

Digital Football Fandom as Participatory Culture: Study from @utdfocusid on Platform X

Andhika Widy Nugroho ^{1*}, Aulia Rahmawati ²

¹ Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur, Indonesia. andhikawidy19@gmail.com

² Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur, Indonesia. aulia_rahmawati.ilkom@upnjatim.ac.id

Corresponding Author Email: 22043010351@student.upnjatim.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Received : 5 April 2026
Accepted : 27 April 2026
Published : 30 April 2026

Keywords:

Participatory Culture, Football Fandom, Manchester United, Social Media X

This study examines the forms of participatory culture within the Manchester United fandom on social media platform X through the account @utdfocusid. Employing a qualitative approach with Christine Hine's virtual ethnography method, data were collected through virtual observation of three strategically selected match periods involving Manchester United against Grimsby Town, Liverpool, and Arsenal, alongside supplementary content outside these periods. Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The findings demonstrate that @utdfocusid embodies all four dimensions of Participatory Culture, Affiliations manifested through memes and hashtags as collective identity markers; Expressions embodied in sarcastic humor and emoticon use as emotional communication; Circulations occurring through live tweets and multi-directional fan interactions; and Collaborative Problem Solving evident in real-time tactical discussions and historical rivalry threads that collectively produce richer community knowledge. These findings establish that digital fandom operates as a complex communication ecosystem where collective identity, solidarity, and shared knowledge are actively constructed, extending well beyond mere emotional expression.

INTRODUCTION

Football has long transcended its function as a sport. Across the world, it operates as a social and cultural phenomenon that cuts across geographical, linguistic, and social boundaries, connecting millions of people through shared devotion to a team or player. For many fans, this devotion is not incidental but constitutive of their everyday lives: they adjust personal schedules to match fixtures, invest financially in merchandise and tickets, join supporter communities, and produce content centered on their clubs. As Abed et al. (2025) observe, these varied forms of engagement reflect how football cultivates a sense of belonging and becomes embedded in an individual's social identity. The emotional bond between supporters and clubs is particularly durable: it persists across poor results, managerial changes, and

periods of decline, indicating that fan loyalty is rooted not in performance alone but in a deeper affective and social attachment that develops over time.

Among the clubs that have cultivated the most extensive and loyal global supporter bases, Manchester United occupies a singular position. Its long history of success in domestic and European competition, combined with the global visibility of iconic players from David Beckham and Wayne Rooney to Cristiano Ronaldo, has produced a fanbase that extends far beyond England and into every corner of the world, including Indonesia (Asril & Darmansyah, 2024). For Indonesian fans specifically, supporting Manchester United has become more than an expression of sporting preference: it is a way of affiliating with a global cultural identity while also building distinctly local communities of fellow supporters.

The emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed how these communities operate. Platform X, as a microblogging service built around real-time public conversation, has become one of the primary arenas in which Indonesian Manchester United fans express their devotion, debate tactical decisions, mourn defeats, and celebrate victories. Aisha and Bahalwan (2024) note that X functions not merely as an information distribution channel but as a dynamic space for building social and cultural networks. This shift has altered the nature of fandom itself: fans are no longer passive spectators who receive information about their clubs but active participants who co-create narratives, produce humor, and construct shared meanings through daily digital interaction (Fadilah & Putri, 2024).

Within this landscape, the account @utdfocusid has emerged as one of the most significant hubs of Manchester United fan activity on X in Indonesia. The account serves as a collective space where hundreds of thousands of followers participate in diverse communicative practices: producing and sharing threads, memes, and live-match commentary; engaging in tactical analysis; conducting playful rivalries with opposing fanbases; and discussing club management and history. Over time, these interactions have produced a distinctive community culture characterized by its own linguistic norms, humor conventions, and symbolic vocabulary that are intelligible primarily to insiders. As Fadilah and Putri (2024) note in their analysis of Indonesian Manchester United fan communities on X, the account does not merely distribute information but actively shapes collective identity and emotional solidarity among its members.

Despite growing scholarly interest in digital fandom, most existing research focuses on entertainment fandoms, particularly K-Pop communities, leaving football fandom communities in Indonesian digital contexts comparatively underexplored. Additionally, studies that do examine football supporter culture in Indonesia, such as Tenriliweng and Fridayanti's (2025) analysis of social media's role in supporter conflicts and Asril and Darmansyah's (2024) phenomenological study of Manchester United fan loyalty, tend to examine isolated aspects of supporter behavior, such as conflict dynamics or loyalty formation. Consequently, these studies have not provided a comprehensive analysis of how participatory culture is manifested across multiple forms of fan interaction using Jenkins et al.'s (2009) Participatory Culture framework. This study addresses that gap by applying Jenkins et al.'s (2009) Participatory Culture framework to conduct a systematic analysis of how @utdfocusid enacts participatory practices across all four of its core dimensions—Affiliations, Expressions, Circulations,

and Collaborative Problem Solving. In doing so, this study extends previous research by offering a more comprehensive understanding of participatory culture within an Indonesian football fandom community on social media X. The central research question is: how does participatory culture manifest within the Manchester United fandom on social media X through the account @utdfocusid?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participatory Culture in Digital Communities

Participatory Culture, as theorized by Henry Jenkins, describes a cultural environment in which individuals are not merely consumers of media but active contributors to its production and circulation. The framework identifies five core dimensions. Affiliations encompass the memberships and associations individuals forge within formal and informal online communities. Expressions involve the creation of new forms of content derived from existing cultural material. Collaborative Problem Solving refers to the collective process of pooling knowledge and working together to accomplish shared goals. Circulations describe how media content flows through social networks. Connections involve the ability to navigate between communities and link knowledge acquired in one context to another, including cross-platform transliteracy and identity negotiation.

While Jenkins conceptualizes Participatory Culture through these five dimensions, the present study focuses specifically on Affiliations, Expressions, Collaborative Problem Solving, and Circulations, as these dimensions are directly reflected in the observable interaction patterns within the @UnitedIndonesia community on Platform X. The Connections dimension is not included in the analysis because it primarily concerns cross-community and cross-platform navigation, which falls beyond the scope of this study.

This framework has been applied across various digital community contexts. Adnjani and Supraja (2025) demonstrated that participatory culture enables collaborative knowledge production in digital activism communities through sustained participatory interaction. Piva (2022) found that fan production in digital environments consistently involves collective knowledge-building processes that evolve through ongoing user interaction. Paiva and Quintas-Mendes (2024) further established that participatory

collaboration in digital communities not only generates new knowledge but also reinforces belonging among members.

Football Fandom and Social Media

The relationship between football fandom and social media has undergone significant transformation in the digital era. Platform X occupies a particularly significant role in football fan communities due to its real-time capabilities and public conversational architecture. Features including threads, replies, retweets, and hashtags enable football-related discussions to develop rapidly and involve large numbers of participants simultaneously. Kennedy et al. (2021) show that digital sport fandom on platforms like X influences not only how fans express themselves but also how they build loyalty and collective identity within their communities.

Digital Community Culture

Online communities develop their cultures through the collective exchange of symbols, narratives, and communication forms that evolve organically over time. Rather than emerging from deliberate design, these cultural formations grow from the accumulated patterns of daily interaction among members who share common interests, values, and emotional investments. Fandom constitutes a social space rich with layers of meaning and complex dynamics, where communication including discussion, humor, and debate enables members to construct and display their identities. Within fan communities, interaction is never merely informational: every exchange of opinions, every inside joke, and every shared reaction to a match result is simultaneously a performance of identity and a contribution to the community's evolving culture.

This understanding has been reinforced by more recent scholarship on digital fan communities in the Indonesian context. Savitri (2025) demonstrates that fan communities on platform X function as imagined communities whose members develop a strong sense of collective belonging despite never meeting in person, with identity formation occurring continuously through accumulated interactions including replies, retweets, and content production. Similarly, Witarti (2026) finds in her netnographic study of digital fandom in Indonesia that communities actively construct shared identities through digital

communication rituals, developing their own linguistic norms, humor conventions, and symbolic vocabularies that serve simultaneously as cultural markers and boundary mechanisms separating insiders from outsiders

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach using virtual ethnography, a method introduced by Christine Hine that treats the internet as both a culture and a cultural artifact, enabling the researcher to observe social interactions in digital spaces without physical co-presence. Virtual ethnography is particularly appropriate for this study because the entire community under investigation exists and operates within a digital environment.

Data Collection

Data were collected through systematic virtual observation of content and interactions on the X account @utdfocusid across three primary periods selected for their social and emotional significance to the community: the MU vs Grimsby Town match (August 28, 2025), which saw Manchester United eliminated from the Carabao Cup by a League Two club; the MU vs Liverpool fixture (October 19, 2025), a high-emotion Premier League derby; and the MU vs Arsenal match (January 25, 2026), another high-stakes Premier League encounter. Additionally, selected content outside these periods was incorporated as supplementary data to enrich the analysis, particularly for examining the Connections dimension. A corpus of 16 content items was established based on criteria of high audience participation and theoretical relevance to the five Participatory Culture dimensions. The analyzed data consisted of original posts (tweets), reply threads, reposts with commentary, and user interaction patterns (e.g., likes, reposts, and replies) generated around these selected content items.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, comprising three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Condensation involved systematically reducing the collected data by identifying patterns aligned with the five Participatory Culture dimensions. Display involved organizing the

condensed data into structured descriptions. Conclusion drawing involved interpreting these patterns in relation to the theoretical framework.

RESULT

Profile of @utdfocusid

The account @utdfocusid was first established in 2017 on the Line and Facebook platforms before launching its X presence on January 2, 2021. As of March 30, 2026, the account holds 245,000 followers and has published 46,700 posts, making it the second-largest Manchester United fanbase account on X in Indonesia. The account produces a diverse range of content including match live-tweets, tactical discussions, historical threads, memes, and cross-domain informational articles.

Affiliations: Collective Identity Through Meme

Figure 1. Meme at @utdfocusid



The Affiliations dimension is represented by a meme posted during the MU vs Liverpool period, which features an image of a small child walking upright with visible confidence and satisfaction. The caption reads "SENIN FULL SENYUM ANYINKK" loosely translated as "Monday full of smiles, damn". Several communicative elements in this content work simultaneously. The all-caps writing and the use of informal Indonesian slang (*anyinkk*) signal that the content is produced for insiders who share the same linguistic register, not for general audiences. The visual of the child walking confidently externalizes the collective emotional state of fans following the victory: buoyant, self-assured, and optimistic despite the club's inconsistent season form.

This content reflects on Henry Jenkins conception of Affiliations as the formation of shared membership and collective belonging within informal digital communities. Identity in this community is not declared through formal membership but constructed through the daily circulation of symbolic content that encodes shared values, emotions, and aspirations. Savitri (2025) corroborates this, demonstrating that fan communities on X build collective identity continuously through symbolic content circulated among members who already share a common emotional investment in the same club. The meme in this case functions as what Witarti (2026) describes as a digital communication ritual: a recurring expressive act through which community members confirm to one another that they belong to the same group and feel the same things at the same moment.

Expressions: Sarcasm as Community

Figure 2. Sarcasm at @utdfocusid



During the MU vs Arsenal period, @utdfocusid uploaded a tweet responding to a comparison between Arsenal's current squad and Manchester United's 2008 vintage with the phrase "Ini lagi kok berani-beraninya bandingin..." (How dare they keep comparing...) followed by "This level of disrespect is wild." The content operates through layered irony: exaggerated indignation is deployed as a form of wit that simultaneously dismisses the comparison and celebrates the club's historical prestige. Crucially, the humor is only intelligible to those who possess the shared historical knowledge underpinning the comparison, making it an implicit test of insider membership. This aligns with Henry Jenkins

description of Expressions as the production of new creative forms through which community members display their engagement. Sanita Eka (2025) further notes that digital expression in fan communities encodes emotional nuances that function as cultural identifiers distinguishing community insiders from casual observers.

Circulations: Live Tweet as Real-Time Content Flow

Figure 3. live tweet during the match



During the MU vs Arsenal match, @utdfocusid published a live tweet reading "MATHEUS CUNHAA GOALLLL" and "WHAT A FINISHHHHH!!!" written entirely in capital letters with repeated characters. The typographic choices are not incidental: all-caps writing and character repetition are established conventions of digital fan communication that simulate the sonic intensity of a stadium reaction, transforming a text-based post into a performative expression of collective euphoria. The tweet immediately triggered cascading responses from followers who replicated the same register, demonstrating how a single post initiates a chain of circulation across a community's network. McCracken notes that social media functions as a space where sports-related meaning is continuously circulated and amplified; Rabbani (2024) adds that synchronized live engagement creates a virtual collective spectatorship experience that binds geographically dispersed fans into a shared moment.

Collaborative Problem Solving: Tactical Discussion as Distributed Analysis

Figure 4. Discussion at Halftime



Following the first half of the MU vs Liverpool match, @utdfocusid posted the open question "Gimana babak pertama tadi?" (How was the first half?). The reply from @ucupjo contained a concrete tactical assessment: "Cukup longpass dan menangin second ball" (Just win the longballs and second balls) alongside a specific substitution recommendation to replace Dalot. The exchange illustrates what Jenkins describe as the distributed nature of analytical opinion in participatory culture: no single party holds authority over match evaluation; instead, each community member contributes a fragment of knowledge that collectively produces a more comprehensive assessment than any individual could generate alone. Hutchins and Rowe observe that this form of peer analytical production is a defining characteristic of digital sport fandom, effectively transforming fans into unofficial co-analysts operating in parallel with professional commentators

DISCUSSION

The results of this study carry several important theoretical implications for how we understand participatory culture in digital fan communities. The most fundamental is that the @utdfocusid community demonstrates that digital football fandom has evolved well beyond what earlier scholarship described as passive spectatorship or simple emotional expression. Each dimension identified in the findings points toward a qualitatively different kind of fan engagement: one in which community members are simultaneously producers, curators, analysts, and emotional co-participants in a shared cultural project. This finding aligns with and extends Henry Jenkins original argument that participatory culture represents a fundamental shift in the relationship between media

producers and consumers, and it does so in a domain of Indonesian football fandom that the original framework did not anticipate. The data suggest that participatory culture is not a phenomenon confined to entertainment fandoms or Western digital contexts, but a generalizable dynamic that manifests wherever communities of shared interest converge around social media platforms with interactive affordances.

The Affiliations findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how collective identity operates in digital communities. Prior research, including Asril and Darmansyah (2024), has documented that Manchester United fan loyalty in Indonesia is rooted in deep emotional and biographical attachment to the club. The present findings extend this by demonstrating that identity in the @utdfocusid community is not merely held but continuously produced and reproduced through communicative practice. The meme content analyzed in this study shows that collective identity is not declared through formal statements of allegiance but enacted through the daily circulation of symbolic content humor, visual metaphors, shared aspirations that require insider knowledge to decode. This implies that community membership in @utdfocusid is performative rather than declarative: one does not simply join the community but earns and maintains belonging through ongoing participation. Savitri (2025) and Witarti (2026) both point in this direction in their studies of Indonesian digital fandom, but the present findings offer more granular evidence of the specific communicative mechanisms through which this performative identity production occurs.

The Expressions findings suggest that humor, and sarcasm in particular, functions in this community as more than entertainment. It operates as an epistemological mechanism: a means by which the community tests, validates, and reproduces its shared knowledge base. A fan who can produce or correctly interpret a layered sarcastic reference to Manchester United's 2008 squad demonstrates not only emotional investment in the club but historical knowledge of it, and this demonstration is implicitly recognized by the community as a marker of legitimate membership. This observation connects to Hills' account of knowledge hierarchies in fandom but extends it into the specific context of Indonesian digital fan culture, where the additional dimension of bilingual code-switching between Indonesian and English adds

another layer of cultural competence to the expression repertoire. The implication is that fan communities like @utdfocusid do not merely consume culture but actively produce an epistemological community a group whose membership is defined not only by shared affect but by shared ways of knowing and expressing. This has implications for how communication scholars theorize the relationship between language, identity, and community in digital spaces, particularly in multilingual contexts like Indonesia where global media cultures and local communicative norms intersect.

The Circulations findings raise important questions about the role of platform architecture in shaping fan culture. The density and immediacy of circulatory behavior observed in @utdfocusid particularly during live-match periods suggests that platform X does not merely host fan interaction but actively structures it. The real-time, public, and reply-threaded architecture of X creates affordances that make certain kinds of participatory behavior not only possible but culturally normative: live-tweeting becomes expected, reply chains become the standard format for communal reaction, and the absence of engagement becomes a noticeable deviation from community practice. What this study adds is evidence that in a high-intensity fan community context, these platform affordances interact with the emotional dynamics of live sport spectatorship to produce a communicative environment whose properties are qualitatively different from those of other social media contexts. The implication is that future research on digital fandom must account not only for what fans do on platforms but for how the specific technical affordances of those platforms enable, constrain, and shape what is communicatively possible and culturally normative.

Perhaps the most theoretically significant finding concerns the Collaborative Problem Solving dimension, which reveals that @utdfocusid functions as a genuine knowledge community rather than simply an affective one. The spontaneous production of tactical analysis by ordinary fans during the Arsenal match, and the collective assembly of historical knowledge in the Leeds United thread, demonstrate that the community possesses and actively exercises intellectual capacities that existing research has tended to underestimate. This has significant implications for media studies scholarship on the relationship between

professional and amateur knowledge production in the digital era. If fan communities can sustain this level of analytical engagement without institutional support or professional training, then the boundary between expert analysis and fan opinion that has traditionally structured sports media is not merely blurring but dissolving. Lee and Park (2025) begin to address this in their work on fandom posting behaviors, and the present findings provide concrete empirical evidence from a non-Western context that supports and extends their argument.

These findings also speak directly to the gaps identified in the existing literature on Indonesian football fandom. Prior studies, including Fadilah and Putri (2024) on fan fanaticism and verbal aggression, Tenriliweng and Fridayanti (2025) on social media and supporter conflicts, and Cahyadi et al. (2024) on sentiment analysis of Manchester United-related tweets, have tended to focus on the more contentious or emotionally reactive dimensions of fan behavior. While these studies have made important contributions, they have collectively produced a picture of Indonesian football fandom that emphasizes its volatile and potentially problematic aspects. The present findings offer a necessary corrective to this picture by demonstrating that the same communities that can generate conflict and aggression are also capable of sustained, constructive, intellectually engaged participatory behavior. The *@utdfocusid* community is not merely a site of rivalry and emotional reaction; it is also a space of cultural production, knowledge exchange, and identity formation whose communicative practices deserve analytical attention on their own terms rather than primarily through the lens of their potential for disruption.

Finally, these findings carry practical implications for community managers, communication practitioners, and platform designers working in the context of Indonesian digital fan culture. The results suggest that fan communities are most vibrant and culturally productive when they are structured in ways that facilitate all four dimensions of participatory culture simultaneously: spaces for identity formation, channels for creative expression, mechanisms for rapid content circulation, and prompts that invite collective analytical engagement. Administrators and moderators of fan accounts would benefit from understanding that their role is not merely to distribute

information but to catalyze the participatory dynamics through which their communities generate meaning. At the same time, this study acknowledges important limitations. The analysis is based on a single account across three match periods, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The study also relies exclusively on publicly available digital content, which means that the subjective experiences and motivations of community members remain largely inaccessible. Future research that combines virtual ethnography with interviews, or that examines multiple fan accounts comparatively across different clubs and national contexts, would significantly deepen our understanding of how participatory culture operates in digital football fandom at scale.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Manchester United fan community organized around *@utdfocusid* on platform X exhibits all four dimensions of Participatory Culture as theorized by Henry Jenkins. Affiliations are constructed through memes and hashtags that function as collective identity markers. Expressions emerge through sarcastic humor and emoticon use that encode community-specific meanings accessible only to insiders. Circulations occur through live-tweeting and multi-directional fan interactions that create shared virtual spectatorship experiences. Collaborative Problem Solving manifests in real-time tactical discussions and historical knowledge threads that collectively produce richer analyses than any individual could generate.

These findings collectively establish that digital football fandom cannot be reduced to emotional expression or information distribution. At its most developed, a community like *@utdfocusid* constitutes a complex communication ecosystem in which collective identity, solidarity, and shared knowledge are actively and continuously constructed through participatory practice. Platform X's real-time, open architecture proves particularly conducive to this form of participatory culture, enabling the community to sustain and deepen itself across multiple dimensions simultaneously.

This study is limited by its focus on a single account and three primary data collection periods.

Future research should examine multiple fan accounts comparatively, incorporate fan interviews to capture subjective experiences of participation, and explore how the Participatory Culture framework applies across different platform architectures. Longitudinal studies tracking how these communities evolve in response to the club's on-field performance would also enrich understanding of the relationship between football results and participatory dynamics.

References

- Adnjani, M. D., & Supraja, M. (2025). Participatory culture in digital activism: Enhancing digital literacy in Indonesia. *Knowledge and Society*, 34–51.
<https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v10i30.20329>
- Asril, M. F., & Darmansyah, S. S. (2024). Manchester United dan makna kesetiaan: Studi fenomenologi loyalitas mahasiswa penggemar Manchester United. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 4, 124–138.
- Fadilah, M. R., & Putri, I. P. (2024). The influence of social media account X @Idextratime and verbal aggression on the fanaticism of Manchester United football club fans. *Indonesian Journal of Advanced Research*, 3(7), 1183–1200.
<https://doi.org/10.55927/IJAR.V3I7.10263>
- Harjono, A. C., Choirunnisa, Z., & Febriana, F. N. (2025). Konvergensi media di era digital: Tinjauan literatur sistematis tentang integrasi penyiaran digital dan media sosial dalam membangun keterlibatan audiens. *Jurnal Komunikasi Digital*, 2, 392–406.
- Hasan, D. Y., Savitri, L., & Utami, S. (2025). Pemanfaatan media sosial X untuk interaksi penggemar dalam mendukung idola. *Jurnal Media Sosial*, 387–395.
- Kennedy, H., Gonzales, J., & Pegoraro, A. (2021). Digital sport fandom. In *Routledge handbook of sport and new media* (pp. 261–272). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429342189-26>
- Lee, Y., & Park, S. (2025). Classifying and characterizing fandom activities: A focus on superfans' posting and commenting behaviors in a digital fandom community. *Journal of Fan Studies*, 1–28.
- Paiva, A., & Quintas-Mendes, A. (2024). Participatory culture and knowledge sharing among educators and scholars in higher education. *Educational Media International*, 61(1–2), 86–102.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2024.2357954>
- Piva, H. C. (2022). An overview of fan production and participatory culture in the digital age. *Fan Studies Journal*, 89–102.
- Rabbani, F. Z. (2024). Komunitas dan interaksi penonton pada siaran langsung di kanal YouTube NapLive. *Jurnal Media Digital*, 1(1), 406–415.
- Sanita Eka, A. S. (2025). Analisis psikolinguistik dalam komunikasi digital: Dampak penggunaan emoji terhadap ekspresi emosi pada mahasiswa. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 10, 486–497.
- Savitri, S. (2025). Identifikasi stan Twitter sebagai komunitas fandom yang dibayangkan. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 7(2020), 1–18.
- Witarti, D. I. (2026). Aktivitas nasionalisme digital: Studi netnografi fandom K Indonesia. *Komuniti: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Teknologi Informasi*, 1–28.