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Social media discontinuation: A systematic literature review on drivers and inhibitors

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ABSTRACT

Recent practical reports reveal that users leave social media. This behavior is named social media discontinuation (SMD) and is attributed to stress, fatigue, and further negative effects caused while using social media. While current literature points to some causes of SMD, a systematic literature review is needed to identify current research trends, carve out future research directions, and guide practitioners in encouraging users not to close their social media accounts. We thus examine existing research on SMD and identify its drivers and inhibitors. We conducted a systematic literature review by screening 1,270 studies, published in journals and conference proceedings since 2005. We focused on 32 studies that matched our screening guidelines. Our results come up with three SMD drivers and inhibitors categories: individual, relational and platform-specific. Individual drivers and inhibitors can further be divided into cognitive, behavioral, and emotional drivers, whereas platform-specific drivers are related to content and other social media characteristics. Most drivers are from the individual or the relational category. The findings contribute to SMD research by providing a comprehensive state-of-the-art perspective on what drives and inhibits SMD. This lets us develop valuable future research directions, such as the need for future research on SMD inhibitors, which have received little attention. The study further offers valuable practical implications to social media service providers.

1. Introduction:

Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, or TikTok, has transformed the interaction and communication of individuals across the world (Ekwueme and Ebiere, 2019; Michael, 2021; Xu et al., 2018; Pang, 2021). Convenience, enjoyment, and information access have made social media popular among its users (Chai and Kim, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has proven its capacity to educate the general public on health issues (Gever et al., 2021) and as an innovative way of disseminating education in developing countries (Laato et al., 2022). The current user base of social media is approximately 3.78 billion, and users spend, on average, 145 min daily on social media (Statista, 2021a). From the perspective of social media platforms, the users are core for their long-term success for at least two fundamental reasons. First, big enterprises, such as Coca-Cola or Procter&Gamble, and small and medium enterprises pay for advertisements on social media to engage with current and potential

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customers and increase their sales and brand awareness (Barreda et al., 2015; Chatterjee and Kar, 2020; Harrigan et al., 2020; He et al., 2017; Kapoor et al., 2018). Nonetheless, social media platforms can only further attract organizations when their user's numbers do not decline in the future. Second, social media platforms rely heavily on user-generated content. Thus, many users are needed to generate new information and engaging content for other users. Both reasons imply that a strong and active user base is required to stay attractive for users and organizations. However, recent practical reports show that people leave social media (Keating, 2021; Youn, 2021) and that the number of social media users decreases (Wang et al., 2020). Statistics show that several social media are at risk of losing a substantial user base. For example, during 2020, in the US, 45% of Facebook users, 34% of Snapchat users, and 32 % of Twitter users were considering leaving their respective social media platforms (Statista, 2021b). A similar story was also evident among British social media users, where 43% of Facebook users, 37% of Snapchat and 31% of Twitter users considered leaving the social media platforms (Statista, 2021c). This development challenges social media platforms as a decline in users implies less income from social media advertisements and less content on their platforms, resulting in a vicious circle hindering their long-term success.

A vast of existing literature on the stream of social media has identified factors that drive individuals to adopt social media (e.g., Kapoor et al., 2018; McGowan et al., 2012; Whiting and Williams, 2013), or has provided insights on how to promote continued use (e.g., Lin et al., 2014, Hsu et al., 2015). Recently, based on the declining numbers of social media users, research has focused on studying factors behind social media discontinuation (SMD) (e.g., Maier et al., 2015; Zheng and Ling, 2021). Research in that field attributed SMD to specific factors, such as frustration, dissatisfaction, stress, and fatigue while using social media. Others complimented those findings by revealing the importance of information, communication, and social overload as reasons for SMD (Cao and Sun, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020).

While current research offers valuable insights to explain SMD, more research is required to understand what drives and inhibits SMD (Wang et al., 2020). As research on SMD is relatively young, the field will benefit from a systematic review of existing SMD literature that structures current findings and offers guidance in generating valuable new insights. We provide a state-of-the-art snapshot of SMD that combines diverse findings, carves out essential future research directions (Palmatier et al., 2018), and acts as a benchmark for supporting claims of novelty (Paul et al., 2021). We argue that a systematic review can provide valuable insights to both academics and practitioners in understanding what is known about the factors that create SMD, what we call drivers, and the factors that discourage it, what we call inhibitors. We aim to integrate and synthesize the extent of knowledge to provide a state-of-the-art understanding of drivers and inhibitors of SMD. This research hence seeks to answer the following research question (RQ):

RQ: *What are the drivers and inhibitors of social media discontinuation?*

Using Web of Science and Scopus, 1,270 studies published since 2005 were examined and screened, reaching a final sample size of 32 articles. We assess these articles and contribute to the existing literature on SMD by offering a holistic perspective on SMD, explicating its drivers and inhibitors, and suggesting valuable future research directions.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a conceptualization of SMD. Methodology, including the search strategy and the screening process, are described in Section 3, and results are narrated in Section 4. Section 5 discusses the results and synthesizes the findings by developing a framework. The conclusion is provided in Section 6.

2. Conceptualization of social media discontinuation

Since the first paper studying social media discontinuation (Maier et al., 2012) (SMD), lots of research has provided additional insights into SMD (e.g., Turel, 2015; Cao and Sun, 2018; Maier et al., 2015; Hong and Oh, 2020). Discontinuation is a post-adoption behavior distinct from other previously studied use behaviors. The absence of factors driving continuous use does not necessarily mean that discontinuation intentions will be formed. For instance, a user may no longer be satisfied with social media; nonetheless, he/she might continue using it out of habit. Accordingly, discontinuation merits its own theory development (Lin et al., 2020) and has specific impacts on the user, explaining why users discontinue their social media use.

Discontinuation has been manifested in different forms in the literature. It can refer to reducing usage intensity (Cao and Sun, 2018; Adhikari and Panda, 2020; Lin et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Luqman et al., 2020; Masood et al., 2021), temporary discontinuance (Adhikari and Panda, 2020; Dindar and Akbulut, 2014; Franks et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Luqman et al., 2020; Masood et al., 2021), completely abandoning usage (Darban et al., 2021; Hong and Oh, 2020; Adhikari and Panda, 2020; Cao and Sun, 2018; Dindar and Akbulut, 2014; Lin et al., 2020; Luqman et al., 2018; Luqman et al., 2020; Masood et al., 2021), or using an alternative social media platform instead (Cao and Sun, 2018; Turel, 2015; Maier et al., 2015; Hong and Oh, 2020; Lin et al., 2020; Masood et al., 2021). Most research adopts a multidimensional conceptualization of discontinuation, consisting of at least two of the above dimensions.

Studies have reported the negative psychological and emotional consequences of social media on its users, such as increasing levels of exhaustion (Cao and Sun, 2018; Cao et al., 2020; Maier et al., 2015) and fatigue (Adhikari and Panda, 2020; Lin et al., 2020), where discontinuation becomes a behavioral response to these. When deciding whether to continue or discontinue using social media, users engage in a judgmental process where they compare their beliefs and value system with their actual behavior (Turel, 2015). When the outcome of this process is unfavorable, that is, there is a discrepancy between one's values and behavior, users go through a self-regulation behavior to eliminate this discrepancy by discontinuing usage (Turel, 2015; Luqman et al., 2020). For example, hedonic use of social media, accompanied by spending too much time on it, can result in guilt feelings that drive users to discontinue usage (Turel, 2015). Accordingly, SMD is considered an essential emotional coping strategy against the stress and exhaustion users experience from using social media (Adhikari and Panda, 2020).

Besides the psychological and emotional drivers, SMD can be associated with a cognitive aspect related to users' perception that social media no longer satisfies their needs. That is, there is no fit between the features and functionalities of the technology and their

needs (Darban et al., 2021). In such situations, discontinuation intentions are also likely to arise. Users are rational actors who calculate the benefits and costs of leaving or staying with a particular social media platform and decide accordingly (Park and Koh, 2018).

3. Method: A systematic literature review

A systematic literature review approach was adopted to explore the literature on SMD to identify the drivers and inhibitors of SMD. This review approach allows researchers to synthesize the literature systematically, transparently, and reproducibly (Tranfield et al., 2003). In this way, we avoid the limitations of traditional literature review, such as lack of rigor (Noblit and Hare, 1999) and biased inclusion of studies (Briner and Walshe, 2014). A systematic review follows a structured methodology for reliable and valid outcomes (Briner and Walshe, 2014). This study was conducted using the guidelines provided by Tranfield et al. (2003), which are widely accepted and used in lots of previously published reviews (Behera et al., 2019; Chaudhary et al., 2021; Geissdoerfer et al., 2018; Nabi et al., 2017). Aligned with the guidelines and the previously published papers, we present the search strategy, screening process, quality assessment, and data extraction processes in the next sections.

3.1. Search strategy

The purpose of the study was to identify all empirical studies on factors encouraging (drivers) and discouraging (inhibitors) SMD. First, we identified relevant search keywords. For this purpose, we examined the existing literature reviews (e.g., Cheston et al., 2013; Keles et al., 2020; Al-Qaysi et al., 2020a, 2020b) on social media and extracted the relevant keywords. We also examined existing studies on SMD and identified the most often used keywords when studying "discontinuation". Table 1 shows the main keywords and their alternatives for constructing search strings.

We also used abbreviations such as SM (for social media), SN (for social networks), and SNS (for social networking sites). However, a large number of returned publications were from the medical field, having no connection with social media. We also considered "quitting" and "withdrawal" as alternative terms to discontinuation. The addition of the term "quitting" did not increase the number of returned publications, whereas the addition of "withdrawal" returned many articles irrelevant to social media. So, we decided not to use such terms in the search string to avoid a noisy dataset.

Second, we identified relevant sources. Many sources exist, such as Emerald, Google Scholar, IEEE, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Taylor and Francis, Web of Science, and Wiley. Researchers have used some or all of these sources as per their needs (e.g., Cheston et al., 2013; Keles et al., 2020; Al-Qaysi et al., 2020a). However, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science are often preferred due to their coverage, accuracy, citations, and consistency (Farooq and Feizollah, 2021). In contrast to Web of Science and Scopus, Google Scholar is a search engine that collates all the publications and is criticized for inconsistency (Falagas et al., 2008). We selected Web of Science and Scopus for their better coverage of journals (Adriaanse and Rensleigh, 2013), more comprehensive coverage of disciplines (Falagas et al., 2008; Farooq and Feizollah, 2021; Olijnyk, 2015), and relevance (Olijnyk, 2015).

A search string was constructed using the Boolean operator "OR" within alternatives of one keyword, and the "AND" operator was used to concatenate social media keywords and discontinuation. A search in title, abstract, and keywords was conducted in September 2021, resulting in 1,270 potentially relevant publications (Scopus = 733, Web of Science = 537). We searched the literature between 2005 and 2021.

3.2. Screening process

After the search process, we applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the study according to the research questions. The inclusion criteria allowed us to identify the publications (1) relevant to SMD, (2) published in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings, and (3) written in English. As exclusion criteria, all studies that (1) were not empirical, (2) did not examine drivers or inhibitors of SMD, (3) and omitted SMD in the model testing were removed from further analysis.

Instead of manually applying inclusion criteria 2 and exclusion criteria 1, we used database's built-in functions to remove publications that were not in English (Scopus: 29, Web of Science: 14) and non-empirical papers, such as reviews (Scopus: 126, Web of Science: 130). The *meta*-data of the remaining 971 publications was extracted into an Excel file for manual application of inclusion criteria. Before applying the inclusion criteria manually, 270 duplicate publications were removed using Excel remove duplicate function. The first and second authors, a post-doctoral researcher in user experience research and an associate professor in information systems, went through the titles and abstracts of the remaining 701 publications. In this phase, 62 publications (39 duplicates and 23 records that did not fulfill inclusion criteria 2) were removed.

Next, we applied the exclusion criteria by examining the full text of 639 publications. After the screening process, we identified 32

Table 1
Keywords and their alternative terms for search string construction.

Keyword	Alternative
Social media	"social networks", "social networking sites", "social networking services", "messaging apps", Facebook, WeChat, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Google+
Discontinuation	Post-adoption, "discontinuance intention", "discontinuous intention", "discontinuation", termination

relevant publications. The detailed screening process is shown in Fig. 1.

3.3. Quality assessment

We then evaluated the quality and accuracy of 33 publications according to quality assessment criteria (Nidra et al. (2013); Zhen and Ling (2021)). The criteria were related to relevance, context, adequacy of methodology, clarity of data collection, and accuracy of data analysis and rated based on a 3-point scale. A publication received 2 points if a criterion was fulfilled completely, 1 point for partial fulfillment, and 0 points for not meeting a criterion. In this way, each publication received points in the range of 0 to 10. Next, each publication was ranked "high" (points greater than or equal to 6), "medium" (points equal to 5), and "low" (points less than 5) as suggested in previous research (Ahmed et al. (2019); Zhen and Ling (2021)). All 33 publications except one scored high according to the quality assessment criteria. The final sample size hence was 32 publications (see Appendix A).

3.4. Data extraction and coding

The *meta*-data of the publications were included in an Excel file. This file was used for data extraction and coding. The *meta*-data included names of authors, the title of publication, year of publication, type of publication, and the title of publication forum. In addition, we extracted the following data points: social media type, country of study, drivers of SMD, inhibitors of SMD, the theoretical lens of the study, sample characteristics, data collection, and analysis method. Next, through an iterative coding and categorization process, drivers and inhibitors of SMD were further grouped into themes. Two of the authors (first and second) coded the papers, differences were discussed, and inconsistencies were removed to achieve complete inter-coder reliability of 100 %, meaning that both

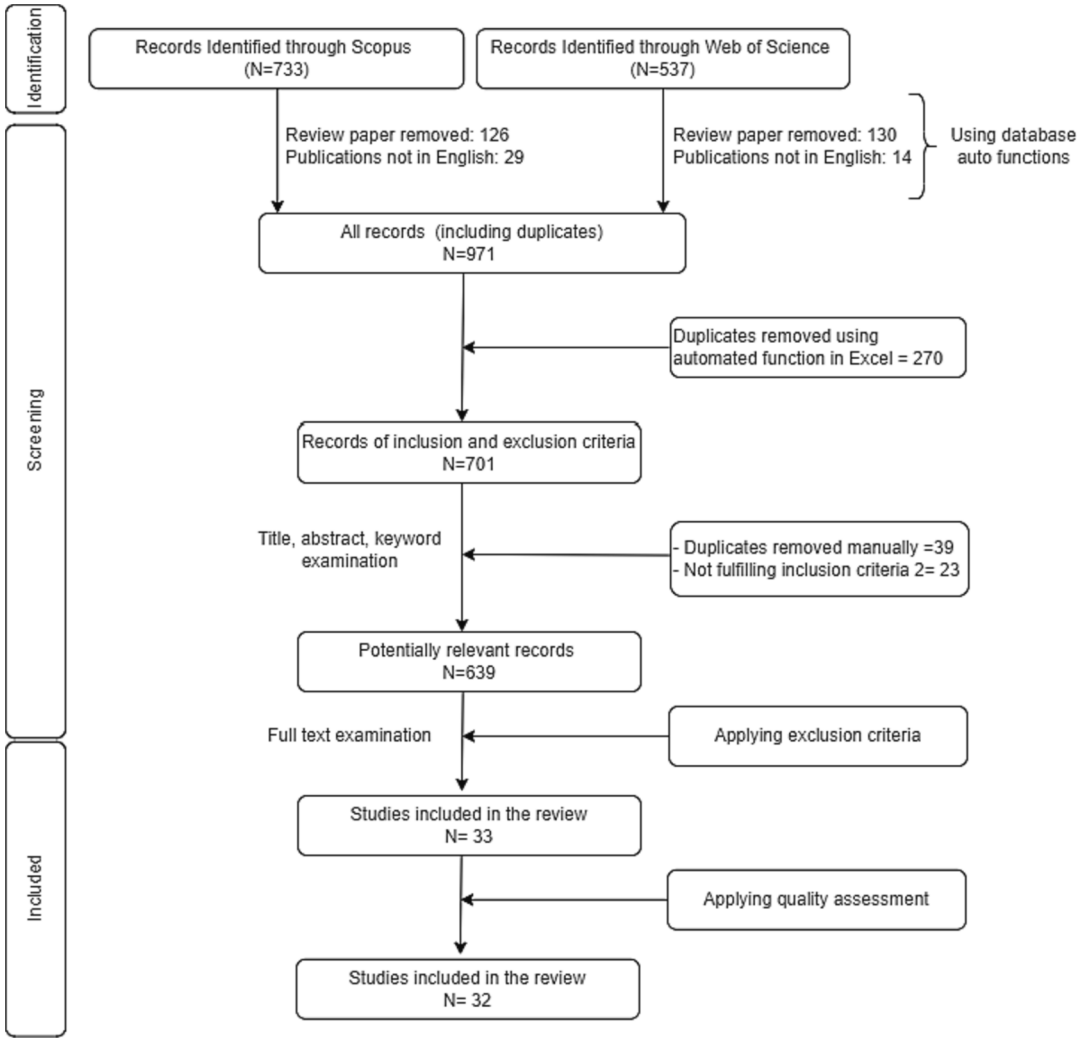

Fig. 1. Screening process.

raters agreed on the coding and categorization. We iteratively categorized the drivers and inhibitors of SMD into themes. We also looked at both direct drivers (the factors having a direct positive relationship with SMD) and indirect drivers (antecedents of the drivers).

4. Results

Out of 32 publications, 26 were journal articles, and six were published in conference proceedings. Fig. 2 shows the number of publications divided based on the type of publication forum over the years.

Most of the studies were conducted in China (n = 9) and the USA (n = 6), whereas the rest were conducted in Asian countries (Bangladesh = 1, India = 1, Indonesia = 1, Pakistan = 2, South Korea = 1, Taiwan = 1, Turkey = 1), Europe (Finland = 1, Germany = 2, UK = 1) and Australia (n = 1). One study included multiple country samples (Stieger et al., 2013), while three did not specify the country. In terms of social media type, Facebook received the most focus (n = 10).

Eight studies were focused on Chinese social media (e.g., WeChat, Weibo, Qzone), one each was on Instagram, Line-P, Ello, and Grindr, and eight studies examined social media in general without specifying any social media platform. Table 2 shows the research context of the studies, including source, social media type, theoretical lens, sample description, country of research, data collection, and data analysis methods.

4.1. Drivers of social media discontinuation

We categorized direct and indirect drivers of SMD into individual, relational, and platform-related drivers. Individual drivers refer to within-individual factors such as beliefs and attitudes (e.g., distrust, frustration, self-efficacy). Relational drivers refer to factors beyond the individual self and focus on the influence of users' interactions and relationships with others on discontinuation of social media (e.g., peer pressure, subjective norms). Platform-related drivers refer to factors describing the social media platforms' content, features, or structure (e.g., messages, friend requests, advertisements).

Individual drivers were further divided into emotional, cognitive, and behavioral categories, whereas platform-related drivers were divided into social media content and social media characteristics categories.

4.1.1. Individual drivers of SMD

Our analysis revealed various individual factors, which we further classify into emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and personal attributes. We define these attributes next and provide examples from the existing literature.

Emotional factors refer to feelings and affections experienced by users. Our analysis shows that most individual-level drivers fall under this category. Different emotional factors have been examined in the literature. The one that is widely recognized as a driver of SMD is social media fatigue and exhaustion (Liu et al., 2021; Cao et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2016; Adhikari and Panda, 2020; Cao and Sun, 2018; Zhang et al., 2015; Valensia and Nugroho, 2019; Lin et al., 2020; Maier et al., 2015; Maier et al., 2012). Other emotional drivers include feelings of guilt (Vaghefi and Qahri-Saremi, 2017; Maier, 2020; Turel, 2015; Masood et al., 2021) that result from neglecting more important needs such as hobbies, and feelings of regret (Cao and Sun, 2018; Wang et al., 2020; Nawaz et al., 2018) which emerge from negative consequences users' experience following the use of social media such as anxiety and embarrassment, are other emotional drivers that cause SMD.

Further emotional factors studied so far are dissatisfaction (Wu et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2015; Nawaz et al., 2018), frustration (Mahmud et al., 2020; Maier, 2020), distress (Cao et al., 2020), strain (Luqman et al., 2020), attitude

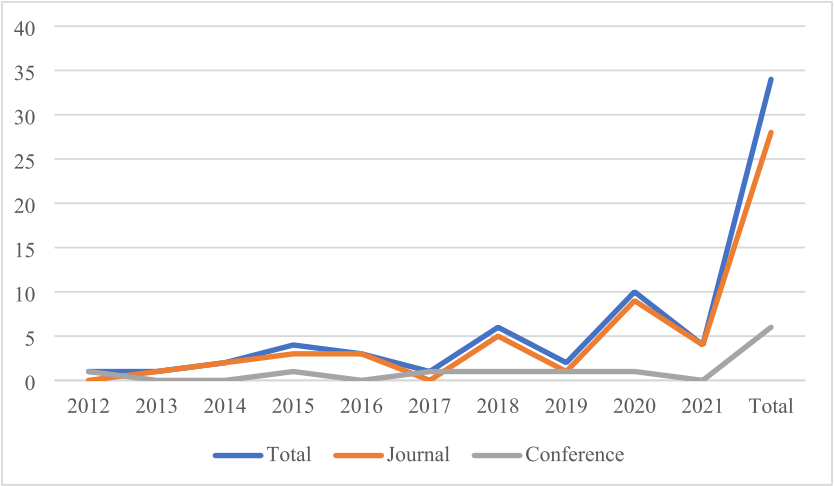

Fig. 2. Number of publications by forum type.

Table 2
Summary showing research context of the studies.

S#	Source	Social Media Type	Theoretical Lense	Sample Description	Country	Data collection method	Analysis Method
P1	Adhikari and Panda (2020)	Social media in general	LCM, UTAUT	306 social media users	India	Survey	SEM
P2	Brubaker et al. (2016)	Grindr	No specific theory	16 gay men	US	Interviews	Inductive analysis
P3	Cao and Sun (2018)	Social media in general	S—O—R	258 students in a large Chinese university	China	Survey	SEM
P4	Cao et al. (2020)	Facebook and WeChat	Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)	314 students and working people	Pakistan	Survey	SEM
P5	Darban et al. (2021)	Ello	Herd Theory, Task Technology Fit	259 Ello users	US	Longitudinal online experimental study	SEM
P6	Mahmud et al. (2020)	Facebook	No specific theory	170 university students	Bangladesh	Survey	SEM
P7	Dindar and Akbulut (2014)	Facebook	No specific theory	231 and 11 pre-service teachers	Turkey	sequential mixed method (quan-qual)	ANOVA
P8	Franks et al. (2018)	Facebook	No specific theory	11	Australia	Interviews	
P9	Hong and Oh (2020)	Facebook	No specific theory	218 Facebook users	US	Survey	Pearson's correlation
P10	Kour (2016)	Facebook	No specific theory	10 videos	Not specified	Content analysis of YouTube videos	content analysis of YouTube videos
P11	Köse (2020)	Facebook	No specific theory	142 Foreigners	Finland	Survey	SEM
P12	Lin et al. (2020)	WeChat	SOR	502 WeChat users	China	Survey	SEM
P13	Liu et al. (2021)	Social media in general	S—O—R	322 Gen Z social media users	UK	Survey	SEM
P14	Luqman et al. (2018)	Chinese social media	SDT and TPB	397 university students	China	Survey	SEM
P15	Luqman et al. (2020)	Smartphone-based social media	S—O—R	505 general users	China	Survey	SEM
P16	Maier (2020)	Social media in general	Cognitive dissonance theory	6 former IT addicts	Not specified	Interview	Narrative
P17	Maier et al. (2012)	Facebook	SSO	523 students	Germany	Survey	SEM
P18	Maier et al. (2015)	Facebook	No specific theory	82 students	Germany	Experimental study	SEM
P19	Masood et al. (2021)	Chinese social media	SSO and ED Theory	701 students	China	Survey	SEM
P20	Nawaz et al. (2018)	Social media in general	SSO	505 students	Pakistan	Survey	SEM
P21	Park and Koh (2018)	Social media in general	No specific theory	213 business school students	South Korea	Survey	SEM
P22	Sharabi and Timmermans (2021)	Dating app	Rusbult's Investment Model	205 students	US	Survey	ordinary least squares path analysis
P23	Stieger et al. (2013)	Facebook	No specific theory	310	multiple	Survey	Correlation
P24	Turel (2015)	Facebook	SCT	510 university students	USA	Survey	SEM
P25	Vaghefi and Qahri-Saremi (2017)	Social media in general	CDT	226 university students	US	Survey	SEM
P26	Valensia and Nugroho (2019)	Instagram	No specific theory	200 instagram users locaed in greater Jakarta area	Indonisia	Survey	SEM
P27	Wang et al. (2020)	WeChat	Two-Factor model	238 general uses	China	Survey	SEM
P28	Wu et al. (2019)	Line-P	EDT, FT	Interviews (22), Questionnaire (626) users	Taiwan	Mixed methods (semi-structured interviews + survey	multiple regression
P29	Xie and Tsai (2021)	Weibo	SOR	328 users	China	Survey	SEM and FsQCA
P30	Zhang et al. (2015)	Qzone	C-A-C	274 users	Not specified	Survey	SEM
P31	Zhang et al. (2016)	Qzone	SSO	525 users	China	Survey	Not mentioned
P32	Zhou et al. (2018)	Weibo	C-A-C	401 users	China	Survey	PLS

Note:C-A-C = cognition-affection-conation framework, CDT = cognitive dissonance theory, EDT = expectation-disconfirmation theory, ED = ego depletion theory, FsQCA = fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, FT = functional theory of upward counterfactual thinking, LCM = limited capacity model, PLS = partial least square, SCT = Social Cognitive Theory, SDT = self-determination theory, SEM = structural equation modeling, SOR = stimulus-organizsm-response framework, SSO = stressor-strain-outcome framework, TPB = theory of planned behavior, UTAUT = unified theory of acceptance and use of technology.

towards SMD (Luqman et al., 2018), and stress (Maier, 2020). One paper examined the case of COVID-19 and identified fear of COVID-19, due to the abundance of information on social media on the pandemic, as a factor that positively influences SMD (Liu et al., 2021).

Cognitive factors relate to neuropsychological cognitive capabilities and thought processes (Milligan et al., 2017). Our results show that social media's costs and benefits are the salient cognitive factor influencing SMD. This aspect was captured under different terminologies such as investment (Sharabi and Timmermans, 2021), coupling (Park and Koh, 2018), and waste of time (Kour, 2016; Dindar and Akbulut, 2014; Hong and Oh, 2020; Brubaker et al., 2016). Privacy concerns have also been reported to drive SMD (Hong and Oh, 2020, Dindar and Akbulut, 2014, Stieger et al., 2013).

Many studies emphasized that behavioral factors determine SMD. For example, two studies found that self-efficacy to discontinue the use of social media is positively associated with SMD (Vaghefi and Qahri-Saremi, 2017, Turel, 2015). One study highlighted the positive impact of perceived behavioral control regarding discontinuance on SMD (Luqman et al., 2018). While another research revealed that online intensity negatively predicts SMD (Sharabi and Timmermans, 2021). Additionally, heavy social media users felt addicted to them and thus were more inclined to leave (Stieger et al., 2013).

Finally, three studies have examined the role of personal attributes, such as personality traits, in SMD (Hong and Oh, 2020; Dindar and Akbulut, 2014; Stieger et al., 2013). These studies found a significant association of personality traits, such as the Big Five, with SMD and its motivating factors.

4.1.2. Relational drivers

Our findings reveal that social pressure drives users to abandon social media. Such pressure can arise from one's close network (e.g., family, friends, colleagues) (Luqman et al., 2018; Hong and Oh, 2020; Dindar and Akbulut, 2014) or distant network (e.g., broader community) (Chesney and Lawson, 2015). Disturbances caused by voluminous friendship requests and the presence of people one no longer wants to interact with on social media are other reasons behind SMD (Dindar and Akbulut, 2014). The likelihood of misunderstanding and misinterpretation is higher in online than offline communications, which drives users to quit social media (Kour, 2016).

A qualitative study by Maier (2020) identified several relational factors for SMD. One is the solid intrinsic motivation rising from a stronger motivator, particularly meeting someone in the real world, that causes users to abandon social media and focus on offline relationships instead. Another factor is the negative feedback and complaints received for not performing specific tasks due to the constant use of social media. Whether the drive for SMD emerged from intrinsic or extrinsic motivations, the paper emphasizes the importance of external support in boosting these motivations (Maier, 2020).

Besides the direct impact of the above-mentioned relational factors on SMD, prior research has also examined the indirect effect of relational factors. Social overload, defined as the increased level of social support one is expected to provide to others through social media, is the most prominent factor (Maier et al., 2012). Social overload is positively related to regret (Cao and Sun, 2018; Wang et al., 2020), social media exhaustion (Cao and Sun, 2018; Cao et al., 2020), distress (Cao et al., 2020), frustration (Mahmud et al., 2020), social media fatigue (Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2020), and dissatisfaction (Zhang et al., 2015; Nawaz et al., 2018). Other relational factors that have an indirect impact on SMD are communication overload (Cao and Sun, 2018; Luqman et al., 2020; Mahmud et al., 2020), cyberbullying (Cao et al., 2020), technology-family friction (Luqman et al., 2020) and extrinsic motivation to abandon social media (Maier, 2020).

4.1.3. Platform-related drivers

Among the SMD drivers, we identified factors related to social media platforms. Such factors were mainly related to content (information and connectivity) and other characteristics of social media platforms (system features and mechanics).

Major drivers within content-related factors were related to information – type, value, and volume of posts. These included information equivocality (Xie and Tsai, 2021), disturbance (Dindar and Akbulut, 2014), annoyance due to posts (Hong and Oh, 2020); the banality of content (Hong and Oh, 2020), advertisement interference (Xie and Tsai, 2021), dissatisfaction with service due to information volume and quality (Wu et al., 2019) and information overload (Xie and Tsai, 2021). Another study discussed rumor dissemination (Xie and Tsai, 2021) as a reason for leaving social media. Lack of interesting connections (Brubaker et al., 2016) was another content-related factor that resulted in SMD.

Apart from the content-related drivers, lack of interest, system mechanics (Dindar and Akbulut, 2014), and alternative availability (Hong and Oh, 2020) were other factors mentioned as reasons for SMD. Dindar and Akbulut (2014) found that users did not find social media exciting and planned to leave it. They also found that different system mechanics, such as unnecessary messages, invitations, and advertisements, are reasons for SMD. Sometimes social media users find a better alternative for the current service and leave the existing one (Hong and Oh, 2020).

Some studies also looked at factors that indirectly resulted in SMD. Similar to direct platform drivers, several indirect drivers were related to information. Some were related to the characteristics of information, such as usefulness, inconsistency, lack of novelty, comprehensibility, and equivocality (Wu et al., 2019); Xie and Tsai, 2021), whereas others were related to the outcome of the information, such as information overload (Cao and Sun, 2018; Liu et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020; Nawaz et al., 2018; Valensia and

Nugroho, 2019; Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2018), excessive cognitive use (Luqman et al., 2020) and communication overload (Cao and Sun, 2018; Lin et al., 2020). In addition, factors such as rumor dissemination and advertisement interface were mentioned as indirect drivers of SMD (Xie and Tsai, 2021).

The different categories of SMD direct drivers are shown in Fig. 3.

4.2. Inhibitors of social media discontinuation

4.2.1. Individual inhibitors of SMD

Regarding the individual inhibitors, our analysis revealed that emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors inhibited users from discontinuing social media. Satisfaction with social media was the main emotional inhibiting factor (Zhou et al., 2018; Turel, 2015; Köse, 2020; Maier et al., 2012). Switching exhaustion was found to reduce SMD (Maier et al., 2015). Regarding the cognitive factors, one study revealed that sunk cost, which is the irreversible costs that have already been incurred, also triggers users' resistance to social media discontinuation (Park and Koh, 2018). Habitual use of social media is recognized as a behavioral impediment to SMD (Turel, 2015). Finally, Wang et al. (2020) examined the impact of inertia and its emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components (e.g., affective commitment, sunk costs, and habit) on SMD and found that inertia acts as a significant inhibiting mechanism.

4.2.2. Relational inhibitors

The existing studies have considered only two factors categorized as direct relational inhibitors of SMD. These are relational satisfaction (Sharabi and Timmermans, 2021), defined as the satisfaction a social media user feels due to interaction with other people, and controlled motivation (Luqman et al., 2018) which is an external motivation due to peers.

Studies have stated relational satisfaction, controlled motivation, transition costs, and replacement overload as indirect inhibitors of SMD. We found that relational satisfaction indirectly predicts SMD through commitment (Sharabi and Timmermans, 2021), whereas controlled motivation indirectly predicts SMD through attitude and perceived behavioral control of discontinuation (Luqman et al., 2018). Maier et al. (2015) found that transition cost, establishing new social connections, and replacement overload were among other inhibitors of SMD.

4.2.3. Platform-related inhibitors

Among the platform-related inhibitors, post-adoptive task-technology-fit was identified as an inhibitor of social media abandonment and defined as "*evaluating how a technology fits the user's needs after a short period of usage*" (Darban et al., 2021, p.167). Two other

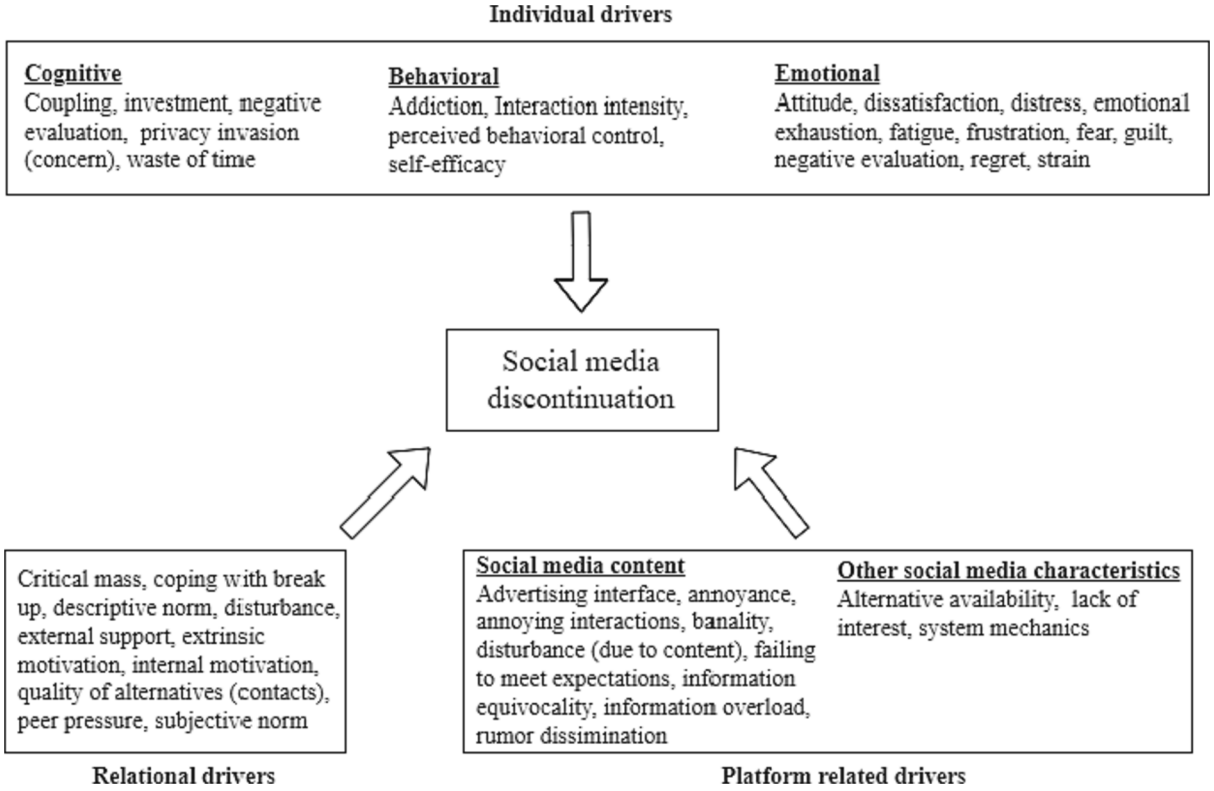

Fig. 3. Categories of social media discontinuation direct drivers.

studies have examined factors that inhibit SMD indirectly through satisfaction (Köse, 2020; Zhou et al., 2018). These indirect inhibitors of SMD were related to the type and characteristics of the content. Köse (2020) found that utilitarian and hedonic content creates a sense of satisfaction among social media users, negatively impacting SMD. Utilitarian content is knowledge and task-specific content, whereas hedonic content includes icons, avatars, and videos. Another study shows that content characteristics, such as interestingness, surprisingness, novelty, and usefulness, are negatively related to discontinuous usage intention (Zhou et al., 2018).

Fig. 4 shows the direct inhibitors of SMD.

4.3. Control variables

The studies reported mixed results about the impact of control variables on SMD. Out of 32 studies, 12 included control variables for the discontinuance intention. Among the control variables, gender (Luqman et al., 2018; Maier et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016), age (Lin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2016), positive/negative effects (Masood et al., 2021), satisfaction, perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, dispositional resistance to change, neuroticism, and extraversion (Maier et al., 2015) significantly affected the SMD. Studies also considered control variables such as the number of accounts (Cao et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021), number of friends (Cao et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; luqman et al., 2020), health status (Liu et al., 2021), social media experience (Cao and Sun, 2018; Lin et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Maier et al., 2012), frequency of use (Lin et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021), device such as phone, TV and laptop use (Masood et al., 2021), social norms and network effects (Darban et al., 2021). However, these variables were found to have no significant impact on SMD.

Consequently, based on the review, an overall theoretical perspective of significant factors causing or inhibiting SMD is shown in Fig. 5.

5. Discussion

Social media discontinuation is a vital user behavior for social media platforms. A large user base is critical for motivating users to generate content and organizations to pay for advertisements. Our results show that SMD is a complex behavior guided by multifaceted drivers that foster the development of SMD and several inhibitors that prevent users from SMD. A holistic perspective on what drives and inhibits SMD can be seen in Fig. 5.

The review provides three main findings. First, a more nuanced perspective reveals that SMD drivers and inhibitors can be divided into individual, relational and platform-specific factors. Due to the diversity of the individual-specific drivers and inhibitors, they are further divided into emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors. Likewise, relational- and platform-specific drivers are divided into content-related and other social media characteristics. This multi-level categorization suggests that SMD discontinuance is driven by

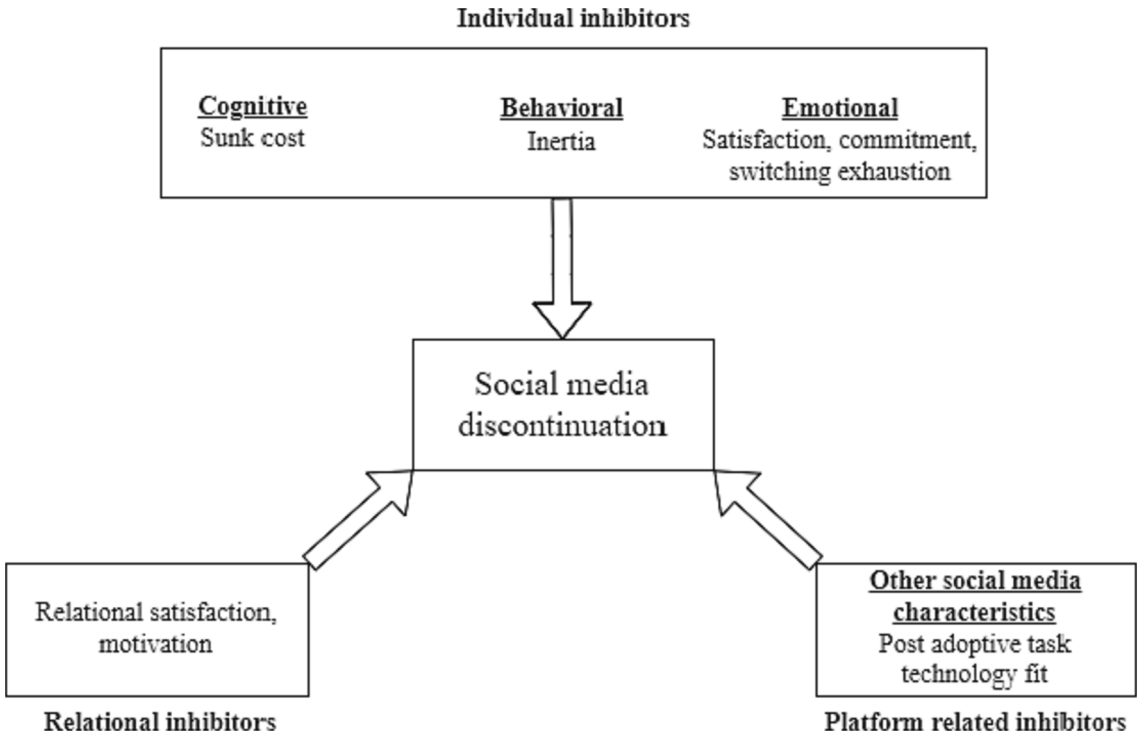

Fig. 4. Categories of SMD direct inhibitors.

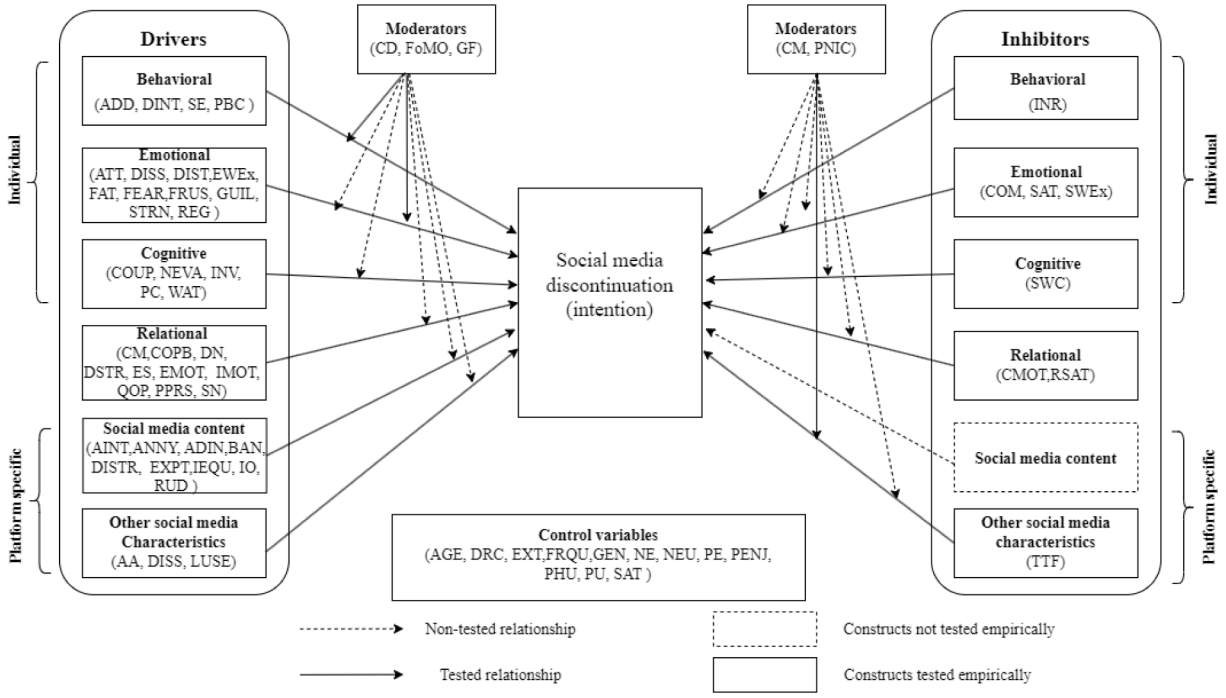

Fig. 5. List of drivers, inhibitors, control variables, and moderators related to SMD based on the systematic review *Note: Used abbreviations:* AA = alternative attractiveness, AGE = age, ADD = sense of addiction, ANNY = annoyance due to post, AINT = annoying interactions (persons), ADIN = advertising interface, ATT = attitude towards discontinuation, BAN = banality of information, CD = cognitive dissonance, CM = critical mass, CMOT = controlled motivation, COM = online dating commitment, COPB = coping with breakup, COUP = coupling, DINT = online dating intensity, DISS = dissatisfaction, DIST = distress, DRC = dispositional resistance to change, DSTR = disturbance, EMOT = extrinsic motivation, ES = external support, EWEx = emotional exhaustion, EXPT = failing to meeting expectations, EXT = extraversion FAT = fatigue, FEAR = fear of COVID-19, FoMO = fear of missing out, FRUS = frustration, GEN = gender, GUIL = guilt, GF = guilt feeling, IEQU = information equivocality, IMOT = internal motivation, INR = inertia, INV = investments, IO = information overload, LUSE = lack of usefulness, NE = negative effect, NEVA = negative evaluation, NEU = neuroticism, PBC = perceived beahvioral control regarding disctontinuation, PC = privacy concern, PE = positive effect, PENJ = perceived enjoyment, PNIC = percehived niche, PPRS = pressure of partner, PU = perceived usefulness, QOA = quality of alternatives, REG = regret, RSAT = relational satisfaction, RUB = rumor dissemination, SAT = satisfaction, SE = self efficacy to discontinue use, STRN = strain, SN = subjective norms regarding discontinuation, SWC = swichting/sunk cost, SWEx = switching exhaustion, TTF = task-technology fit, WAT = waste of time.

internal (individual drivers) and external motivations (relational and platform-specific drivers). At the same time, internal motivation (internal inhibitors) and external motivation (relational and platform-specific inhibitors) counter SMD. Factors in different categories do not act in a silo but are interrelated. For example, platform-specific factors (e.g. information overload) and relational factors (e.g. communication overload) can have an impact on individual factors (e.g. regret) that trigger SMD (e.g. Cao and Sun, 2018). In other words, external motivations can trigger internal motivations for SMD. This differentiation is essential for researchers as it will allow them to identify other internal and external stimuli that may counter SMD. Overall, it contributes by offering a holistic theoretical understanding of SMD. It will enable us to pinpoint the drivers and inhibitors so that future studies can build their work on these categories and identify essential, unstudied drivers and inhibitors or additional categories.

Second, prior literature revealed that culture could influence users' technology-related decisions (Hoehle et al., 2015; Mohammed and Tejay, 2017). Our results show that the existing SMD studies are grounded in different social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WeChat) (e.g. Mahmud et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2020) and were conducted in different countries (e.g., Australia, China, Finland, Germany, India, Pakistan, and the USA) (e.g. Wang et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2020), but these platform and cultural differences were not accounted for. With that, we contribute with a nuanced understanding that platform or cultural differences might influence whether a driver or an inhibitor influences SMD. This understanding contributes to research in developing contextualized theories (Hong et al., 2014) that respect the specifics of a given platform or country.

Third, we found that SMD inhibitors have a powerful cascading impact on SMD. For example, sunk costs are directly associated with SMD (Park and Koh, 2018), but it can also trigger other factors such as switching exhaustion (Maier et al., 2015) and inertia (Wang et al., 2020), which then, in turn, reduce SMD indirectly. This implies that inhibitors can have cascading effects where one inhibitor can activate a series of other inhibitors magnifying their influence. Examining the cause-effect pathways becomes thus necessary to enrich our understanding of SMD.

Our study offers several valuable practical implications. First, negative feelings associated with social media use (e.g., stress, frustration, fatigue, exhaustion) are the top reasons behind leaving social media. Social media service providers should develop

strategies that alleviate such negative feelings. One way of achieving this is by investigating the antecedents of these feelings to tackle the problem's root cause and not the symptoms. For instance, privacy concerns are seen as a source of regret (Wang et al., 2020), social media fatigue (Adhikari and Panda, 2020), and social media exhaustion (Maier et al., 2015). Social media service providers should develop strong privacy policies that give users more control over their data, its use, and its sharing. This area is of great importance because privacy concerns affect SMD, directly and indirectly, magnifying its impact on users' continuation/discontinuation. Changing the platform's terms of service is also considered a source of stress and frustration (Maier, 2020). WhatsApp witnessed a huge decrease in users after it changed its terms of service last year. This implies that social media service providers should minimize the frequency of the updates on their terms of use, and when they do, they should offer clear statements on what has exactly been changed and why. In addition, irrelevant content and information overload lead to dissatisfied users (Zhou et al., 2018). Recently, Instagram users revealed their annoyance over the irrelevant content that is flooding their feeds (Silberling, 2022). Motivated by financial gains and growth needs, social media service providers are increasingly using algorithmic recommendations to show content to users instead of relying on users' friends and accounts they follow. Social media service providers need to acknowledge that such strategies can incite negative feelings hence fireback leading to a decrease in the number of users.

Second, the ability of users to interact with social media and utilize its different features and settings can determine their use levels. Those with low self-efficacy in social media-related tasks and activities are more likely to abandon social media (Adhikari and Panda, 2020). Hence, more attention should be directed toward building the skills and competencies needed to participate and engage in social media activities.

Third, social media service providers should strive to update their sites with new features that meet users' needs and increase their satisfaction since the latter is seen as a good strategy for counteracting the negative impact of SMD drivers. Social media advertisement is one of the revenue sources for the service providers, however, if these advertisements are shown in a manner that creates annoyance or overloading sensation, the users will start leaving the platforms. Accordingly, social media service providers should balance their efforts to increase their user base and profits.

6. Avenues for future research and limitations

Our study offers several avenues for future research. First, while the current literature has examined drivers and enablers of SMD, inhibitors have received little attention. A driver can likely cease to have an impact (or show lower impact) with the presence of inhibiting factors. Future research should incorporate both enablers and inhibitors of SMD in the research model to provide a more comprehensive view of discontinuation.

Second, the existing research is mainly focused on the social media platform Facebook. Discontinuation can vary according to social media types, so researchers should also focus on other social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) distinguish between six types of social media: blogs, collaborative projects, social networking sites, content communities, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds. Future studies should examine and compare discontinuation in different social media applications.

Third, many studies present social media as a generic concept to the study participants. Considering several types of social media, as mentioned above, respondents may have a wrong conception of the term 'social media' while responding. Therefore, future studies should provide a clear and well-defined definition of social media applications.

Fourth, existing studies considered a few moderators, such as cognitive dissonance, fear of missing out, and guilt; future studies may include other moderators (Xie and Tsai, 2021). In this regard, using individual and relational drivers and inhibitors (Fig. 5) as moderators will offer further theoretical insights into SMD research.

Fifth, unlike social media adoption studies, the literature on SMD does not examine its consequences. Some existing studies show that drivers of SMD negatively impact wellbeing (e.g., O'Reilly et al., 2018; Kross et al., 2021) and performance (e.g, Yu et al., 2018; Whelan et al., 2020). It is relevant for theory to understand how and if SMD improves the users' physical and mental wellbeing.

Having said that, this review should be used keeping the following limitations in mind. First, we did not include SM or SNS in the search string due to too many false positives, so there is a possibility that some studies using SM or SNS in their titles, abstracts, or keywords were left out. However, this possibility is improbable as we expect authors to use the full abbreviation text when used for the first time. Second, we used two famous databases, Web of Science and Scopus, so studies not listed in these two databases are excluded from the review. Third, the purpose of the study was to identify, categorize and summarize the drivers and inhibitors of SMD, and, therefore, a comparison of drivers/inhibitors between social media platforms is not made. Fourthly, while we introduced both direct and indirect drivers and inhibitors in the result section, we focused only on the direct drivers/inhibitors to reduce the complexity of the holistic picture (Fig. 5). Finally, we did not compare the effect size of drivers and inhibitors of SMD in this study, however, a future *meta*-analysis is encouraged when there are sufficient studies in this area.

7. Conclusion

The study aimed to identify the drivers and inhibitors of social media discontinuation. For this purpose, a systematic literature review was conducted on the studies published between 2005 and 2021. The studies were extracted from two famous databases: Web of Science and Scopus. Through a systematic approach, we identified 32 relevant studies. We found that SMD drivers and inhibitors can be divided into three main categories: individual, relational and platform-specific. Individual drivers and inhibitors can further be divided into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive factors, whereas platform-specific drivers can be divided into content and other characteristics. Most of the SMD drivers are either emotional factors or relational factors. Social media content-related drivers are the third most prominent reason for discontinuation. Only a few studies looked at drivers and inhibitors in the same study, whereas only

two examined inhibitors exclusively. This study provides a synthesis of the literature on drivers and inhibitors of SMD that will provide a solid base for further exploration of the SMD phenomenon.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ali Farooq: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization. **Laila Dahabiyeh:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis. **Christian Maier:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A

Quality assessment of relevant publications

Publication Reference	Q1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	Total Score	Ranking
Adhikari and Panda (2020)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Brubaker et al. (2016)	2	2	1	1	1	7	High
Cao and Sun (2018)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Cao et al. (2020)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Darban et al. (2021)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Mahmud et al. (2020)	2	2	1	1	1	7	High
Dindar and Akbulut (2014)	2	1	1	2	1	7	High
Franks et al. (2018)	2	2	1	2	1	8	High
Hong and Oh (2020)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Kour (2016)[1]	2	0	1	0	1	4	Low
Köse (2020)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Lin et al. (2020)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Liu et al. (2021)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Luqman et al. (2018)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Luqman et al. (2020)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Maier (2020)	2	2	2	2	1	9	High
Maier et al. (2012)	2	2	1	1	2	8	High
Maier et al. (2015)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Masood et al. (2021)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Nawaz et al. (2018)	2	2	2	1	2	9	High
Park and Koh (2018)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Sharabi and Timmermans (2021)	2	2	1	1	2	8	High
Stieger et al. (2013)	2	2	1	0	1	6	High
Turel (2015)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Vaghefi and Qahri-Saremi (2017)	2	2	2	1	2	9	High
Valensia and Nugroho (2019)	2	2	1	2	1	8	High
Wang et al. (2020)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Wu et al. (2019)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Xie and Tsai (2021)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High
Zhang et al. (2015)	2	2	2	1	2	9	High
Zhang et al. (2016)	2	2	2	2	1	9	High
Zhou et al. (2018)	2	2	2	2	2	10	High

[1]Study not included in the review due to low ranking.

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