

PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN INDONESIAN TITLES OF CHINESE VERTICAL MICRODRAMAS ON YOUTUBE

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ABSTRACT

Video titles function as the first point of contact between short-video producers and prospective viewers, yet the titles of Chinese vertical microdramas (duanju) circulating in Indonesian on YouTube remain unexamined as a site of persuasive language. This study analyzes how persuasive strategies are linguistically realized in 200 Indonesian-language duanju titles. Titles were coded using a newly proposed five-level Lexical Trigger–Persuasion Framework (LTPF) — lexical triggers, linguistic devices, persuasive strategies, persuasion patterns, and Viewer Expectation (the storyline a title textually projects for a prospective viewer, not an expectation empirically measured from actual audiences) — grounded in Persuasive Communication theory, Advertising Language theory, Curiosity Gap theory, and narrative (possible-worlds) theory, with each category operationalized through an explicit, replicable codebook. Beyond an expected romance-dominant framing (85.0% of titles), Positive-Emotion Valence (46.5%) and Curiosity Gap (46.0%) emerge as the two dominant persuasive strategies, which rarely co-occur within the same title (22.6–22.8% overlap), indicating duanju titles are constructed along two largely separate persuasive routes — one emotion-led, one curiosity-led — rather than one blended appeal. Social Status triggers (e.g., CEO) co-occur with Relational triggers in 55.6% of Status-marked titles but with Economic triggers in only 1.6%, indicating status-based fantasy operates largely independently of the rags-to-riches reversal assumed in prior genre commentary; a further salient pattern in this corpus is the presence of Rebirth/Second Chance narratives (9.5%), a device not typically discussed in prior clickbait and headline scholarship. This study contributes a transferable, auditable coding framework grounded in observable linguistic forms, demonstrating analytical value over conventional single-level persuasion coding for short-form digital titles beyond the Chinese microdrama genre.

Keywords: persuasive strategies; clickbait linguistics; Chinese microdrama titles; lexical trigger framework; Viewer Expectation

Introduction

Digital platforms increasingly function as attention economies, where a single line of text — a title, a headline, a caption — determines whether content is watched. Persuasion research documents how such text is engineered to capture attention and shape audience response (Perloff, 2019), yet remains concentrated on two genres: news headlines and generic social media posts. Short-form serialized entertainment, despite competing just as fiercely for attention, remains comparatively underexamined as a site of persuasive language.

This inquiry is further motivated by the platform itself: recommendation algorithms amplify content maximizing immediate engagement (clicks, watch-time), pressuring titles toward condensed, emotionally charged forms (Baumann et al., 2026; Milli et al., 2025). Indonesian Generation Z audiences, who report high daily social media use (Purboningsih et al., 2023), are particularly exposed to this environment, and digital marketing scholarship identifies short-form titling as an under-theorized site of persuasive practice (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Chinese vertical microdramas, locally termed *duanju*, exemplify this underexamined genre. Within a few years, the format has grown from a niche mobile-video product into a multi-billion-yuan industry characterized by ultra-short episodes, algorithmic distribution, and cliffhanger-driven monetization (Chen, 2025; G. Li, 2025). As the industry has expanded beyond China, platforms and multi-channel networks have actively localized *duanju* content for Southeast Asian audiences, including Indonesia, through dubbing and subtitling (Li et al., 2026; Meng, 2026). Qualitative work on Indonesian viewers confirms *duanju* is now part of urban Indonesians' media diet, valued for escapism and aspirational fantasy during fragmented daily routines (Rizky & Irfan, 2026).

For this genre, the video title carries disproportionate persuasive weight: it is often the sole point of contact between a producer and a prospective viewer scrolling a YouTube feed, and must do its persuasive work in a handful of words while competing against thousands of similarly formatted alternatives for a single click (Kemmm, 2022; Samuel et al., 2025). However, clickbait research, despite growing substantially, remains concentrated on news headlines (Blom & Hansen, 2015; Limbi et al., 2024; Mormol, 2019; Scott, 2021) and, more recently, generic social media content (Lischka & Garz, 2023; Milli et al., 2025). Studies specifically examining YouTube video titles are rarer still (Kemmm, 2022), and for the Indonesian context tend to be computational rather than linguistic, focused on automatic detection rather than how persuasive meaning is constructed (Samuel et al., 2025).

A further gap concerns genre. Clickbait research typically treats headlines as vehicles for factual information deliberately withheld (Scott, 2021). *Duanju* titles, by contrast, do not withhold facts so much as construct an anticipated narrative — projecting an expected story arc (revenge, forbidden romance, a rags-to-riches reversal) before a single frame is watched. This function is not captured by clickbait or advertising-language frameworks alone and calls for integrating narrative theory (Ryan, 1992) alongside persuasion theory (Perloff, 2019), advertising-language theory (Leech, 1966), and Curiosity Gap theory (Loewenstein, 1994).

Building on the gaps identified above, the literature reviewed for this study documents *duanju*'s industrial growth and cross-border circulation and Indonesian audiences' engagement with the genre, but, within the scope of that literature, does not appear to have analyzed how persuasive strategies are linguistically realized in the titles of Indonesian-language Chinese vertical microdramas on YouTube — a gap consistent with, though not proven by, the genre's rapid regional growth (Fu & Wang, 2025; Sarkar & Yang, 2025; Tang & Wang, 2025) and its demonstrated cultural resonance with Indonesian audiences (Rizky & Irfan, 2026). This study

proceeds from the premise that such titles systematically mobilize persuasive linguistic resources rather than assembling words at random. Its contribution should be understood at two distinct levels: as an object of study, it is, to the best of the reviewed literature, the first linguistic analysis of Indonesian-language duanju titles as a site of persuasive language; as an analytical contribution, it proposes a coding framework whose novelty lies not in the object it is first applied to but in operationalizing persuasion, linguistic form, and narrative expectation as one traceable, auditable pipeline rather than three separately theorized constructs. It addresses this gap by analyzing a corpus of 200 Indonesian-language duanju titles collected from YouTube. Three research questions guide the analysis, formulated directly from the gaps established above: (1) How are persuasive strategies linguistically realized in the titles of Indonesian-language Chinese microdramas on YouTube? (2) Which linguistic devices are used to construct persuasive appeal in these titles? (3) How do combinations of persuasive strategies shape the narrative expectations projected to prospective viewers regarding the storyline? Each RQ is answered directly through a corresponding level of the coding pipeline and reported in the Discussion: RQ1 through the Persuasive Strategy findings (Table 6), RQ2 through the Linguistic Device findings (Table 5), and RQ3 through the Persuasion Pattern and Viewer Expectation findings (Tables 8–9). In addressing these questions, this study proposes the Lexical Trigger–Persuasion Framework (LTPF), a five-level coding framework based on observable linguistic forms, intended to be transferable to other short-form digital titles, including web-novel titles, news clickbait, and short-video captions on other platforms.

Theoretical Framework

Persuasive Communication and Advertising Language

The LTPF integrates four complementary theoretical traditions, each anchoring one analytical level. Perloff's (2019) theory of Persuasive Communication defines persuasion as a symbolic process aimed at influencing attention, attitude, and behavior — here, the viewer's click-through decision, understood here as the persuasive target a title's text is designed to invite, not a behavior measured in this study; it anchors Level 2 (Persuasive Strategy), where linguistic patterns are interpreted as strategies shaping attention and attitude. Leech's (1966) account of advertising language identifies brevity, salience, emotional charge, and memorability as defining features of persuasive commercial language; because duanju titles function much like advertising slogans, this anchors Level 1 (Linguistic Device), the inventory of twelve form-based devices (hyperbole, contrast, ellipsis, rhetorical questions) realizing persuasion at the level of grammar and lexis.

Curiosity Gap and Narrative Expectation

Loewenstein's (1994) information-gap theory holds that curiosity arises when attention is drawn to a gap between what one knows and wants to know, and the resulting deprivation motivates information-seeking; extended by subsequent clickbait research (Golman & Loewenstein, 2018; Scott, 2021), this underlies Curiosity Gap and Reversal/Shock at Level 2 and motivates treating ellipsis and withheld revelation as core triggers. Finally, Ryan's (1992) possible-worlds theory of

narrative holds that a text projects alternative possible worlds — of knowledge, wish, and obligation — against which a reader interprets events; applied to titles, this anchors Level 3 (Viewer Expectation — operationalized here as the narrative expectation a title textually projects for a prospective viewer, not an expectation empirically measured from an actual audience): a title such as “Istri Presiden Direktur Mendapatkan Cinta Tanpa Batas” projects a specific storyline (romance culminating in requited love) before viewing begins.

Cross-Theoretical Foundations: Lexical Trigger and Persuasion Pattern

Two further levels of the LTPF are cross-theoretical rather than anchored in a single tradition and are made explicit here. Level 0 (Lexical Trigger), the framework's foundational layer, functions as a cross-theoretical operational layer rather than a claim that Perloff (2019), Leech (1966), Loewenstein (1994), and Ryan (1992) each explicitly endorse a shared premise: it grounds the higher-level categories drawn from these four traditions in specific, observable lexical items rather than in impressionistic judgments, consistent with the principle in lexical semantics that meaning categories should be grounded in observable co-occurring lexical items rather than assigned impressionistically (Boran, 2018; see Appendix A). Level 2b (Persuasion Pattern) is likewise cross-theoretical: it captures the co-occurrence of two or more Level 0 triggers within a single title, operationalizing Perloff's (2019) observation that persuasive messages typically combine multiple appeals simultaneously. Ryan's (1992) claim that a narrative world is projected cumulatively rather than through any single lexical cue.

The Integrated LTPF Model

The LTPF integrates these four theories into a single analytical pipeline moving from the most concrete, directly observable unit of language (the lexical trigger) to the most interpretive, audience-oriented outcome (Viewer Expectation), consistent with the general principle in lexical semantics that meaning categories should be grounded in observable co-occurring lexical items rather than assigned impressionistically (Boran, 2018). This layered design also addresses a recurring methodological criticism of persuasion research: categories such as "wish fulfillment" or "emotional appeal," applied without an explicit lexical anchor, are difficult for an independent coder to reproduce and are vulnerable to the charge of post hoc labeling. By requiring every higher-level category to be traceable to specific lexical triggers defined in an explicit codebook, the LTPF makes each classification decision auditable, and, in principle, falsifiable by a second coder working from the same codebook. Figure 1 presents the five-level model.

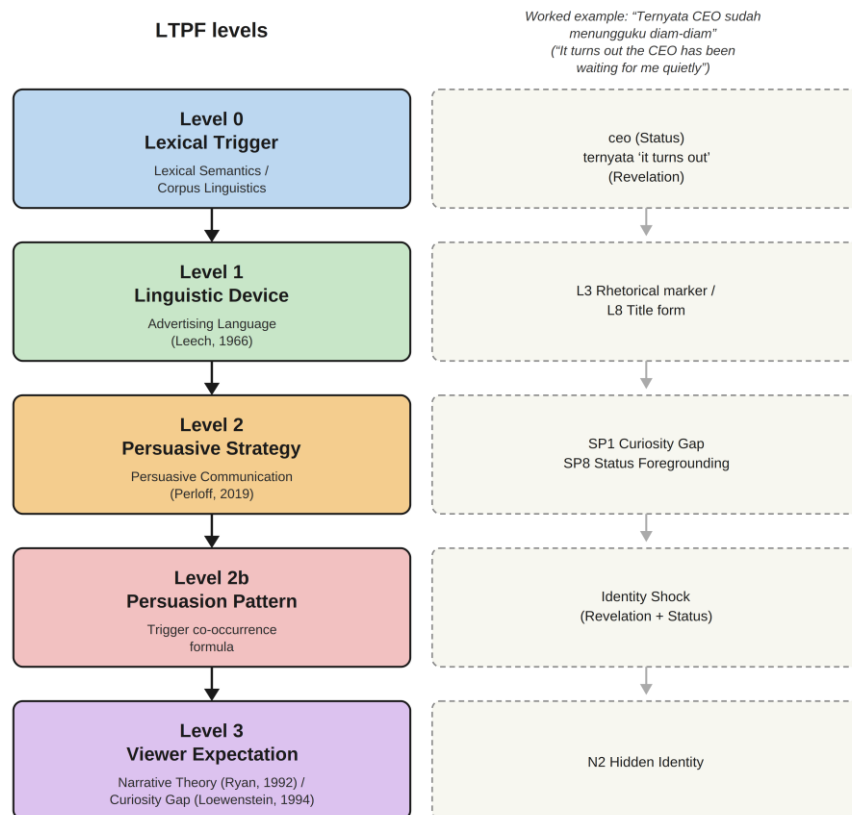


Figure 1. The Lexical Trigger–Persuasion Framework (LTPF): a five-level model (left) shown alongside a worked example (right) tracing a single corpus title from Lexical Trigger to Viewer Expectation.

Research Method

Research Design

This research treats persuasion not as an abstract textual quality but as a composite of discrete, codable linguistic units, an assumption operationalized through a quantitative content-analytic design applied to a purpose-built corpus. The unit of analysis is the individual video title ($n = 200$): lexical triggers, linguistic devices, and their combinations are coded as sub-title units nested within each title so that a single title may carry multiple Level 0/1/2 codes but is treated as one case for the corpus-level frequency and co-occurrence statistics reported in the Discussion.

Data Source and Corpus

The corpus comprises 200 Indonesian-language titles of Chinese vertical microdramas (duanju) collected from YouTube, purposively sampled from channels distributing Indonesian-dubbed or Indonesian-subtitled duanju content, consistent with prior corpus-based studies of short-form digital titles (Kemm, 2022; Limbi et al., 2024).

Sampling Technique and Data Collection

Titles were collected from January to December 2025 from ten Indonesian-dubbed or Indonesian-subtitled duanju channels identified through purposive sampling. Channels were included if they (i) uploaded predominantly duanju content, (ii) published Indonesian-language titles, and (iii) maintained an active and established subscriber base. Titles were excluded if they were not Indonesian-language, duplicated an already-sampled title from the same series, or were compilation/promotional videos rather than individual episode titles. Sampling was closed at 200 titles after successive batches yielded no new Level 0 trigger categories, providing the operational stopping rule for the corpus. Each title was extracted verbatim, along with its video description field, where the displayed title was truncated on the platform interface.

Coding Procedure

Segmentation followed a fixed procedure: each title was first tokenized into words and multi-word expressions, and each token/expression was checked against the Level 0 codebook (Appendix A); tokens matching a codebook entry were tagged with the corresponding trigger category — multi-word expressions were retained as single lexical units when their meaning functioned as a fixed or semantically unified trigger (e.g., presiden direktur 'president director'), and coded as separate tokens otherwise — while residual grammatical features relevant to persuasive form (e.g., an ellipsis mark, a question construction) were separately tagged at Level 1. Titles were then coded using the five-level LTPF pipeline in Figure 1. At Level 0, each title was scanned against an explicit codebook of eight lexical-trigger categories — Social Status, Economic, Relational, Conflict, Family, Revelation, Positive Emotion, and Negative Emotion — each with an operational definition and explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria (Appendix A). These broad domains were adapted from thematic categories previously identified in content analyses of Chinese urban television and web dramas (He et al., 2024) and from established clickbait/advertising-language taxonomies (Kemmm, 2022; Leech, 1966); the specific lexical inclusion/exclusion criteria within each category (Appendix A) were then developed inductively from repeated readings of the corpus itself and iteratively refined until coding decisions stabilized. Categories not derivable from prior literature — most notably Rebirth/Second Chance at Level 3 — were developed entirely inductively from recurring lexical patterns in the corpus and validated only through the recoding procedure described below; such inductively derived categories should be treated as corpus-specific until tested on an independent corpus. For example, Social Status was restricted to corporate-executive and aristocratic titles associated with the genre's billionaire-romance trope (e.g., CEO; presiden direktur 'president director'; pangeran 'prince'; taipan 'tycoon'), excluding ordinary professions (dokter 'doctor', guru 'teacher') unless accompanied by an elite marker, avoiding arbitrary boundaries. Where a title contained more than one trigger, all were coded (multi-label coding); no trigger was treated as dominant, since co-occurrence itself is the basis for Level 2b (Persuasion Pattern).

At Level 1, twelve linguistic devices (hyperbole, contrast, ellipsis, rhetorical question, kinship term, dramatic verb, etc.) were coded from observable grammatical form. At Level 2, eight

persuasive strategies were coded, each tied to an explicit combination of Level 0/1 indicators (e.g., Curiosity Gap was coded when a title contained ellipsis, a rhetorical question, or ternyata ‘it turns out’). Level 2b (Persuasion Pattern) was derived from co-occurrence of two or more trigger categories, following a fixed priority ordering. Level 3 (Viewer Expectation) comprised thirteen categories identified inductively, including two — Contract/Instant Marriage and Rebirth/Second Chance — not typically discussed in general clickbait taxonomies.

Table 1 illustrates the full coding procedure for a single representative title, showing how each analytical level is derived directly from observable lexical items rather than from subjective impression.

Table 1. Full LTPF Coding Procedure Illustrated for a Representative Title

Component	Result
Title	Pengemis Itu Ternyata Pewaris Triliunan (“The Beggar Turned Out to Be Heir to a Trillion”)
Lexical triggers	pengemis ‘beggar’; ternyata ‘it turns out’; pewaris ‘heir’; triliun ‘trillion’
Semantic domains	Economic (pengemis ‘beggar’, triliun ‘trillion’); Revelation (ternyata ‘it turns out’); Social Status (pewaris ‘heir’)
Linguistic devices	L2 Contrast (beggar ↔ trillion heir); L1 Hyperbole (triliunan ‘trillions’)
Persuasive strategies	SP1 Curiosity Gap (ternyata ‘it turns out’); SP2 Reversal/Shock; SP8 Status Foregrounding (pewaris ‘heir’)
Persuasion pattern	Social Mobility, formula: Status + Economic
Viewer Expectation	Social Transformation (Cinderella narrative)

Reliability and Trustworthiness

To assess coding reliability, a 10% random subsample (20 titles) was independently recoded at Level 0 by a second coder trained using the codebook but not involved in its development. The second coder worked without access to the first coder's decisions. The two coding sets were compared item by item, with exact agreement defined as an identical set of Level 0 categories assigned to each title. The two coders achieved 95% exact agreement across the 20 titles. Discrepancies were subsequently resolved through Discussion. This recoding served as a first-pass reliability check of the operational codebook rather than a full-corpus independent double-coding procedure. Future replications of the LTPF are encouraged to compute Cohen's Kappa from two fully independent human coders working without dictionary assistance, as recommended in reliability procedures for qualitative-quantitative content analysis. All frequency counts reported below were computed using formula-driven spreadsheet functions applied directly to the coded corpus, so that any correction to the underlying coding automatically propagates to all reported statistics, supporting the replicability emphasized throughout the LTPF's design.

Discussion

Demonstrating the Analytical Value of LTPF

Before reporting corpus-wide distributions, it is useful to demonstrate what the LTPF adds over conventional single-level coding. A conventional clickbait-style coding of “Ternyata CEO Sudah Menungguku Diam-diam” (“It Turns Out the CEO Has Been Waiting for Me Quietly”) would stop at one observation: Title, Curiosity — accurate but thin, since it does not explain which words produced the effect or what story is primed. The LTPF instead traces the title through five linked levels, each answerable from the text: (0) the triggers *ceo* (Status) and *ternyata* ‘it turns out’ (Revelation); (1) the linguistic devices realizing them; (2) the strategies they jointly license (SP1 Curiosity Gap, SP8 Status Foregrounding); (2b) their co-occurrence pattern (Identity Shock: Revelation + Status); and (3) the Viewer Expectation projected (N2, Hidden Identity). Figure 1 traces this example alongside the abstract model.

Table 2 quantifies this contrast directly. Under single-level coding, the CEO/*ternyata* title above and a purely emotional title, “Hanya Mencintaimu Seorang: CEO yang Dingin Telah Luluh karena Aku” (“I Only Love You: The Cold CEO Has Melted Because of Me”), receive the identical label (“romance clickbait”); under the LTPF, they receive five distinct classifications each. This comparison is not simply a claim that more categories are better; the relevant methodological test is whether the additional levels are recoverable from the text — rather than imposed post hoc — and whether they track a distinction a single-level scheme cannot make. The co-occurrence finding reported later (Table 7) provides that test: SP1- (Curiosity Gap) and SP5- (Positive-Emotion Valence) coded titles are shown to be largely non-overlapping (22.6–22.8%), so a single-category label such as “romance clickbait” would treat the CEO/*ternyata* title and the purely emotional title as equivalent cases, whereas the corpus-level co-occurrence pattern indicates the two pattern differently — evidence that the LTPF provides analytically differentiated information that a single-level coding scheme would collapse into one label, not merely more labels for their own sake.

Table 2. Informational Yield: Conventional Coding vs. LTPF

Analytical Question	Conventional Single-Level Coding	LTPF
Categories assigned per title	1 (e.g., “romance clickbait”)	Up to 5 linked levels
Specific trigger word identified?	No	Yes (e.g., <i>ceo</i> , <i>ternyata</i> ‘it turns out’)
Trigger co-occurrence (pattern) captured?	No	Yes (13 recurring formulas)
Narrative expectation projected?	No	Yes (13 categories)
Curiosity-led vs. emotion-led titles distinguished?	No (same label)	Yes (SP1 vs. SP5, 22.6–22.8% overlap)

Semantic Domains and Lexical Triggers in the Corpus

Table 3 and Figure 2 present the distribution of the seven semantic domains identified across the corpus. For presentation only, Table 3 aggregates the codebook's Relational and Family Level 0 categories (Appendix A) into one composite domain, Relational/Romantic, because both function narratively as romantic or kinship framing devices; the two remain analytically distinct at Level 0 coding and are reported separately elsewhere in this article (e.g., the Family Bond pattern in Table 8 and the Family Bond/Unifying Child category, N12, in Table 9). This aggregation is presentational and does not alter the underlying Level 0 counts or any Level 0-based statistic reported outside Table 3. The Relational/Romantic domain is the single most frequent, present in 48.0% of titles, followed by Social Status (31.5%) and Positive Emotion (28.5%). The Economic domain is comparatively rare (2.0%), appearing almost exclusively in combination with Social Status rather than independently. This distribution is consistent with prior content analyses of Chinese urban television and web dramas, which identify romantic love, wealth, and social Mobility as persistent thematic preoccupations across the genre over several decades (He et al., 2024), and with qualitative accounts of Indonesian viewers who explicitly describe duanju narratives as compensatory fantasies of instant romantic and financial success unavailable in their own professional lives (Rizky & Irfan, 2026).

Table 3. Distribution of Semantic Domains (Level 0) in the Corpus

Semantic Domain	Constituent Trigger Categories (Indonesian, glossed)	n (titles)	%
Relational/Romantic	Relasi 'Relational', Keluarga 'Family'	96	48.0
Social Status	Status 'Status'	63	31.5
Positive Emotion	Emosi Positif 'Positive Emotion'	57	28.5
Negative Emotion	Emosi Negatif 'Negative Emotion'	16	8.0
Conflict	Konflik 'Conflict'	15	7.5
Revelation	Revelation 'Revelation'	14	7.0
Economic	Ekonomi 'Economic'	4	2.0

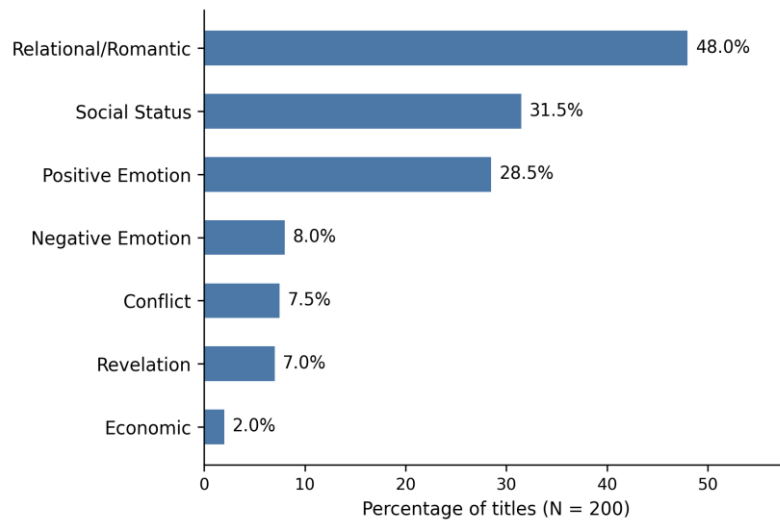


Figure 2. Distribution of semantic domains across the 200-title corpus (percentage of titles containing at least one trigger from the domain).

Co-occurrence Among Semantic Domains and Triggers

Frequency counts alone do not show how domains combine within titles. Table 4 reports conditional co-occurrence, calculated with the first-named domain as the denominator: for example, "Status: also Relational" reports, of the 63 titles containing a Status trigger, the percentage that also contain a Relational trigger; the reverse direction ("Relational: also Status") would use the 96 Relational titles as denominator and yield a different percentage, so the two directions of a pair are not symmetric and should not be conflated with the domain's overall corpus frequency reported in Table 3. Among 63 titles containing a Status trigger, 55.6% also contain a Relational trigger — a descriptive co-occurrence pattern consistent with, though not proof of, an interpretation of Status as functioning primarily as a romantic-fantasy signal rather than a standalone appeal. More strikingly, only 1.6% of Status-marked titles also contain an Economic trigger — counter to the popular assumption that duanju titles routinely stage an explicit poverty-to-wealth reversal (a poor protagonist secretly a CEO). This reversal, while present (the Mobilitas Sosial 'Social Mobility' pattern, 1.0%), is a minor sub-pattern: the dominant status-based appeal is proximity to an already-wealthy figure through romance, not the protagonist's own economic transformation. Revelation triggers show a more balanced profile, co-occurring with Status in 50.0% of cases (Identity Shock) and with Relational triggers in 42.9% (the Misteri Percintaan 'Romantic Mystery' pattern), indicating "surprise" splits almost evenly between revealing who a character is and revealing a hidden relationship.

Table 4. Conditional Co-occurrence of Semantic Domains

Domain Pair (given the first domain, % of those titles also containing the second)	Conditional %
Status: also Relational	55.6%

Status: also Positive Emotion	12.7%
Status: also Revelation	11.1%
Status: also Economic	1.6%
Revelation: also Status	50.0%
Revelation: also Relational	42.9%

Linguistic Devices Realizing Persuasion

At the level of linguistic form (Table 5), the emotive lexicon (L7, 41.0%) and title/address forms (L8, 39.5%) are the two most frequent devices, followed by ellipsis (L12, 34.0%). The prominence of ellipsis supports Loewenstein's (1994) account of curiosity as a perceived information gap: nearly one in three titles is deliberately left incomplete, most often through a trailing “...” withholding the resolution. Kinship terms (L9, 26.0%) are similarly frequent, reflecting reliance on family-relation vocabulary (suami ‘husband’, istri ‘wife’, mertua ‘parent-in-law’, ibu ‘mother’) even in titles whose primary domain is romantic rather than familial.

Table 5. Frequency of Linguistic Devices (Level 1)

Code	Linguistic Device	n	%
L7	Emotive lexicon	82	41.0
L8	Title/address form	79	39.5
L12	Ellipsis	68	34.0
L9	Kinship term	52	26.0
L11	Extreme adjective	34	17.0
L5	Modality	30	15.0

Persuasive Strategies: Why Emotional Valence and Curiosity Dominate

Table 6 shows that Positive-Emotion Valence (SP5, 46.5%) and Curiosity Gap (SP1, 46.0%) are nearly tied as the two dominant strategies, followed at a distance by Status Foregrounding (SP8, 31.5%). This pattern reflects genre conventions rather than a generic clickbait finding. Unlike news clickbait, whose curiosity gap centers on withheld factual information (Scott, 2021), duanju titles combine curiosity with an explicit emotional promise: the viewer is invited not only to find out what happens, but is pre-emotionally primed toward a positive outcome. This matches findings that micro-drama content is engineered around rapid emotional payoffs suited to fragmented viewing (Li et al., 2025; Zhai, 2025), and reports that viewers seek predictable, emotionally resolving narratives as relief from demanding routines (Rizky & Irfan, 2026).

Status Foregrounding (SP8) and its narrower variant, Romantic-Status Fantasy (SP3, 15.5%), reflect the billionaire-romance trope long noted as a defining genre convention: a CEO or pangeran

‘prince’ is a recurring lexical signal that reliably co-occurs with a romantic outcome (see “Dominant Persuasion Patterns” below). By contrast, Narrative Justice (SP7, 3.0%) and Reversal/Shock (SP2, 4.5%) are comparatively rare: revenge and karmic-justice storylines are less often signaled at the title level than romance- or status-based appeals.

Table 6. Frequency of Persuasive Strategies (Level 2)

Code	Persuasive Strategy	Linguistic Indicator	n	%
SP5	Positive-Emotion Valence	Positive-emotion trigger present	93	46.5
SP1	Curiosity Gap	Ellipsis / rhetorical question / "ternyata" ('it turns out')	92	46.0
SP8	Status Foregrounding	Status trigger present	63	31.5
SP3	Romantic-Status Fantasy	Status + Relational trigger co-occur	31	15.5
SP6	Negative-Emotion Valence	Negative-emotion trigger present	16	8.0
SP4	Conflict Intensification	Conflict trigger present	15	7.5
SP2	Reversal/Shock	Contrast + Revelation or Status↔Economic	9	4.5
SP7	Narrative Justice	"balas dendam 'revenge' / menyesal 'to regret' / karma"	6	3.0

Which Trigger Words Drive Curiosity Versus Emotion?

Strategy-level percentages conceal which lexical items do the persuasive work. Table 7 reports the trigger words most frequent in titles coded SP1 (Curiosity Gap) versus SP5 (Positive-Emotion Valence). The word *ceo* is the most frequent lexical marker in titles coded Curiosity Gap (22 of 92 titles), appearing more often than *ternyata* ‘it turns out’ (8 titles); this frequency indicates association rather than causation, since word frequency alone cannot establish that *ceo* itself generates curiosity in a reader. One plausible reading, consistent with withheld-identity implicature, is that *ceo* co-occurs with Curiosity Gap because titles built around an unnamed elite figure invite an identity-guessing inference even without an explicit revelation word such as *ternyata*; confirming this reading would require reader-response or experimental evidence beyond the scope of a text-based corpus analysis. By contrast, *cinta* ‘love’ and *mencintai* ‘to love’ are the most frequent markers in the Positive-Emotion list, with *suami* ‘husband’ and *istri* ‘wife’ as secondary markers. Critically, only 22.6–22.8% of titles coded under one strategy are also coded under the other, a pattern that echoes the central/peripheral processing distinction in persuasion (Perloff, 2019): a cognitively engaged inference ("who is this really?") versus a directly affective response ("this will feel good") — two textually distinct routes converging on the same persuasive target, a click. However, whether either route actually produces more clicks is a question this text-based analysis cannot answer.

Table 7. Top Lexical Markers for Curiosity Gap (SP1) vs. Positive-Emotion Valence (SP5)

Rank	Top Words: Curiosity Gap (SP1)	Top Words: Positive Emotion (SP5)
1	ceo (22)	cinta 'love' (35)
2	cinta 'love' (15)	mencintai 'to love' (13)
3	istri 'wife' (11)	suami 'husband' (10)
4	menikah 'to marry' (11)	istri 'wife' (9)
5	ternyata 'it turns out' (8)	menikah 'to marry' (7)

Dominant Persuasion Patterns (“Formulas”)

Table 8 reports Level 2b persuasion patterns, capturing recurring formulas of trigger co-occurrence rather than single strategies in isolation. Emotional Romance (Relational + Positive Emotion, 23.0%) is the most frequent pattern, followed by Romantic-Status Fantasy (15.5%) and General Romance (16.0%). Together, these three romance-centered patterns account for over half the corpus, showing duanju titles are structured around a small number of repeatable formulas rather than diverse, idiosyncratic appeals — specifying precisely which trigger categories combine, and how often. This matches industry accounts of duanju production as fast, low-cost, and template-driven (Cao et al., 2026; Wang & Liang, 2025).

Table 8. Dominant Persuasion Patterns (Level 2b)

Persuasion Pattern	Trigger Formula	n	%
Emotional Romance	Relational + Positive Emotion	46	23.0
Romantic-Status Fantasy	Status + Relational	31	15.5
General Romance	Relational (single)	32	16.0
No specific pattern	–	31	15.5
Status Foregrounding	Status (single)	19	9.5
Family Bond	Family (single)	9	4.5
Conflict Tension	Conflict present	8	4.0
Identity Shock	Revelation + Status	7	3.5

Note. The table presents the dominant Level 2b persuasion patterns identified in the corpus; because these patterns were derived from the most frequent recurring trigger-co-occurrence formulas rather than an exhaustive, mutually exclusive classification of every title, the listed pattern counts ($n = 183$) do not sum to the full corpus ($N = 200$). The remaining 17 titles combined trigger categories in less frequent configurations that did not meet the threshold for inclusion as a named pattern and are not separately tabulated here.

Viewer Expectations: Romance, and the Underexplored Salience of Rebirth

As shown in Table 9, Romance (N3) is by far the most frequent viewer expectation, appearing in 85.0% of titles — expected given the genre's romantic orientation, and not itself novel. A further pattern worth noting — a salient pattern identified in the present corpus, though its distinctiveness relative to other genres has not been systematically benchmarked here — is the second-ranked category: Rebirth/Second Chance (N10), present in 9.5% of titles through markers such as *terlahir kembali* and *kelahiran kembali* (glossing as “reborn, given a new life”). Examples from the corpus include “Setelah Kelahiran Kembali: Aku Menemukan Cinta Sejati” (“After [My] Rebirth: I Found True Love”) and “Setelah Terlahir Kembali, Aku Menolak Menikahi Mantanku” (“After Being Reborn, I Refuse to Marry My Ex”). Unlike the first example, which frames rebirth purely as a gateway to romance, the second foregrounds refusal and agency — the rebirth trope licensing not just a second romantic chance but a corrective redo of a past mistake, aligning it with Narrative Justice (SP7) even where no revenge vocabulary is present.

This extends prior clickbait research, focused mainly on curiosity, emotion, and Status (Kemml, 2022; Scott, 2021), by identifying a category rooted in the rebirth/transmigration trope pervasive in Chinese web-novel storytelling. A rebirth title performs double persuasive work: it activates Curiosity Gap (how did the protagonist return?) while pre-installing Narrative Justice (a second life correcting the first), without explicit revenge vocabulary. Because news headlines cannot promise a second life, rebirth narratives appear characteristic of fictional serial entertainment and *duanju*'s roots in Chinese web-novel transmigration (*chuanyue*) — though whether this trope is genuinely absent elsewhere, or understudied, remains open. Future work on web-novel titles that share this tradition could test whether rebirth functions similarly across the wider Chinese-origin digital fiction ecosystem.

Table 9. Distribution of Viewer Expectations (Level 3)

Code	Viewer Expectation	n	%
N3	Romance	170	85.0
N10	Rebirth / Second Chance	19	9.5
N9	Contract/Instant Marriage	11	5.5
N2	Hidden Identity/Secret	7	3.5
N12	Family Bond / Unifying Child	6	3.0
N8	Redemption	6	3.0

A Deviant Case: Maximum Trigger Density

One deviant case merits brief attention: “Cinta dan Benci: Dendam antar Keluarga Kaya” (“Love and Hate: Vengeance between Rich Families”) is the only title activating four domains at once — Economic, Positive Emotion, Conflict, Relational/Family — coded under the Drama Keluarga ‘Family Drama’ pattern. This outlier marks the corpus's upper bound of trigger density: most titles

rely on a compact one- or two-domain formula. At the same time, a minority compress an ensemble-conflict narrative into the title, at the cost of the brevity (Leech, 1966) that advertising language is said to value. This dense title notably lacks *ternyata* 'it turns out' (Table 7), suggesting titles either economize through one polyvalent word or accumulate single-function triggers, rarely both.

Comparison with Persuasive Language in Other Digital Genres

Placing these findings alongside prior clickbait scholarship clarifies what is distinctive about *duanju*; the comparisons below draw on findings reported in previously published studies rather than a direct re-analysis of comparison corpora within this study, so parallels and contrasts should be read as indicative alignments with the literature rather than statistically tested cross-genre differences. Indonesian news clickbait studies report a comparable reliance on withheld information and dramatic vocabulary (Kertanegara, 2018), and cross-linguistic research similarly identifies questions, numbers, and dramatic language as core tactics (Limbi et al., 2024). What distinguishes this corpus is the near-parity between Curiosity Gap and Positive-Emotion Valence: whereas news clickbait typically foregrounds curiosity with neutral or negative affect (Scott, 2021), *duanju* titles pair curiosity almost as often with an explicit positive emotional promise, consistent with the genre's function as short, restorative entertainment rather than a vehicle for factual information (Qinghua, 2025).

This points to a deeper distinction in how curiosity operates. News-headline curiosity gaps concern factual uncertainty (Scott, 2021): the reader genuinely does not know what happened. *Duanju* curiosity gaps instead operate within a conventionalized genre schema viewers already recognize — a title beginning “*ternyata* CEO...” (‘it turns out [the] CEO...’) activates a familiar trope rather than genuine uncertainty. Such curiosity is better characterized as trope-recognition anticipation — pleasurable uncertainty about how and when a known formula resolves — than Loewenstein's (1994) original information deficit, consistent with viewers who report full awareness of the genre's implausibility while still deriving satisfaction from its predictable resolution (Rizky & Irfan, 2026). Curiosity Gap theory, developed for factual contexts, thus requires a schema-based qualification when extended to fictional entertainment.

A related question concerns why status-based fantasy is more prominent in *duanju* titles than news headlines. News clickbait persuades chiefly through the promise of information; *duanju* titles persuade through vicarious identity access — the viewer imaginatively occupies, however briefly, the position of someone loved by a CEO. This function is unavailable to fact-based genres, explaining why Status Foregrounding (31.5%) and Romantic-Status Fantasy (15.5%) have no direct clickbait equivalent. That Status rarely co-occurs with Economic reversal (Table 4) suggests this appeal's core is proximity to Status via romance, not economic self-transformation — subtler and more conservative than the rags-to-riches framing often assumed in casual genre description.

The genre's reliance on cliffhanger-style incompleteness fits findings that serial formats withhold closure to sustain engagement across episodes (Lu et al., 2025) — anticipated, in *duanju*, already

at the title level. Unlike K-drama titles and fan discourse, which prior studies report as foregrounding actor names (Putri & Purwadi, 2025; Wajdi et al., 2025), duanju titles here rarely name actors, relying instead on trope-based vocabulary (CEO; ternyata 'it turns out'; balas dendam 'revenge') portable across a high volume of titles — suited to an industrial, low-cost content model (Cao et al., 2026; Wang & Liang, 2025).

Two Persuasion Routes: A Concluding Model

The preceding sections have shown, from several angles, that curiosity and positive emotion are structurally distinct pathways, not variants of one mechanism: near-identical frequencies (46.5% vs. 46.0%) yet only 22.6–22.8% co-occurrence (Tables 6 and 7), non-overlapping trigger vocabularies, and different viewer expectations. Figure 3 consolidates this into one concluding model. Route A begins with a Revelation- or Status-marked trigger, realized through Curiosity Gap, resolving into Identity Shock, and projecting a Hidden Identity expectation. Route B begins with a Relational- or Emotion-marked trigger, realized through Positive-Emotion Valence, resolving into Emotional Romance, and projecting a Romance expectation. Both routes converge on the same persuasive target — inviting a click — through demonstrably different linguistic means; this convergence is inferred from the titles' textual design, not from measured click behavior.

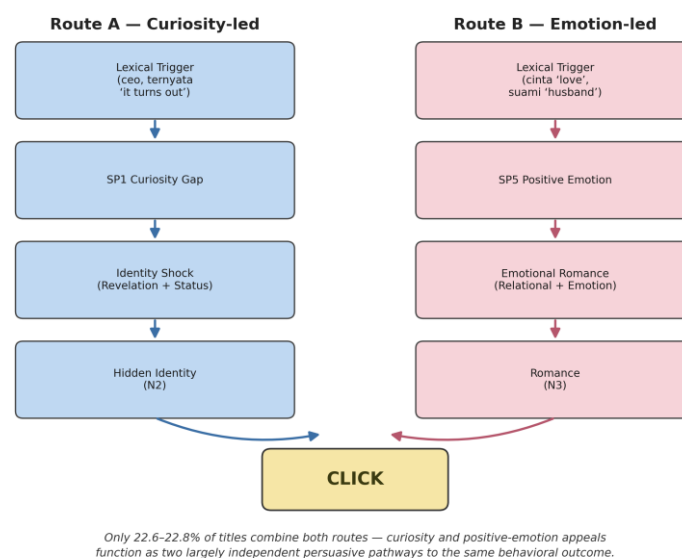


Figure 3. Two persuasion routes in Indonesian-language duanju titles: a curiosity-led route (Route A) and an emotion-led route (Route B), converging on a common, textually projected persuasive target.

This two-route model is, in the end, the study's central empirical contribution — more so than the LTPF's layered architecture, which is a methodological instrument rather than a finding. A single-category scheme would report only that both routes are "persuasive" and stop there. Three non-equivalences recovered by the framework summarize this contribution: curiosity is not interchangeable with positive emotion; Status is not interchangeable with economic transformation (a proximity-to-wealth fantasy realized mainly through romance); and rebirth is

not interchangeable with revenge (Narrative Justice achieved without conflict vocabulary). None would be recoverable from a title's surface classification as "clickbait" or "romance" alone; each depends on tracing titles through the full pipeline the LTPF makes explicit.

Conclusion

This article set out to examine how persuasive strategies are linguistically realized in Indonesian-language titles of Chinese vertical microdramas on YouTube. The analysis of 200 titles shows persuasive strategies are realized through a small, formulaic set of trigger combinations organized into two largely independent routes — curiosity-led and emotion-led (Figure 3) — rather than one diffuse, blended appeal (RQ1). The linguistic devices most responsible are the emotive lexicon, title/address forms, and ellipsis, the latter instantiating information-gap-based curiosity at the grammatical level (RQ2). Strategy combinations shape the narrative expectations projected toward prospective viewers primarily toward romance. Still, a secondary, underexamined expectation — rebirth/second chance — emerges as a salient device in this corpus, one whose narrative premise (a second life) is definitionally unavailable to non-fictional genres such as news headlines. However, this comparison rests on the genre's definitional properties rather than a direct analysis of non-fictional title corpora (RQ3).

Beyond these empirical findings, the LTPF's methodological transparency — an explicit codebook, multi-label coding rules, and a traceable link between lexical form and higher-level categories — is what makes the two-route distinction, and the other non-equivalences above, recoverable at all. Because the framework is anchored in observable lexical triggers rather than genre-specific interpretive categories, it is not tied to duanju content: it can be adapted to other short-form digital title genres by redefining the Level 0 lexicon, while Levels 1–3 remain unchanged.

Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several limitations that qualify the scope of its claims. First, the corpus comprises 200 titles from a single platform (YouTube) and a single language (Indonesian), collected using the purposive sampling procedure and inclusion/exclusion criteria described in the Research Method section. This scope means the findings describe the sampled corpus and should not be generalized to duanju titling practices on other platforms (e.g., TikTok, other short-video apps) or in other target languages without further testing. Second, coding relied on a dictionary- and rule-assisted procedure rather than fully independent double-human coding; a 10% subsample (20 titles) was independently recoded by a second coder as a first-pass reliability check, achieving 95% exact percentage agreement with the first coder's Level 0 categorizations. However, this study does not report a chance-corrected intercoder-agreement statistic such as Cohen's Kappa, and the coding should be understood as internally consistent and rule-based rather than validated through the stricter standard of fully independent dual coding across the full corpus. Future replications of the LTPF are encouraged to employ two fully independent human coders and report Cohen's Kappa. Third, and most fundamentally, this study analyzes only the

textual properties of titles; it does not collect or analyze data on actual viewer behavior, such as click-through rates, watch-time, comments, or experimental response measures. Consequently, every reference in this article to persuasive "strategies," "expectations," or a title's tendency to produce "the click" describes the persuasive potential projected by a title's linguistic design, not an empirically measured effect on real viewers; all claims about Viewer Expectation throughout this article should be read as claims about textually projected narrative expectation, not measured audience response. Fourth, the Level 0 lexicon (Appendix A) does not achieve exhaustive coverage of the corpus — approximately 15% of titles matched no codebook entry — so the Level 0 lexicon likely undercounts less common trigger types not yet captured by the codebook. Unless otherwise specified, all percentages reported in this article's tables are calculated against the full 200-title corpus, not against the coded subset alone; the 15% figure describes coverage of the lexicon itself, not a different denominator for the frequencies reported elsewhere. Future research combining the LTPF with audience-response data (click-through rates, survey-based expectation measures, or eye-tracking) would be needed to test whether the persuasive potential identified here corresponds to measurable audience effects, and future work should also extend the LTPF across platforms and genres and test whether the rebirth/second-chance expectation generalizes to other Chinese-origin digital narrative formats consumed by Indonesian audiences.

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Appendix A. LTPF Level 0 Codebook (Lexical Trigger Categories)

The following table reproduces, in full, the operational definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria used to code the eight Level 0 lexical-trigger categories referenced in the Research Method section. Coders applying this codebook to a new corpus should note that Table A1 defines only the trigger-word inventory used for the present duanju corpus; researchers extending the LTPF to other genres or languages should re-derive the Level 0 lexicon following the same operational logic illustrated below, rather than reusing this word list unmodified.

Table A1. LTPF Level 0 Codebook

Category	Operational Definition	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Examples (Included / Excluded)
Social Status	Nouns denoting corporate-executive or aristocratic titles associated with power, wealth, or institutional authority within the genre's billionaire/CEO-romance trope.	Executive titles (CEO; presiden direktur 'president director'; direktur 'director'; bos 'boss'); aristocratic titles (pangeran 'prince'; putri 'princess'; sultan 'sultan'); extreme-wealth markers attached to a character	Ordinary professions without an explicit elite marker (dokter 'doctor', guru 'teacher', perawat 'nurse', manajer 'manager', polisi 'police officer') are excluded, as they fall outside the genre	Included: "CEO", "Presiden Direktur" ('President Director'), "Pangeran" ('Prince'), "Taipan" ('Tycoon')

		(taipan 'tycoon'; konglomerat 'conglomerate owner'; milyarder/miliarder 'billionaire'; pewaris 'heir').	trope. Honorific address forms (Tuan 'Sir', Nona 'Miss') are coded at Level 1 instead, since honorifics do not always index elite status.	Excluded: "Dokter" ('Doctor', without additional elite marker), "Manajer" ('Manager'), "Guru" ('Teacher')
Economic	Nouns/adjectives marking extreme financial condition or class mobility.	Poverty markers (miskin 'poor'; pengemis 'beggar'; desa/kampung 'village'); wealth markers (kaya 'rich'; warisan 'inheritance'; harta 'wealth'; triliun 'trillion'; milyar 'billion'; yuan in large amounts).	Neutral money/place references without class connotation.	Included: "Pengemis" ('Beggar'), "Triliunan" ('Trillions'), "Warisan" ('Inheritance') Excluded: neutral place names without poverty/wealth association
Relational	Nouns marking romantic or marital Status between characters.	menikah/nikah/pernikahan 'to marry/marriage'; cerai/bercerai/perceraian 'divorce'; pacar 'boyfriend/girlfriend'; tunangan 'fiancé(e)'; suami 'husband'; istri 'wife'; kekasih 'sweetheart'; jodoh 'destined match'; kencana 'date'; pengantin 'bride/groom'.	Non-romantic kinship terms (ibu 'mother', ayah 'father', kakak/adik 'siblings') are coded as Family.	Included: "Menikah" ('To Marry'), "Cerai" ('Divorce'), "Istri" ('Wife'), "Suami" ('Husband') Excluded: "Ibu" ('Mother'), "Kakak" ('Older Sibling') (coded as Family)
Conflict	Verbs/nouns marking explicit hostility between characters.	balas dendam 'revenge'; diusir 'expelled'; dikhianati 'betrayed'; musuh 'enemy'; benci 'hate'; menjebak 'to trap'; kejam 'cruel'; menjual 'to sell' (betrayal context).	Merely implied tension, without an explicit hostility verb/noun, is not coded here.	Included: "Diusir" ('Kicked Out'), "Dikhianati" ('Betrayed'), "Balas Dendam" ('Revenge') Excluded: implied tension without explicit hostility lexicon
Family	Nouns marking kinship relations or family life events.	hamil 'pregnant'; anak 'child'; bayi 'baby'; ibu 'mother'; ayah 'father'; mertua 'parent-in-law'; ipar 'sibling-in-law'; kakak/adik 'siblings'; keluarga 'family'.	Romantic partners (suami/istri 'husband/wife') are Relational, not Family, unless co-occurring with other kin terms.	Included: "Hamil" ('Pregnant'), "Mertua" ('Parent-in-law'), "Bayi" ('Baby') Excluded: "Istri"/"Suami" ('Wife'/'Husband') alone (coded as Relational)
Revelation	Lexicon marking	Ternyata 'it turns out';	Surprise implied only	Included:

	disclosure of previously hidden information.	rahasia 'secret'; menyamar 'to disguise oneself'; identitas 'identity'; siapakah 'who is'; diam-diam 'secretly, quietly'.	through ellipsis, without an explicit revelation word, is coded at Level 1, not here.	"Ternyata" ('It Turns Out'), "Rahasia" ('Secret'), "Menyamar" ('To Disguise Oneself') Excluded: titles ending only in "..." without an explicit revelation word
Positive Emotion	Lexicon explicitly marking positive affect.	cinta 'love'; mencintai 'to love'; sayang 'dear'; bahagia 'happy'; rindu 'longing'; dicintai 'to be loved'; menyukai/suka 'to like'.	Romantic content without affective lexicon (e.g., only "menikah" 'to marry') is coded as Relational.	Included: "Cinta" ('Love'), "Bahagia" ('Happy'), "Rindu" ('Longing') Excluded: "Menikah" ('To Marry') without affective lexicon (coded as Relational)
Negative Emotion	Lexicon explicitly marking negative affect.	menangis 'to cry'; patah hati 'heartbroken'; dingin 'cold'; jahat 'wicked'; gila 'crazy'; marah 'angry'; sakit 'hurt'; malang 'unfortunate'.	Active-hostility lexicon (mengkhianati 'to betray', mengusir 'to expel') is coded as Conflict, avoiding overlap between levels.	Included: "Menangis" ('To Cry'), "Gila" ('Crazy'), "Malang" ('Unfortunate') Excluded: "Dikhianati" ('Betrayed') (coded as Conflict)