Austronesian: Journal of Language Science & Literature

P-ISSN: 2963-1548 E-ISSN 2961-9947

Journal Homepage:

https://www.ojs.wahanapublikasi.com/index.php/austronesian



Impoliteness Strategies in User Comments on Clara Dao's Instagram Posts

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ARTICLE INFO

Received:
14 August 2026

Accepted:
28 October 2026

Published:
01 December 2026

Keywords:

Impoliteness, Instagram Comments, Culpeper, Pragmatics, Social Media

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the types and communicative functions of impoliteness in the comment section of Clara Dao's Instagram posts, particularly those attracting public reactions to her decision to undergo breast augmentation surgery. It aims to identify the impoliteness strategies employed by Instagram users and examine their communicative functions. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected from relevant Instagram comments through observation and note-taking. The data were analyzed using Culpeper's (1996, 2011) theory of impoliteness. The findings reveal four strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock politeness. These strategies appear in comments expressing direct disapproval, attacking the target's public image, attempting to silence her, and ridiculing her through ironic expressions. In terms of communicative functions, affective impoliteness is the most evident, primarily expressing negative emotions such as disappointment, frustration, and disapproval. Coercive impoliteness is also identified in comments that attempt to restrict or control the target's expression. However, entertaining impoliteness and the withhold politeness strategy are not identified in the analyzed data. The findings demonstrate that impoliteness in the examined Instagram comments operates through both explicit criticism and indirect ridicule, reflecting how language can be used to express negative evaluations in digital interactions.

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.59011/austronesian.5.3.2026.907-917

1. Introduction

Interaction is an integral part of human life because it enables individuals to exchange information, express opinions, negotiate meanings, and establish social relationships. However, technological developments have transformed communication from predominantly face-to-face encounters into computer-mediated interactions through platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, X, and Instagram. These platforms facilitate communication across geographical and cultural boundaries but also create challenges concerning appropriate language use and interpersonal relationships. High et al. (2023), through a systematic review of 366 studies, highlighted the growing significance of computer-mediated communication and its implications for interpersonal relationships and individual well-being. Similarly, research by the Quality of Face-to-Face and Digitally Mediated Social Interactions research team (2025) found that text-based and social media interactions were generally perceived as lower in quality than face-to-face communication.

Among these platforms, Instagram has become an influential space for digital interaction because it combines visual content with interactive features, including comments, likes, and direct messages. Its comment sections allow users to express opinions, respond to public figures, and evaluate their activities. Wahida and Gunarto (2022) demonstrated that verbal and non-verbal information and content characteristics influence user engagement on Instagram. Similarly, Kusuma et al. (2024) highlighted the contribution of visual content modality to social interaction and social capital within Instagram-based communities. Thorgren et al. (2024) also demonstrated that different Instagram content formats generate varying patterns of user engagement. However, these interactions do not always involve supportive communication; they may also contain offensive language, personal attacks, ridicule, and verbal aggression, creating opportunities for interpersonal conflict and linguistic hostility.

Recent studies have demonstrated the prevalence of impoliteness in digital communication. Subyantoro et al. (2023) examined impoliteness strategies in Indonesian cyberbullying on Instagram, while Situmorang et al. (2024) investigated impoliteness in hate comments on Twitter. Furthermore, Sigalingging et al. (2025) identified gender differences in the use of impoliteness strategies among Indonesian social media users on Instagram. These studies demonstrate that digital platforms provide spaces where language is employed not only to communicate opinions but also to express hostility and negatively evaluate others.

From a pragmatic perspective, such linguistic practices can be examined through the concept of impoliteness. Culpeper (1996) defines impoliteness in relation to communicative strategies that attack an individual's face and generate interpersonal conflict. In his subsequent work, Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence, Culpeper (2011) identifies five strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness. He also distinguishes three communicative functions: affective impoliteness, which expresses negative emotions; coercive impoliteness, which establishes or reinforces power relations; and entertaining impoliteness, which uses offensive expressions to amuse an audience. These categories provide a framework for understanding the linguistic forms and communicative intentions underlying impolite interactions.

The relevance of this framework is supported by recent empirical research. Sylvestrisa and Suraiya (2025) examined impoliteness in Benny Blanco's Instagram comment section and identified four strategies, with affective impoliteness as the dominant function. Culpeper et al. (2025) investigated impoliteness reciprocity in online interactions, highlighting distinctive

interactional patterns involving sarcasm and third-party participation. Beyond their linguistic characteristics, negative online comments may also have psychological consequences. Ai and von Mühlenen (2025), through an experimental study involving 128 adults, demonstrated the potential effects of negative social media comments on anxiety and mood. These findings emphasize the importance of investigating impoliteness as both a pragmatic phenomenon and a form of negative social interaction.

Although previous studies have examined impoliteness across different social media platforms, further investigation is needed into how impoliteness strategies and their communicative functions emerge in controversies involving public figures. Previous research has focused on cyberbullying (Subyantoro et al., 2023), hate comments (Situmorang et al., 2024), gender differences (Sigalingging et al., 2025), and celebrity-related Instagram interactions (Sylvestrisa & Suraiya, 2025). However, the relationship between impoliteness strategies and their functions in controversies concerning personal appearance, bodily decisions, and previously expressed public opinions deserves further examination.

This study addresses this gap by investigating impoliteness in the comment section of Clara Dao's Instagram posts, particularly following her decision to undergo breast augmentation surgery. The decision attracted various public reactions, including criticism, disappointment, ridicule, and offensive remarks. The controversy is particularly relevant because Clara Dao had previously expressed support for body acceptance and the idea that having a flat chest should not cause insecurity. This context provides an opportunity to examine how personal decisions become subjects of public judgment and how negative evaluations are linguistically expressed through direct criticism, personal attacks, attempts to silence others, and sarcasm.

Applying Culpeper's (1996, 2011) framework, this study aims to identify the types of impoliteness strategies employed by Instagram users and analyze their communicative functions in the comment sections of Clara Dao's posts. Accordingly, it addresses two research questions: (1) What types of impoliteness strategies are employed by Instagram users in the comment sections of Clara Dao's posts? and (2) What are the communicative functions of these strategies? This research is expected to contribute to contemporary pragmatic studies, particularly digital pragmatics and impoliteness in computer-mediated communication, while promoting greater awareness of responsible language use in digital environments.

2. Literature Review

Impoliteness is a pragmatic phenomenon involving the use of language to offend, insult, or threaten another individual's social identity. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that individuals have two basic face needs: positive face, referring to the desire to be appreciated and accepted, and negative face, concerning the desire for freedom and independence from imposition. When these expectations are deliberately threatened through offensive expressions, impoliteness may occur. Culpeper (1996, 2011) develops this concept by identifying five strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness. These strategies explain how speakers use language to attack others' faces and create interpersonal conflict.

Culpeper (2011) also identifies three functions of impoliteness: affective, coercive, and entertaining impoliteness. Affective impoliteness expresses negative emotions, such as anger and frustration; coercive impoliteness involves the use of language to control or influence others; and entertaining impoliteness uses offensive expressions to amuse an audience

through ridicule or mockery. These categories demonstrate that impoliteness involves not only linguistic forms but also communicative intentions and social contexts.

Previous empirical studies have applied Culpeper's framework to various digital communication contexts. Subyantoro et al. (2023) examined impoliteness in Indonesian cyberbullying on Instagram, while Situmorang et al. (2024) investigated impoliteness strategies in hate comments on Twitter. Sigalingging et al. (2025) explored gender differences in Instagram users' impoliteness strategies. Similarly, Sylvestrisa and Suraiya (2025) identified four impoliteness strategies in Benny Blanco's Instagram comment section, with affective impoliteness emerging as the dominant function. Culpeper et al. (2025) further demonstrated the distinctive interactional patterns of online impoliteness, particularly involving sarcasm and third-party participation. Widiastuti et al. (2024) also examined insults, mockery, and offensive expressions in comments on Jennie's Instagram account. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that social media provides an important context for examining how impoliteness is linguistically expressed and functionally employed.

Drawing on these theoretical and empirical perspectives, the present study employs Culpeper's (1996, 2011) framework to investigate impoliteness in the comment section of Clara Dao's Instagram posts. Unlike previous studies, this research focuses on public reactions to a controversy concerning personal appearance, body image, and individual decisions. It examines both the types of impoliteness strategies and their communicative functions to provide further insights into how offensive language operates in contemporary digital interactions.

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to investigate the types and communicative functions of impoliteness in the comment section of Clara Dao's Instagram posts. This approach was selected because the research focused on describing and interpreting linguistic expressions within their communicative contexts rather than measuring their occurrence statistically. The analysis was guided by Culpeper's (1996, 2011) theory of impoliteness.

The data source consisted of comments posted by Instagram users in response to Clara Dao's posts, particularly those related to her decision to undergo breast augmentation surgery and other posts that attracted negative public reactions. The data comprised written expressions containing elements of impoliteness, including direct criticism, personal attacks, attempts to silence the account owner, and sarcastic remarks.

Data were collected through observation and note-taking. First, the researchers examined the relevant comment sections of Clara Dao's Instagram posts. Second, comments containing potentially impolite expressions were identified and selected as research data. Third, the selected comments were recorded for further analysis.

The data were analyzed descriptively through several steps. First, the selected comments were examined to identify their linguistic characteristics and communicative contexts. Second, each comment was classified according to Culpeper's (1996, 2011) five impoliteness strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness. Third, the comments were analyzed based on their communicative functions, namely affective, coercive, and entertaining impoliteness. Finally, the findings were interpreted by considering the linguistic expressions and the contexts in which the comments appeared. The results were then presented descriptively using selected examples from the collected data.

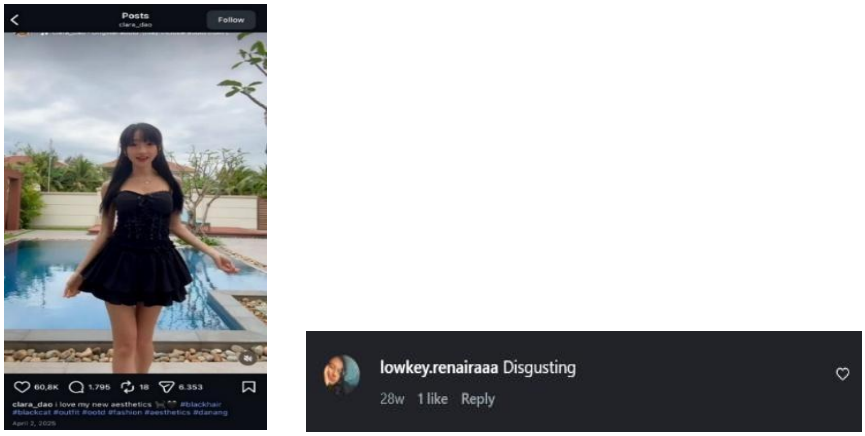
4. Result

Based on Culpeper's (1996, 2011) framework, this research identifies several types and functions of impoliteness strategies found in the comment section of Clara Dao's Instagram posts. The types include bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness. Bald on record impoliteness appears when speakers express disapproval or anger directly without softening their words. Positive impoliteness aims to damage the hearer's positive image, often used to mock, insult, or reject others. Negative impoliteness attacks the hearer's need for freedom and personal space, commonly functioning to criticize or dominate. Sarcasm or mock politeness involves using polite expressions insincerely to ridicule or humiliate, while withhold politeness occurs when politeness is intentionally omitted to show disregard or contempt. Each of these strategies serves different functions in communication, such as expressing disagreement, showing dissatisfaction, asserting power, or provoking emotional responses toward Clara Dao's decision.

a. Bald on Record Impoliteness

Bald on record impoliteness occurs when a speaker delivers a direct and unmitigated face attack. It happens without softening devices or indirectness, aiming to express criticism or anger openly toward the target.

Example:



Data 1. Bald on Record Impoliteness "*disgusting*"

One of the comments that appeared was "disgusting." This comment was categorized as bald on record impoliteness because it was conveyed directly and clearly without any strategy for politeness. Even though it only consisted of one word and did not contain any harsh language, the word still attacked the account owner directly and had the potential to damage her image in the public.

This comment was posted in response to a video uploaded by Clara Dao on April 2, 2025, showing a significant change in her body, namely, breast implants. The upload shocked the public because Clara Dao had previously been known to actively voice her opinion that having a flat chest was normal and should not cause self-doubt. This change in attitude then sparked various negative reactions from social media users.

The use of impoliteness in these comments has an affective function, namely as a means of expressing negative emotions such as dislike and disappointment with the decision made by Clara Dao. Impoliteness is used by speakers to convey personal judgments briefly but strongly, without considering the social impact on the account owner.

b. Positive Impoliteness

Positive impoliteness occurs when a speaker attacks the hearer's positive face, or their need to be liked, respected, and valued. It happens through behaviors such as ignoring, insulting, showing disinterest, or using sarcasm and ridicule. The aim is to make the target feel rejected, excluded, or inferior in a social context.

Example:



Data 2. Positive Impoliteness "we made a wrong person famous"

One of the comments that appeared was "we made a wrong person famous". This comment is not directly related to the video content, but rather refers to the overall judgement of Clara Dao. The speaker simply wants to show other audiences that Clara Dao's followers have made the wrong decision in making Clara Dao a public figure. According to Culpeper's (1996) theoretical framework, this comment can be categorized as a strategy of positive impoliteness, specifically in the form of disassociating from the other. The use of the word "we" indicates group solidarity that indirectly excludes Clara Dao from the group. In this way, the speaker attempts to lower Clara Dao's public image.

Clara Dao actively posts her daily activities on social media. So, it is possible that netizens are also paying attention to what she does. Even though she was wearing respectful clothing, netizens still criticized her because the positive image she had built seemed to turn negative when she decided to change what she had previously emphasized as a form of self-acceptance.

As a result, even posts that only showed her outfit for going to the gym were filled with comments that were irrelevant to the content being uploaded.

Based on the results of the analysis above, it can be concluded that the use of a positive impoliteness strategy in the comment "we made a wrong person famous" is affective impoliteness. This is because it expresses disappointment and rejection, rather than controlling or forcing the target. Therefore, the comment is classified as a positive impoliteness strategy with an affective impoliteness function.

c. Negative Impoliteness

Negative impoliteness happens when someone attacks another person's wish to have freedom and not be controlled. It can appear through rude commands, harsh criticism, or disrespectful comments that make the other person feel small, restricted, or embarrassed.

Example:



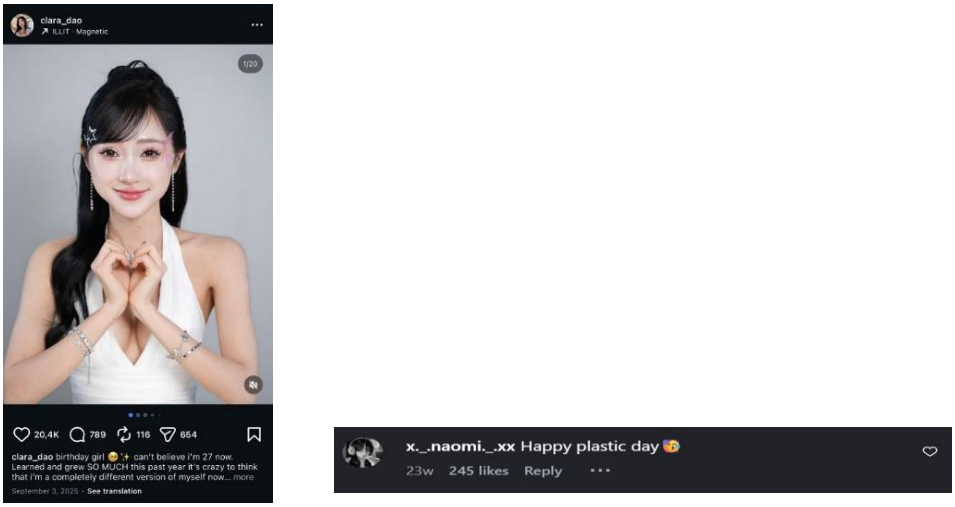
Data 3. Negative Impoliteness "Daily reminder: girl shut up"

One of the comments was, "Daily reminder: girl shut up". This comment can be categorized as negative impoliteness because it directly attacks Clara's negative face, which is the individual's freedom to act and express themselves without pressure or restrictions from others. The phrase "shut up" is an imperative that serves to silence, while the use of "daily reminder" reinforces the impression that the speaker feels they have the authority to continue to control or remind the target.

Many factors contribute to the use of negative impoliteness in comments, as seen in the comments section of Clara Dao's post on January 27, 2026. As a public figure, Clara often shares her daily activities, including her gym routine. This is basically something that public figures do. However, because the public's image and perception of her has changed since her previous surgery, the responses were mostly negative. These comments can be classified as coercive impoliteness. Coercive impoliteness aims to restrict, control, or impose the speaker's will on the target, in this case, Clara Dao. In this context, the speaker attempts to prevent Clara from expressing herself on social media.

d. Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

Sarcasm or mock impoliteness happens when someone uses rude or offensive expressions in a humorous or playful way, often pretending to be polite while actually mocking or criticizing the target. It usually occurs in situations where the speaker wants to express dislike, frustration, or superiority indirectly, making the insult sound less serious but still hurtful.
Example:



Data 4. Sarcasm or mock impoliteness "Happy plastic day"

In addition to direct expressions of disapproval, there are still sarcastic comments such as, “Happy plastic day”. This comment is a form of impoliteness because it implicitly compares Clara to “plastic,” which refers to the surgery she had done. This comment is classified as sarcasm or mock politeness. On the surface, the sentence appears to be a positive birthday greeting, complete with a celebratory emoji. However, the use of the word “plastic” instead of ‘birthday’ indicates irony intended to undermine the sentiment. This strategy attacks Clara’s positive face by damaging her image and associating her with unnatural or artificial qualities.

In a post-dated September 3, 2025, pinned by Clara Dao on her Instagram account, there are several photo slides showing her birthday celebration. There is nothing controversial about the photos as they only capture moments of happiness and celebration. However, there are still sarcastic comments appearing in response to the photo uploaded by Clara Dao, indicating that impoliteness may occur even in neutral or positive contexts.

The comments can be classified as affective impoliteness. They serve as expressions of ridicule and skepticism on the part of the speaker, who still associates Clara's identity with her previous decision to get surgery. Consequently, even though they are presented casually and cheerfully, these comments still constitute an attack on Clara's reputation and identity in the digital public space.

5. Discussion

The findings identify four impoliteness strategies in Clara Dao's Instagram comment section: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock politeness. These strategies demonstrate how users express negative evaluations through direct criticism, social rejection, attempts to silence the target, and sarcastic expressions. This finding is consistent with Culpeper's (1996) conceptualization of impoliteness as communicative behavior that threatens an individual's face and potentially generates interpersonal conflict.

Bald on record impoliteness is illustrated by the comment "disgusting," which directly expresses disapproval of Clara Dao's decision to undergo breast augmentation surgery. The absence of mitigating expressions makes the negative evaluation explicit. This finding corresponds with Culpeper's (1996) explanation of direct face attacks and is comparable to Sylvestrisa and Suraiya's (2025) findings on bald on record impoliteness in Benny Blanco's Instagram comments. The expression primarily functions as affective impoliteness because it communicates dissatisfaction rather than attempting to control the target.

Positive impoliteness appears in the comment "we made a wrong person famous." The expression questions Clara Dao's suitability as a public figure, while the pronoun "we" creates distance between the commenter and the target. This reflects Culpeper's (1996) strategy of disassociating from the other and constitutes an attack on positive face. Matley (2018) also demonstrates how Instagram interactions involve the negotiation of social identities through potentially offensive expressions. In this context, the comment primarily functions as affective impoliteness because it communicates rejection and disappointment toward the target's public image.

Negative impoliteness is demonstrated by the expression "Daily reminder: girl shut up." The imperative "shut up" attempts to silence Clara Dao and restrict her freedom of expression. This constitutes an attack on negative face and can be interpreted as coercive impoliteness because the expression communicates an attempt to control the target's behavior. Culpeper et al. (2025) similarly highlight the distinctive interactional characteristics of impoliteness in

online communication. Although the present study does not examine reciprocal interactions, this example illustrates how an individual comment can function as an attempt to silence a public figure.

Sarcasm or mock politeness occurs in the expression "Happy plastic day," which superficially resembles a birthday greeting but implicitly ridicules Clara Dao's breast augmentation surgery. This finding corresponds with Culpeper's (1996) explanation of mock politeness, in which apparently polite expressions convey offensive meanings. Matley (2018) and Culpeper et al. (2025) provide further perspectives on potentially offensive expressions and sarcasm in digital interactions. In the present study, the comment primarily functions as affective impoliteness because its contextual meaning conveys ridicule and negative evaluation rather than an identifiable intention to entertain.

The findings can also be understood in relation to discussions of physical appearance on social media. Albert et al. (2024), in their analysis of Lizzo's Instagram account, identified stigmatizing expressions concerning body size and physical appearance. Although their study focuses on body positivity and weight stigma rather than breast augmentation, it provides a relevant comparison for understanding how physical appearance becomes a subject of public evaluation on Instagram. Similarly, the comments examined in the present study associate Clara Dao's physical appearance with judgments about her personal decisions and public identity. However, these findings are limited to the specific comments and controversy investigated.

Regarding communicative functions, affective impoliteness is the most prominent function in the analyzed data, while coercive impoliteness occurs in a more limited instance. Most comments express dissatisfaction, rejection, and ridicule, whereas the expression "Daily reminder: girl shut up" attempts to restrict the target's expression. This distinction supports Culpeper's (2011) argument that impoliteness should be examined in relation to both linguistic strategies and communicative purposes. The findings are also comparable to Sylvestrisa and Suraiya (2025), who identified affective impoliteness as the dominant function in their Instagram study.

Meanwhile, withhold politeness and entertaining impoliteness are not identified in the analyzed data. The comments primarily contain recognizable negative expressions rather than deliberate omissions of expected polite behavior. Although sarcasm occurs, its contextual function is predominantly associated with criticism and ridicule rather than entertainment. As Culpeper (2011) explains, the interpretation of impoliteness depends on communicative intentions and contextual circumstances. Therefore, sarcastic expressions should not automatically be classified as entertaining impoliteness.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that impoliteness in Clara Dao's Instagram comment section is expressed through both direct and indirect strategies. The analyzed comments primarily function to communicate negative emotions and evaluations, while some attempt to restrict the target's freedom of expression. These findings provide a context-specific application of Culpeper's framework and illustrate how impoliteness operates in Instagram interactions concerning personal appearance and individual decisions.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the types and communicative functions of impoliteness in the comment section of Clara Dao’s Instagram posts using Culpeper’s (1996, 2011) framework. The findings reveal four impoliteness strategies: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock politeness. These strategies were

used by Instagram users to express criticism, disappointment, rejection, and ridicule in response to Clara Dao's personal decisions and social media activities.

Regarding their communicative functions, the comments primarily demonstrated affective impoliteness, which was used to express negative emotions such as disapproval and frustration. Coercive impoliteness was also identified in comments intended to restrict or silence the target. However, entertaining impoliteness was not identified because the analyzed comments primarily conveyed negative evaluations rather than seeking to entertain an audience. Similarly, the withhold politeness strategy was not found in the analyzed data.

These findings indicate that impoliteness in the examined Instagram comments was expressed through both direct attacks and indirect forms of ridicule. The study illustrates how users employ language to communicate negative evaluations and challenge the public image of an individual in digital interactions. However, these findings are limited to the selected comments on Clara Dao's Instagram posts and should not be generalized to all Instagram interactions.

Funding
This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions
Zalma Adinda Putri Andika: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft.
Anak Agung Istri Manik Warmadewi: Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.
I Wayan Ana: Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.

Statement of the Use of AI
Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist with grammar checking, translation, and proofreading. The authors take full responsibility for the research content, data analysis, interpretation, and final manuscript.

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