

## Manipulation Strategies in Interpersonal Relationships and Their Psychological Impact

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### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

Manipulation is a purposeful, conscious, organized psychological influence with the aim of using the personality of another person as a means of achieving one's own goals. The purpose of the article is to characterize the main strategies of manipulation in interpersonal relationships. A set of theoretical research methods was used: the conceptual and terminological analysis was used to determine the essence of the main concepts of the study, comparative and contrastive, which made it possible to analyze the periodicals and scientific-methodical publications on psychology, classification. The results identify the major components of the process of manipulative interaction and the main signs of manipulation in interpersonal relationships. The results showed that manipulators control their victims through positive reinforcement (praise, excessive apologies, gifts, attention), negative reinforcement (getting rid of the problem), unstable or partial reinforcement (fear, doubt), punishment (reproaches, shouting). The conclusions indicate that the psychological mechanisms of manipulative action ensure the effectiveness of the manipulator's psychological influence on the object of manipulation. The conclusions also summarize that the main manipulative techniques are organizational and procedural, logical and psychological, and personal. The prospect of further scientific research is an empirical study of the features of manipulative tendencies in interpersonal relations.

### 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of manipulating people has been known throughout the history of society. Today, it is not only very widespread, but also characterised by a variety of forms of manipulation. Manipulative actions are becoming more and more pronounced and sometimes even dangerous. Therefore, the problem of their impact on interpersonal communication is becoming more and more relevant. Recently, a large number of works of domestic and foreign scientific literature have been devoted to the issue of manipulation, and it is also reflected in works of fiction, which once again confirms its relevance, reaching a new level of social sensitivity, and the human desire to subdue others for their own purposes (Tsekhmister et al., 2019). The mass media (press, radio, cinema, television, Internet, advertising) and the progress of modern science have provided considerable opportunities to influence the general public. In today's society, manipulative influences in the educational sphere are increasingly growing. The family experience of manipulating children in the home is supplemented and developed at school. This includes disruption of school lessons, independent and control work. More and more technologies are being developed to influence the motivation of people's actions and behaviour - not by forcing them. People are being manipulated against their will, but with their consent, for the benefit of a small part of society (Borets & Palahniuk, 2021; Vovchenko et al., 2022). As a result of the qualitative changes that have taken place in the world, mind manipulation has come to the forefront and plays a largely decisive role in interpersonal relationships. Manipulation is essentially moral violence, as its sole purpose is to break the autonomy of the individual by coercion, while remaining unknown. In this sense, manipulation is about penetrating someone's mind in order to change their mind or provoke a desired behaviour, but without them being aware that their mind has been invaded (Buts, 2019). Thus, manipulation occupies a special place among the socio-psychological mechanisms of influence (as a means of achieving a goal) and is an integral part of modern society. The problem of manipulation remains relevant due to the lack of a common approach to understanding this phenomenon. The purpose of the article is to theoretically substantiate the phenomenon of

manipulation of people, to identify the nature of the impact of manipulative actions on interpersonal communication. In accordance with the aim, the objectives of the study are: 1. Clarify the essence of key concepts that reveal the content of manipulative interaction: “manipulation”, “manipulation situation”, “manipulative influence”, “manipulator”, “manipulative actions”, “interpersonal conflict”. 2. Identify the components of the process of manipulative interaction. 3. Identify the main signs of manipulation in interpersonal relationships. 4. Describe the tools of the strategy of manipulation in interpersonal relations: causes, types, techniques, forms, means, mechanisms, methods and their impact on the psychological state of the individual. The structure of this article consists of a brief introduction describing the relevance of the problem under study, a systematic review of the current scientific literature. The following sections consist of the results, which describe the main methods and techniques of manipulation and identify the main actions of the manipulator. The discussion is devoted to the data obtained. The last section, the conclusions, emphasizes that the main manipulative techniques are organizational and procedural, logical and psychological, and personal.

## **2. Literature Review**

An important aspect of the study of manipulative interpersonal relationships is the problem of developing a personal tendency to manipulate, since a person's readiness to use such influence is based on the belief that it is acceptable, appropriate and indisputably justified. Among the scientific studies that revealed the mental components of manipulation, the peculiarities of human consciousness and subconsciousness in the context of various actions, were developed to varying degrees in the works of different current research. Currently, there are many modern works that address the problems of influence manipulation in interpersonal relationships. For example, Maksymenko (2020) studied the psychological mechanisms of changing the value and meaning sphere of a personality, which manifests itself in the real space of interpersonal interaction in joint activities. The results of an empirical study of the relationship between the tendency to manipulate other people and the socio-psychological adaptation of the individual are presented by Kostiuk (2021). The author came to the conclusion that people with a high level of Machiavellianism have little ability for effective social and psychological adaptation, and there is a likelihood of maladaptive behaviour (low motivation to learn, low self-esteem, interpersonal communication problems). As a result of the theoretical analysis of existing studies, Borets & Palahniuk (2021) identified the most significant interpretations of the concept of manipulation. The main ways and methods of manipulation and ways of protection against manipulative actions are systematised. The essence of manipulation of people is identified by researchers as a hidden psychological coercion of a person, which is used as a specific method of control at all levels of social interaction. Buts (2019) paid special attention to the specifics of manifestation of manipulation, taking into account the psychological mechanisms of its functioning. The results of the study by Lytvynchuk (2022) showed that the tendency to manipulation has peculiarities in statistical values: the subjects, regardless of the level of psychological security, have a moderate tendency to manipulative influence, and the intensity of manipulative influence and forms of its manifestation are differentiated depending on the challenges faced by the individual and have a subjective orientation. The well-known paradigms (reactive, activist, dialogic) and strategies (imperative, manipulative, developmental) of social and psychological influence available in psychological science are highlighted in Furman (2019). Furman (2019) studied the reasons for the ironic verbal reaction to positive manipulation and found that the manipulative strategy of positive, which is most clearly manifested in the tactic of increasing the interlocutor's importance, consists in communicating pleasant information to the communicative partner in the form of compliments, praise, approval and statements marking affection in order to change his or her behaviour or mental state in the interests of the manipulator. However, the results of these studies are quite contradictory, depending on the psychological strategy considered, and therefore require some systematisation, especially in interpersonal relationships and their impact on psychological well-being.

## **3. Methodology**

For this study, theoretical methods were chosen to show the state of the art of the problem of

interpersonal manipulation based on the analysis of contemporary literature. The thoroughness of the literature selection was ensured by clearly defined criteria for selecting sources. In particular, these criteria were as follows: The study deals with theoretical aspects of manipulation. The paper describes various mechanisms of manipulation. The study is practical: it describes various practical solutions for the use of manipulative actions. Authoritativeness. Preference was given to journals published in modern scientific and metric databases. These criteria were used to select the sources for analysis. The critical analysis was also thorough. In particular, a cross-check was carried out, i.e., information from different sources was compared to clarify and verify the information provided. A separate analysis of limitations was also performed. To achieve the goal and implement the tasks, a set of theoretical research methods was used: conceptual and terminological analysis was used to determine the essence of the main concepts of the study, namely: "manipulation", "situation of manipulation", "manipulative influence", "manipulator", "manipulative actions", "interpersonal conflict"; comparative and contrastive, which made it possible to analyze the periodicals, professional and scientific-methodical publications on psychology. The methods of synthesis and classification allowed us to find out the components of the process of manipulative interaction and determine the main signs of manipulation in interpersonal relations. The study also used the method of comparison. This made it possible to compare the data obtained with the results of other respected scientists. Moreover, generalization, which was used to systematize the tools of the strategy of manipulation in interpersonal relations (causes, types, techniques, forms, means, mechanisms, methods, their impact on the psychological state of the individual) and theoretical ideas, generalization and formulation of general conclusions on the impact of manipulative actions on interpersonal communication.

#### **4. Results and discussion**

It is believed that manipulation is a form of psychological impact, the deft use of which can cause someone else to secretly become aroused in ways that are at odds with their true wants (Kostiuk, 2021). A situation of manipulation (in the psychological paradigm) is understood as a relatively stable correlation between a person's intentions and the conditions for their implementation over a certain period of time. A change in the psychological situation occurs either when an individual's intentions change or when conditions change, caused by the activity of a person, other persons, or objective circumstances (Buts, 2019). Direct manipulative influence is determined by a stable personal characteristic, which is expressed in certain traits and qualities. Manipulative influence, or a tendency to it, is manifested in understanding the ultimate goal that the manipulator seeks to achieve, awareness of one's own aspirations and actions, and the implementation of specific manipulative activities. An inadequate subjective level of personal security, hypothetically, causes specific manifestations of social interaction, exacerbates destructive ways of interaction, including manipulative influence (Lytvynchuk, 2022; Zhylin et al., 2022). A manipulator is a person who treats people ritually, while trying to avoid intimacy in relationships and difficult situations, as they feel completely helpless and afraid of close interpersonal contacts (Buts, 2019). In order to force the interlocutor to speak and act to the detriment of their interests, the manipulator has certain qualities and abilities that can be mediated by common sense and adaptability, i.e. certain manipulative actions (Borets & Palahniuk, 2021). Manipulative actions are the use of another person for one's own purposes, for one's own benefit. In this case, the other person turns into an object and is devalued. A manipulative attitude involves influencing an interaction partner to achieve one's hidden intentions and goals of controlling their thoughts and behaviour. At the same time, the partner should retain the illusion of independence when making a decision or performing an act. Manipulative actions are closely related to interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict is a difficult to resolve contradiction that arises between people and is caused by the incompatibility of their views, interests, goals, and needs. Conflict resolution is possible through one of the coping strategies, namely: rivalry, cooperation, compromise, avoidance, and concession. The appropriateness of a particular strategy is determined by the degree of significance of the subject of the conflict and the importance of maintaining the relationship. In the process of interaction, there is certainly a certain influence of one person on the other. In social psychology, there are eleven main types of influence: persuasion, self-promotion, suggestion, infection, imitation,

affection, request, coercion, criticism, ignoring, and manipulation. These types of influence differ in content and means of influence. In addition, the main reason for manipulation is considered to be the inherent conflict between a person and himself, since in everyday life he has to rely on both himself and others (Buts, 2019). Based on the analysis of the key concepts of the study, the author identifies five main features that are included in the psychological definition of manipulation in interpersonal relations:

- 1) a generic sign of psychological influence;
- 2) the manipulator's attitude to the objects of manipulation as a means of achieving his own goal;
- 3) the desire to gain a one-sided advantage;
- 4) the hidden nature of the influence (both the factor of influence and its direction);
- 5) the use of force (psychological), playing on weaknesses (exploitation of psychological vulnerability) (Borets & Palahniuk, 2021).

One of the main strategies of psychological influence is the manipulative strategy (Furman, 2019). The manipulative strategy corresponds to the “subjective” paradigm, which is based on the assertion of the activity and individual ingenuity of mental reflection of external influences, where the subject himself influences the psychological information coming from the outside. The manipulative strategy is implemented through subliminal stimulation techniques that “bypass” mental control, as well as the so-called masking and conversion techniques that block or destroy the system of psychological defences, building instead a new subjective spatio-temporal organisation, a new model of the world (Blynova et al., 2020). The following manipulation tools are part of the interpersonal interactions manipulation strategy: motives (ideas), shapes, tactics, means, procedures (techniques), and methods, which when used, enable one to affect another person's awareness in order to accomplish a particular objective. Determine the primary elements involved in the manipulation process: Human individual and collective consciousness are the object of manipulation, and specific influences are applied to them in order to get the intended outcome; A person, group of people, or society (the object of manipulation) that has been used or indirectly assisted in achieving the goal is considered a victim of manipulation; an individual or collection of people who started the process of altering consciousness in order to accomplish a particular goal is considered the subject of manipulation (Borets & Palahniuk, 2021). Another concept that needs to be introduced to describe the psychological manipulation of a person is the “target” of influence. Targets can be individuals, their associations, social groups, populations, and even countries that are the objects of special information operations (Borets & Palahniuk, 2021). In other words, the targets of psychological influence are mental structures that are influenced by the initiator and change in accordance with the goal (Buts, 2019; Borets & Palahniuk, 2021). Emotional contact involves empathy, perceiving the partner's emotions as an essential element of the situation, and entering into an emotional resonance with the interlocutor. Sign forms of contact are built on top of sensory forms, but do not coincide with them. Operational contact involves understanding the content of the work performed by the other person, the importance of the means used in communication, and providing effective feedback (Buts, 2019). One of the targets of manipulation is the social in a person, i.e. his or her social needs. Stereotypes of behaviour are one of the prerequisites, the basis on which manipulation of human consciousness is organised and carried out. A stereotypical response is a person's tendency to act in similar situations in a similar way, or even in the same way as in previous similar situations. Manipulators are not limited to using only existing stereotypes of human behaviour. On the contrary, they take measures to form such stereotypes of people's behaviour (response), and at the same time, they do so on a mass scale, so that the new stereotypes better meet the goals and objectives of the manipulator. At present, psychological literature distinguishes three main groups of manipulative techniques: organisational and procedural, logical and psychological, and personal. Organisational and procedural techniques are associated with the creation of certain conditions, preliminary organisation and specific implementation of the interpersonal interaction procedure. The use of such techniques complicates the process of discussion for the objects of

manipulative influence and, accordingly, facilitates it for the subject who organises the manipulation. The main manipulative techniques are as follows: organisational and procedural, namely, dosing of the initial information base, formation of attitudes through targeted selection of speakers, double standard in the norms of assessing the behaviour of discussion participants, manoeuvring the order of discussion, managing the discussion process, restrictions on the technique of discussion, abstracting; logical and psychological, including “vicious circle”, “incomplete refutation”, the technique of observing norms, consistency, logic of statements, “many questions”, “postulation of truth”; personal, in particular, irritation of the opponent, own exaltation or self-praise, use of words, theories and terms unfamiliar to the opponent, disruption or retreat from the discussion, “stick arguments”, “reading in the hearts” .

In the psychological paradigm, scientists are primarily interested in the nature of manipulation. There are a number of reasons for the manipulative strategy. A person is in an eternal conflict between self-reliance and reliance on the external environment. This is where the problem of self-trust and trust in other people arises. Distrust of oneself makes a person seek the support of authority figures. The second reason is that the true essence of a person is love. However, many people do not realise that we cannot love another until we love ourselves. And to love yourself means to accept yourself with all your weaknesses and shortcomings. We should have the same attitude towards other people. Third reason for manipulation lies in an existential problem - a person's fear of being alone. Risk and uncertainty in life are so great that people often feel helpless and alone in the modern world. The fourth reason is the fear of getting into a difficult situation. Being afraid of getting into a difficult situation, any person may not take any decisive action at all, not take risks, not experiment, but adhere to repeatedly tested, even outdated, principles, rules, and norms of behaviour. One of the reasons for manipulation is the need to get approval from other people. In principle, there can be no complete unity of opinion and general agreement, and therefore, there can be no general approval. Attempts to manage a person, a group of people and other human communities often meet with resistance from the latter. In this case, the initiator of managerial influence has two options: 1) to try to force them to perform the action imposed on them, i.e. to break down resistance (open control); 2) to disguise managerial influence so that it does not cause objections (covert management). The comparative characteristics of manipulative and personal influence are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of manipulative and personal influence

<b>Manipulative influence</b>	<b>Personal influence</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• secrecy and secretive nature of intentions (using another as a means of achieving one's own goal);</li> <li>• the desire to bend to one's will (to gain a one-sided advantage);</li> <li>• the effect of personality-destroying influence (primarily, the negative effect affects the personality of the addressee, but indirectly - the personality of the manipulator).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sincerity and openness of feelings, emotions, intentions and motives of the person who influences;</li> <li>• the presence in the act of influence of the goodwill and personal interests of the interacting people;</li> <li>• the effect of influence that enriches and develops (primarily the personality of the person being influenced).</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' development

Table 1 shows that the difference is obvious: manipulative influence is characterised by the desire to subdue to one's will, negative influence on the object of manipulative action, while personal influence reflects sincerity and personality development. According to the criterion of attitude to people, a person can be either an actualiser or a manipulator. A manipulator seeks to use people, while an actualiser (communicator) seeks to interact with them. The features of a manipulator, i.e. its characteristic features, are as follows:

- untruth (falsity, fraud) - the use of various techniques, methods and manoeuvres, playing roles;

- lack of awareness of the true meaning of life, limited perception of local goals; apathy, boredom;
- closeness, intentionality, and a desire to control the situation;
- cynicism (lack of faith) - does not trust either oneself or others; divides people into those who are controlled and those who control.

Identify four sources of manipulation:

1. People are driven by their needs.
2. Everyone has some weaknesses.
3. Each is characterised by certain passions.
4. People are used to following certain rules and rituals.

It is also worth noting that people with manipulative attitudes find it difficult to communicate effectively. They appear to be self-confident, socially adapted and competent in communication. However, a comparison of individual facets of their personality reveals contradictions and inconsistencies in the value and meaning sphere. The low level of some psychological health indicators leads to a more detailed consideration of the development of individual components that have the greatest impact on the functioning of the body (Hasiuk et al., 2022). This is confirmed in communication: to understand oneself well, to think a lot but not to feel, to understand the thoughts of another, but to remain incomprehensible to them. Manipulative influences can complicate communication and lead to conflicts. When they become the main way of interaction, they are included in the value-sense sphere of the personality at the level of personal attitudes, destroy communication itself, and orientate a person towards a one-sided understanding of the other, rather than mutual understanding. Mutual understanding is always the goal and result of communication, which necessarily includes an attitude towards the other person as a higher value. And manipulation cannot contribute to true love and friendship. Rather, it is a path to alienation and loneliness.

The manipulator is not so experienced in communication. Constant control over oneself and others, fear of giving in to one's feelings or being imbued with the feelings of the interlocutor make the manipulator vulnerable. These are his/her "weaknesses", which, if influenced (consciously or not), can destroy the manipulative activity itself (Khomiak & Klish, 2013). This is difficult to understand mechanism of interaction between various factors of real reality, which is followed by behavioural activity of a certain orientation (Mansurov, 2023; Ma et al., 2022). However, the formation of communication takes place under the condition of modelling real communication situations that encourage individuals to focus on solving various communication tasks and achieving communication goals (Sydorenko, 2024; Reboul, 2021). Identify the following main ways in which manipulators manage their victims: Positive reinforcement includes presents, money, honor, approbation, praise, superficial appeal, superficial pity (sometimes known as "crocodile tears"), excessive apologies, attention, and artificial smiles or laughs. Negative reinforcement is the process of rewarding the removal of an unpleasant or undesirable condition. A environment of dread and doubt can be effectively created by inconsistent or partial reinforcement. Positive reinforcement that is insufficient or erratic may motivate the victim to keep trying; for instance, in the majority of gambling games, a player may occasionally win but will ultimately lose; punishment: scolding, yelling, "the silence game," intimidation, threats, profanity, emotional blackmail, imposing guilt (guilt trip), depressing expression, purposeful crying, and victimization; traumatic one-time event: verbal abuse, screaming, outburst of anger, or other frightening behavior to establish dominance (Maksymenko, 2020; Botes, 2022; Tudder et al., 2022). Besides, caring people cannot look at those who are suffering, and a manipulator can often use sympathy to get what they want through it. Tactile contact, such as hugging, is used as one of the ways of manipulation in interpersonal communication. People consciously do not want to believe and think about the fact that they are being hugged for mercenary purposes (Valente et al., 2020; (Dobrovolska, et al., 2021). There are several tactics to recognize the manipulations. For example, victim blaming: This tactic, more than any other, is a potent way for the manipulator to

conceal their aggressive intentions while making the victim defend themselves. The victim is falsely accused of being the abuser when they are defending or asserting their rights. The second is acting as a servant: hiding the truth under the pretense of advancing a higher good, which is just in one's own self-interest. The third is minimization: The manipulator downplays the harm or irresponsibility of their actions, as evidenced, for instance, by claiming that the insult, ridicule, or censure was merely a jest. Significant role plays negative reinforcement: Taking someone out of a bad circumstance and rewarding them with something like. Also, the important is to pretend to be innocent: The manipulator makes an effort to imply that any harm was inadvertent or that they did not commit any of the charges against them. The manipulator could display a shocked or furious expression. This strategy makes the target doubt their own judgment as well as their own sanity, or mental health. It is crucial to make sure the individual is suitably adjusted to these circumstances and cultivates a suitable mindset towards the circumstance (Maciej, 2023; Mento et al., 2023). In addition, it is necessary to pretend to be perplexed: The manipulator attempts to look foolish by acting as though they have no idea what the victim is talking about or are unclear about a crucial matter that has been brought to their notice. Irony is an important means of motivating the actions of communicators. It is used when the interlocutor is equal in social status and an unreasonable request is not effective. Among the reasons for the addressee's ironic verbal reaction to positive manipulation, we also highlight the violation of distance during communication, in particular, failure to take into account the degree of acquaintance, status, position and age hierarchy, as well as negative experience of previous communication with the manipulator or the object of influence's knowledge of information that contradicts the information provided by the manipulator (Gruhl et al., 2022; Ryabova et al., 2023). A negative ironic reaction of the interlocutor is typical in communication situations when the object of manipulation is insecure, considers a positive assessment to be ambiguous or unmotivated, or does not believe in the sincerity of the subject of influence. The reason for an ironic reaction is not the form of compliment, but rather the relationship between the communicators and the statements accompanying the manipulative. Joking and playing along are close to an ironic response to a positive expressive manipulation. It is difficult to draw a clear line between joking or playing along and irony in manipulative discourse, especially in situations of intergender communication.

### **Limitations of the study and directions of further research**

Since this article belongs to theoretical studies, the main limitation of the work is the lack of empirical data. In addition, due to the fact that the work also mainly uses review materials, not much space is devoted to the analysis of statistical data or empirical data from other articles. Another significant limitation may be subjectivism, which is present in the selected scientific works. Scientific literature always contains certain elements of subjectivism, as the interpretation of research results and materials may vary from the researcher's own considerations and prejudices. Therefore, these limitations should be taken into account when evaluating the results. It also opens new directions for research. In particular, in the future, the main attention should be concentrated on the practical study of manipulations. Future experimental research will make it possible to widely confirm the results obtained on the basis of the literature analysis. This will require the use of different methods of data collection, including surveys or observations. Despite this, the obtained results have both theoretical and practical significance. In particular, these results contribute to the development of a theoretical framework for the study of the problem of interpersonal relations, explaining the mechanisms and strategies used during manipulation. This will help improve existing theories of power dynamics and social influence. In addition, this work has practical significance, as it reveals new directions and mechanisms for predicting the development of manipulation in interpersonal contact.

### **5. Conclusion and future scope**

As a result of the theoretical analysis, the author has achieved the goal of the problem under study and found out the following: The essence of manipulation is to induce fear, shame or guilt in a person and use them to meet your goals. Manipulation is a hidden influence by one person on another. Depending

on the manipulative goal, the results of manipulation can be either positive or negative. The peculiarity of manipulation is that the manipulator seeks to hide his intentions. Hence, for everyone, except the manipulator himself, manipulation is more likely to be the result of reconstruction, interpretation of certain actions, rather than direct discretion. The criteria for manipulation are as follows: the manipulator's attitude to the objects of manipulation as a means of achieving his own goal, the desire to gain a one-sided advantage, the hidden nature of influence, the use of force, inducement, motivation, and skill and ability in the process of exercising manipulative influence. The types of manipulative schemes are identified: an active manipulator tries to control others using active methods; a passive manipulator allows himself to be controlled by an active manipulator; a competing manipulator; an indifferent manipulator pretends to be indifferent. The ways in which manipulators control their victims are identified: positive reinforcement (praise, excessive apologies, gifts, attention), negative reinforcement (getting rid of the problem), unstable or partial reinforcement (fear, doubt), punishment (reproaches, shouting). The main manipulative techniques are organisational and procedural, logical and psychological, and personal. The manipulative methods in interpersonal relations are explained: denial (refutation), selective inattention, rationalisation (justification), diversion (distraction, evasion), deception, hidden intimidation, guilt, shame (shame), playing the role of the victim, blaming the victim, playing the role of the servant, minimisation, negative reinforcement, feigning innocence, feigning confusion, ironic reaction. Therefore, this study has a scientific novelty, primarily in view of the complex systematization of the main mechanisms used by manipulators. In addition, this work demonstrated that the topic is not exhaustive and will therefore require further research. We see the next step of supplementary research in an empirical study of the different aspects of manipulative tendencies in interpersonal relations. It will be feasible to corroborate the findings derived from the literature study by future experimental research. This will necessitate the use of various data collection techniques, such as surveys and observations.

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