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Not Just for Meat: Understanding Farmers' *Habitus* in Promoting Dairy Goat Raising in Central Luzon, Philippines

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Abstract

This study is a part of a research project that introduced dairy goat community modules in selected villages of Central Luzon. Through a combination of Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving 169 goat farmers, the research explores their embodied dispositions (*habitus*) toward goat raising—including existing practices on goat farming, cultural significance of raising goats, and personal motivation for raising goats. These insights served as a guide in designing the training program on dairy goat farming, which was delivered to them through the conduct of capacity building activities. Following the completion of the project, five farmers ventured into dairy goat farming, with three of them adopting the goat milk processing technology. Changes to their existing practices, especially in processing goat milk, resulted in an increase in household income by 10-15%. Knowing the farmers' *habitus* helps understand farmers' behaviors in adopting technologies such as this. Bridging the divergent path between the academe and the farmer realities through contextual understanding was key to achieving the project's objectives. Hence, this study underscores the importance of recognizing and integrating farmers' habitus when developing and promoting new technologies in goat farming.

Introduction

Goats have long played a significant role in human culture as one of the world's earliest domesticated animals (Escareño *et al.*, 2012). This animal is considered a poor man's cow throughout the globe (Manalili *et al.*, 2020), as it provides both meat and milk that are comparable to those of cattle. In the Philippines, goat raising has long been widely practiced in rural areas due to its relatively low investment requirements and minimal opportunity costs compared to other livestock ventures. Traditionally, goat meat or chevon was reserved for special events such as birthdays, weddings, and fiestas. However, the growing popularity of goat meat and recipes has led to an increased demand in wet markets, grocery shops, and supermarkets (PCAARRD, 2013). Several restaurants include goat dishes in their regular menus, further contributing to the growing demand for chevon.

Given the goat's cultural and societal significance, the Small Ruminant Center (SRC) at Central Luzon State University (CLSU) was established to lead research and development on small ruminants focusing on improving the quality of Philippine goats and sheep. The SRC has shared numerous innovations with goat raisers to help them realize the potential of goat production. In addition to upgrading goat stock and increasing chevon output, the Center has spearheaded research on dairy goats to promote goat milk as a viable product. Although the potential of dairy goat raising to improve farm household income has been recognized in the literature (Astuti & Sudarman, 2012; Morales *et al.*, 2019; Paskaš *et al.*, 2020; Zulkifli *et al.*, 2023), its introduction as a source of additional income and nutrition within Philippine context offers unique challenges. Dairy goat farming in the Philippines is not widely practiced and remains a marginal activity compared to meat-based goat production. This limited adoption is due in part to the unfamiliarity with goat milk in Filipino diets and the cultural framing of goats primarily as a source

of meat (Manalili *et al*., 2020). Supporting this, national statistics show that 98.62% of goats in the Philippines are raised in backyard systems, primarily for meat (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017). Dairy-purpose milking does remain few and are largely concentrated in institutional or multiplier farms (Manalili *et al.*, 2020). Hesitancy toward goat milk consumption is often associated with sensory perceptions, with common concerns about the unpleasant odor and taste of goat milk (Icoutchika *et al*., 2022; Queiroga *et al*., 2013). These observations, supported by both literature and baseline data from our community partners, underscore the need to understand the underlying dispositions (*habitus*) of target beneficiaries in achieving the development objectives. Awareness of farmers' habitus enables researchers to account for the social and cultural factors that influence their participation in project activities.

This case study examines the role of farmers' *habitus* in implementing development initiatives, particularly the promotion of dairy goat raising and goat milk production, in selected communities in Central Luzon, Philippines. This research aims to characterize goat farmers, document their existing practices, identify key production constraints, and understand their perceptions of dairy goat production. These insights into farmers' *habitus* are then used to enhance the design of a culturally and contextually responsive capacity building activities on dairy goat farming. Finally, the study assesses modifications in farmers' *habitus* as one of the factors that may trigger changes in goat farming practices.

Goat Raising and *Habitus*

The introduction of dairy goats and their products challenges the popular notion that goats are just good for meat. Given the strong cultural appreciation of chevon in Filipino culinary traditions, particularly in festivities, the initiative to popularize goat milk, led by the Small Ruminant Center (SRC) and other advocates, may also gain favorable acceptance. This appeals to the *habitus* (disposition) of the Filipino goat raisers. Bourdieu (1977) defined *habitus* as a system of durable, transposable, and structured dispositions that guide individual action. *Habitus* is created through the embodiment and internalization of practices that the individual learned from their early experiences. Bourdieu (1984) shares how *habitus* as an embodied disposition can be understood by giving taste as an example, explaining that our preferences are shaped by cultural conditioning. Individuals' food preferences, for instance, may be based on whether they are economical or luxurious, appealing or unappealing, allowed or prohibited, or associated with ordinary days versus special occasions. In the context of goat raising, *habitus* is manifested in the cultural practices, such as using goats as part of a dowry. Giving dowry as a cultural practice and the preference for native goats over crosses or exotic breeds (Byaruhanga *et al*., 2015) also demonstrates *habitus*. Dispositions are evident in the preferential attitude towards selecting desirable goat breeds based on the size and meatiness (Orden *et al.*, 2005), reflecting the common motivation for raising goats as a source of income. Another example is the consumption of goat milk whereby some cultures are not used to consuming it because it was not a part of their food habit (Icoutchika *et al.*, 2022). Non-consumption of goat milk has also been linked to its distinctive sensory qualities, such as a stronger flavor compared to cow milk (Queiroga *et al*., 2013) and an often unpleasant odor and taste (Icoutchika *et al*., 2022; Queiroga *et al.*, 2013). Preference and consumption of chevon is influenced by *habitus*, for they are shaped by cultural, traditional, and religious backgrounds, as well as the socioeconomic status of both the individual and their community (Slijepcevic & Cosovic-Medic, 2011). Understanding *habitus* sheds light on the reasons why an individual continues their family's farming practices or moves away from traditional schema (Glover, 2008).

Though embedded and durable, Bourdieu (2000) explains that *habitus* changes in response to new experiences. This modifying feature of *habitus* creates confusion about its durability, but Bourdieu (2005) explains that the continued and constant changes in *habitus* are caused by rapid change in society. Even when there is change, the modifications are grounded within certain bounds of continuity of the original structure of *habitus.* This original structure is the *primary habitus*, which is "the basis for the subsequent formation of any other *habitus*" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). *Primary habitus* is earned and acquired from the home setting through familial immersion. Further socialization like schooling and other interactions --in institutions permits the formation of *secondary habitus*.

The *secondary habitus* is grafted onto the existing *primary habitus*, resulting in the formation of the specific disposition of the agent. For instance, in goat raising, the acquiescence of new practices and knowledge depends on the *habitus* of the raiser. Traditionalist goat raisers may reject new practices that are not congruent with their traditional stance (Glover, 2008). Another example where *secondary habitus* in goat raising is formed is the initiative to integrate strategies on genetic and breeding strategies for dairy goat production that align with traditional farming practices (Astuti & Sudarman, 2012). Here, the practice of goat raising (*primary habitus*) is improved through learning new breeding techniques, which resulted in the raising of crossbred or hybrid goats (*secondary habitus*).

The significance of considering habitus in agricultural development is well-documented in the literature, highlighting its role in understanding farmers'

response to interventions (Bellet, 2018; Butler & Holloway, 2016; Cuadra & Björklund, 2007; Glover, 2008). However, existing research on this remains limited, and gaps persist. The result of this study hopes to fill those gaps by offering insights into how habitus influences the uptake of dairy goat farming as a strategy for increasing farm household income.

Materials and Methods

Study Area and Participants

This study focused on smallholder goat farmers in the leading goat-producing provinces in Central Luzon, namely, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Bataan, and Pampanga. Smallholders are defined as those managing herds within backyard or semi-intensive production systems. Lists of goat farmers were acquired from the Provincial Veterinary Office (PVO) and Local Government Units (LGUs) within these provinces. Using a non-probability sampling technique (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018) 169 participants were selected based on specific criteria: ownership of 3 to 10 does, openness to adopting new practices, and willingness to engage with the project.

The selected farmers were interviewed by project staff using a structured questionnaire to gather data on farmers' socio-demographic profiles, farm-specific characteristics, and existing goat raising practices. To ensure clarity and consistency, questions were presented in a consistent, predefined order, and delivered in both English and local dialects to enhance clarity for all respondents. Insights from this survey were instrumental in identifying common practices and challenges in goat rearing, alongside assessing the goat raisers' knowledge and perceptions of dairy goat production. Additionally, the baseline data informed the selection of the farmer-partner for the techno-demo component of the dairy goat project.

Data Collection Procedure

Following the initial interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted at identified focal sites across various towns in Nueva Ecija province, including San Jose City, Rizal, Science City of Muñoz, Talavera, Gabaldon, Laur, Palayan, General Tinio, Carranglan, Pantabangan, Llanera, Guimba, Sto. Domingo, Bongabon, and Lupao. Additional FGDs were held in San Fernando and Magalang in Pampanga province, as well as in Balanga, Orion, Abucay, and Pilar in Bataan province. A total of 169 goat raisers participated in these sessions, which were organised across four FGDs, with each discussion group composed of approximately 30-42 participants. This method served as a form of triangulation, confirming and validating participant responses from the interviews. Each FGD session lasted between 1 to 1.5 hours. Key discussion points included problems encountered by goat farmers requiring technological intervention, their notions and perceptions about goat milk, and their willingness to engage in dairy goat farming. Data collected were encoded using MS Excel (2013). Descriptive analysis was applied to the baseline study data, while thematic analysis was used for the FGD data.

To support the primary goal of introducing dairy goat farming, a three-day training program on dairy goat production and milk processing was conducted, introducing various goat technologies and practices. Following this training, a selection process for farmer-partners for a dairy goat raising techno-demo was undertaken. The project team's assessment served as the basis for the final vetting of these partners. Key selection parameters included the establishment of goat housing and a forage pasture area of not less than 5,000 m^2, availability of manpower, and an area for milk processing. From the initial 169 training participants, five farmers were chosen as techno-demo partners for dairy goats. However, only three of these farmer-partners adopted the goat milk processing technology.

Results and Discussion

Unpacking Farmers' Habitus: Farmer Characteristics and Goat Farming Practices

Table 1. Goat Raising Engagement and Management Practices

Goat Raising Engagement	Frequency (n=169)	Percentage (%)
Length of Years Engaged in Goat Raising		
No Reply	12	7.10
1-10 years	106	62.70
11-20 years	32	18.90
21-30 years	11	6.50
31-40 years	6	3.60
41-50 years	1	0.60
61-70 years	1	0.60
Reasons for Engaging in Goat Raising		
Source of income	119	70.40
Good source of meat	9	5.30
Hobby	5	3.00
Utilization of land	3	1.80
Caring for others (Paiwi)	3	1.80
Easy to manage	3	1.80
Easy to market	1	0.60
Other reason	17	10.06
Engagement in Dairy Goat Production		
Yes	10	5.90
No	159	94.10
Goat Production System		
Freegrazing	40	23.70
Partial confinement	71	42.00
Pure confinement	4	2.30
Tethering	22	13.00
Others	22	13.00
Goat Breeding		
Controlled Breeding	29	17.10
Natural Mating for Goats	138	81.60
AI for Goats	6	3.60

Research participants reported varying levels of experience in goat raising, ranging from several decades—such as one individual with seventy years and another with nearly fifty—to more recent involvement, with the majority (62.7%) having raised goats for approximately ten years (Table 1). Income generation was cited as the primary motivation for raising goats, emphasizing that goats are among the easiest livestock to sell. This preference reflects a key disposition—or habitus—among farmers, underscoring the importance of goat raising as a source of livelihood.

Nearly all participants (97%) shared that they do not have to go to other places to sell goats, as buyers usually come directly to their farms. There are now numerous traders who roam around farm villages in search of goats to purchase, supplying meat to eateries (*carinderias)* that serve goat dishes. Besides the traders, goats are in demand for special occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, and festivities. Other reasons for raising goats include meat production, ease in management, utilization of idle land, and caring for others (iwihan). In terms of management practices, most participants (42%) practiced partial confinement, while only 2.3% employed a full confinement system. The majority (72.2%) of the participants fed their goats with native grasses. In terms of breeding, 4 out of 5 goat raisers (81.6%) practiced natural mating, while 17.1% had adopted controlled breeding. Only 3.6% of goat raisers had tried artificial insemination (AI). The highest number of goat inventory was 120 heads, managed by a farmer from Pampanga. Body size of goats was the primary consideration in stock selection, as farmers believed that larger goats command higher market value. Having a bigger breeder is another reason for preferring bigger sizes of goats. They relied on personal and community knowledge to identify breeders with desirable traits, such as remarkable body size. However, due to the high cost of large breeder stock, farmers often resorted to purchasing goats with less desirable growth traits. In terms of feeding management, farmers primarily relied on their own pastures and nearby communal grazing lands. Most of them do not feed their goats with commercial feeds for supplemental feeding due to cost considerations.

a. Cultural Norms and Consumption Barriers

The majority of the respondents (69.05%) were aware that goat milk can be consumed similarly to carabao's milk, with only a few being familiar with its taste. One common reason cited was the lack of familiarity with goat milk, as it is not typically part of household diets. Some participants expressed hesitation due to its perceived strong smell and taste, though these impressions were primarily based on second-hand notions rather than direct experience. These responses may reflect attitudes observed among other potential consumers in comparable rural communities. Their reluctance to consume goat milk appears to originate from cultural attitudes and unfamiliarity, rather than limited accessibility, underscoring critical considerations for stakeholders seeking to scale dairy goat initiatives—from development agencies and extension workers to agribusiness investors and policy planners.

Given that these apprehensions were largely based on perception rather than experience, they represent a soft barrier, one that can be addressed through awareness-building, product exposure, and culturally sensitive capacitation efforts embedded in the project's design. Addressing these perceptual barriers is therefore central to making dairy goat products both socially acceptable and economically viable, as previous studies have highlighted the role of cultural attitudes, unfamiliarity, and sensory bias in limiting consumer acceptance (Queiroga *et al.*, 2013; Icoutchika *et al.*, 2022).

b. Sensory and Attitudinal Insights

Table 2. Reported Sensory and Perceptual Dispositions of Farmers Toward Goat Milk Based on FGDs

Sensory and Perceptual Domain	Positive Disposition	Negative Disposition
Taste	Taste good or delicious Taste like cow milk Taste like carabao milk No off-taste or unpleasant aftertaste	Has a strong or distinct "goaty" flavor Taste like carabao's milk but with a goaty aftertaste
Smell	No strong or unpleasant odor	Smell "like goat" (amoy maanggo) Pungent / strong odor (masangsang) Spoiled smell (panis na amoy)
Perception	Perceived as nutritious Perceived as expensive / premium Described as having a creamier texture More exquisite than cow or carabao milk Considered an alternative to mother's milk	Not accustomed to drinking goat milk Expressed reluctance or disinterest in trying goat milk Hesitant about its safety for human consumption Perceived as fishy (malansa) Considered too thin or watery Described as bland or lacking flavour

To further understand how sensory and attitudinal perceptions shaped receptivity, participants' reported experiences during FGDs were grouped and summarised in Table 2. Though goat-raising is embedded in the culture of many rural Filipino communities, consumption of goat milk is not part of the traditional Filipino diet. This aligns with global findings that cultural norms and non-habitual consumption often explain resistance to goat milk in various populations (Icoutchika *et al.*, 2022; Zulkifli *et al.*,

2023). According to Bourdieu (1984), taste and preference are not merely individual choices but are shaped by one's social position and structure. Several studies also associate goat raising with resource-poor, landless populations (Astuti & Sudarman, 2012; Byaruhanga *et al*., 2015; Escareño *et al*., 2012;), suggesting that decisions around production and consumption are influenced by access to resources.

c. Constraints in Production and Milk Availability

Most of the goat farmers in the Philippines raise the native goat breed because these are the only affordable and locally available options. While native goats can produce milk, the volume is typically sufficient only for their offspring. Farmers often avoid consuming or marketing the milk to ensure the young goats receive adequate nutrition. This practical limitation reinforces the non-consumption of goat milk and highlights a critical barrier to scaling dairy operations. Included in the reasons why participants refrain from engaging in dairy goat production is their lack of knowledge regarding the industry. The introduction of a dairy breed also requires farmers to enhance their knowledge in goat husbandry. Moreover, many farmers lack the capital and resources to acquire high-yielding stock despite their interest in dairy goat farming.

Designing culturally and contextually responsive capacity-building activities on dairy goat farming

The project's capacity-building activities were designed with the recognition that successful adoption of dairy goat technologies depends on compatibility with farmers' *habitus*. Baseline findings showed that most participants had been raised goats for at least 10 years, with some for over five decades. Their practices were marked by partial confinement (42%), reliance on native grasses for feed (72.2%), and natural mating (81.6%), with limited exposure to controlled breeding and artificial insemination—patterns shaped by both resource realities and established routines. Farmers largely relied on traditional goat-raising methods with limited husbandry practices. Capacity-building activities were thus designed to address these gaps through training on record-keeping, feeding alternatives, forage establishment, and breeding management.

The farmers' lived realities and limited resources were main considerations in the discussions on goat housing design. Emphasis was placed on using readily available materials, such as bamboo, as the primary construction material, ensuring that housing improvements remained practical, affordable, and aligned with local conditions. In creating the training design, recurring challenges at the farm were recognized. Farmers often face feed shortages and goat weight loss during the dry season, as well as higher mortality in the rainy months. The capacity-building activities addressed these issues by introducing forage planting, such as legumes near goat houses, and by updating farmers' knowledge on goat health and internal parasite control.

Building on familiar husbandry skills, milking and hygienic milk handling were introduced as natural extensions of routine goat care. As part of the strategy to address preconceived negative notions, and recognising the "to see is to believe" mindset, locally expressed as ***diak mamate diak makita***, farmers were intentionally engaged in hands-on milk collection and tasting activities. By experiencing the process firsthand and seeing the hygienic collection and tasting the fresh product, farmers were convinced that goat milk can be creamy, pleasant, and free from the off-flavours they had long assumed. Linking to cultural and market norms, dairy farming was framed as a complementary enterprise rather than a competing one. Goats were primarily raised for meat and often sold directly to traders for special occasions. This aligns well with farmers' practice of selling male offspring for slaughter to maintain cash flow while retaining females that can give birth and help expand the size of the herd over time. Milk production was presented as an additional source of income during periods when goats were not in demand for festivities.

Facilitating Change in Goat Farming Practices: Aligning Interventions With Farmer Realities

Table 3. Technologies Adopted by the Three Farmer-Partners

Technology Options	Farmer-Partner 1	Farmer-Partner 2	Farmer-Partner 3
1. Breeding Management			
a. Controlled breeding	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Feeding Management			
a. Stall Feeding	Yes	Yes	Yes
b. Intensified use of tree legume species	Yes	Yes	Yes
c. Urea-molasses mineral block	No	No	No
d. Feeding of Pelletized Forage-based Ration	No	No	No
3. Animal Health Management			
a. Strategic Worm Control	Yes	Yes	Yes
b. Rapid rotational grazing	No	No	No
c. Improved housing	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Milking and Milk Processing			
a. Proper Milking Practices	Yes	Yes	Yes
b. Proper Pasteurization of Milk	Yes	Yes	Yes

To engage in dairy goat production and modify their practice, the project provided additional capital (e., knowledge, dairy goats stock, materials). In Bourdieu's theory of practice, the change of practice results from the combination of habitus and capital (habitus + capital= practice). The habitus (disposition) of the farmers on raising goats such as their patterns of thought, behavior, and how they value this animal is embedded within their practices. Thus, the need to introduce additional capital was recognized, as farmers' access to capital directly influenced their goat-raising practices and consumption patterns. In the project, the injection of capital was implemented by giving five conditioned pregnant does to the farmer-partner with the condition that they would return 5 doelings and 1 buck—each over six months of age with a minimum weight of 25 kg within a 2-year period. Another intervention aimed to enhance the cultural capital of the farmer-partner by teaching them on how to establish and maintain forage production area, ensuring year-round availability of quality feed. The farmer-partners were also given training on proper milk collection procedures and milk quality control tests and lectures on business opportunities and market potential of dairy goat operations. After the technology interventions in smallhold dairy goat farms owned by three participating farmers, they adopted the management practices such as intensified proper feeding and nutrition strategies and breeding techniques.

These adoptions led to improved performance among does and higher kidding rates. The intervention also resulted in an increased average daily milk yield from upgraded goats. Thus, the capital assistance to the farmer-partner facilitated a modification of their *habitus*, enabling them to adopt new techniques and technologies in raising, managing, and marketing of dairy goat products. Being ingrained deeply, the farmer-partner's habitus didn't change but evolved and is still hinged in their original disposition. If the participating goat raisers continue to venture into dairy goats and actively promote the consumption of goat milk, they could help in enticing more Filipinos to avail and consume goat milk.

Moreover, the project aimed to introduce and promote dairy goat farming as a strategy to improve farm household income by 10–15% or approximately PhP38,276.69 to PhP57,415.03, based on the average annual income of participants (PhP382,766.90). Following the adoption of the goat milk processing technology, additional net incomes of three farmer-partners amounted to PhP47,118.25, PhP25,957.17, and PhP24,934.84, respectively. These figures illustrated the potential of dairy goat farming to contribute a meaningful supplement to household earnings. Despite the durable nature of habitus, changes in farmers' approaches to dairy goat technology were rooted in their existing practices. The influx of new capital, through knowledge and technology in dairy goat raising, offered crucial avenues for habitus modification. This adaptation was essentially an appeal to their current habitus, showcasing the advantages of engaging in dairy goat ventures, thereby encouraging goat milk production and consumption. If sustained as routine, these new practices could lead to the development of a secondary habitus, inherently linked to their original goat-raising habitus, consistent with Bourdieu's views on habitus modification through new experiences (Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Conclusion

This paper affirms the critical consideration of understanding *habitus* in promoting dairy goats as an agricultural innovation aimed at increasing farm household income. Despite existing efforts by individuals and organizations, popularizing dairy goat raising and milk consumption still requires considerable work. As demonstrated in this project, engaging intended participants requires deep appreciation of their *habitus*—the ingrained dispositions, practices, and perceptions shaped by their social and cultural contexts.

Appealing to existing *habitus* by introducing innovations that align with current practices has proven effective. For instance, goat raisers have begun utilizing Artificial Insemination (AI) for breeding and are increasingly involved in raising crossbred and hybrid goats. These shifts reflect a meaningful integration of new techniques into familiar frameworks. This study underscores the importance of understanding the fundamental practices and perspectives ("groundings") of goat raisers. This insight was instrumental in developing an effective approach to capture participant interest and foster their involvement. Based on the project's implementation, it was observed that tailoring interventions to farmers' existing dispositions and lived experiences enhanced receptivity and engagement.

Crucially, understanding farmers' *habitus* played a central role in promoting dairy goat farming as a viable livelihood strategy, contributing to increased farm household income. While the results are context-specific, these insights may offer useful considerations for other rural settings where cultural norms influence the uptake of agricultural innovations. Further large-scale research is needed to substantiate these findings, potentially leading to a determination of the economic impact of dairy goat production as an additional income source and informing future policy development. Future initiatives may benefit from integrating culturally informed strategies that address both production and perception-based constraints, paving the way for more inclusive and sustainable dairy value chains.

Ethical Statement

All respondents of the study were given pertinent information about the study to make an "informed" decision about participating in the survey. An informed consent to participate in the study was attached to the survey questionnaire. Participation in the research was voluntary, and respondents had the right to refuse involvement at any research stage.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the conduct and publication of this research. All procedures followed were in accordance with institutional and ethical standards, and there were no financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the outcomes of this study.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized Google's AI assistant for grammar correction and clarity improvement. Following the use of this tool/service, the author(s) conducted a review and made necessary modifications, assuming full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions

JMDC: Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft; **EAO:** Methodology; **MEMO:** Methodology; **LLMDR:** Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft; **NADR:** Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing - Review and Editing; **JJDGM:** Writing - Original Draft

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