes shape consumers' purchase intention in live-streaming e-commerce. The results show that both central and peripheral routes matter. Information quality and promotional incentives positively influence perceived value, whereas interactivity, entertainment, and source credibility positively influence social presence. Perceived value and social presence, in turn, significantly enhance purchase intention and mediate the effects of central and peripheral cues, respectively. Overall, rational cues remain the core driver of purchase decisions, while affective cues play an important auxiliary role.

These findings offer practical implications. Streamers and brands should strengthen content quality and value propositions rather than rely solely on low prices. They should also cultivate immersive and interactive social spaces, using real-time communication, entertaining content, and credible streamer personas to reduce consumer vigilance and shorten decision paths. Marketers should align rational persuasion with affective appeal according to product involvement, highlighting informational evidence for high-involvement products and atmospheric engagement for low-involvement, hedonic products.

This study has limitations. The sample of 200 valid responses was skewed toward young consumers, and platform types and product categories were not distinguished. Cross-sectional data also limit causal inference. Future research should diversify samples, incorporate platform type or product involvement as moderators, and use longitudinal or experimental designs to capture dynamic changes in trust and purchase behavior.

Acknowledgment

The research work presented in this article was funded by the Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project of Guangdong Province, China, with the project number [GD23XGL064]. We express our sincere gratitude to the supporting organization.

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