National Fandom and Digital Interaction in Esports: Indonesian and Filipino Netizens on YouTube during MSC

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Abstract

The rise of esports, particularly the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Southeast Asia Cup (MSC), has experienced significant growth in Southeast Asia, attracting millions of fans and creating a vibrant digital fanbase. This study investigates the fan engagement patterns of Indonesian and Filipino audiences, two of the most prominent contributors to the MSC fandom. Using YouTube comments from the 2022 and 2023 MSC championships, this research examines the interaction dynamics of each country's fans in response to their respective teams' performances during live tournaments. The analysis reveals distinctive national patterns in how fans express their emotions, including pride, anger, and loyalty, and how they engage in intra-country debates about team performances. The findings highlight how digital interactivity on platforms like YouTube fosters both bonding and bridging social capital within fan communities, influencing fans' emotional responses and the collective identity they form around their teams. This study provides a deeper understanding of fan culture in modern esports, particularly how national identity and cultural values shape online interactions. The insights from this research have significant implications for event organizers, game developers, and marketing strategists who aim to enhance fan engagement and foster positive fan dynamics in esports communities. By understanding the emotional and communicative behavior of esports fans, stakeholders can design strategies that improve fan experiences and cultivate inclusive, respectful fan environments.

Keywords: Esport Fandom, Interactivity, Mobile Legends Bang Bang, National Pride, Thematic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Esports, defined as organized competitive gaming involving professional players and teams, spans a wide range of video games, from first-person shooters to real-time strategy games (Formosa et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2023). The industry is characterized by its digital nature, with competitions often streamed online (Watanabe et al., 2022). The popularity of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) in Indonesia has been bolstered by increasing access to technology and a surge in public interest in the game. In esports, the popularity and achievements of professional teams can attract millions of fans worldwide. According to Giring

Ganesha, President of the "Indonesia E-Sports Premier League", Indonesia has 43.7 million active gamers, contributing to an economic impact of USD 879.7 million from the industry (Safitri, 2020).

This technological and economic growth has led esports organizations in Indonesia to establish professional Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) teams, providing opportunities for players to grow and compete at a global level. The Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Mid Season Cup (MSC) is a premier esports tournament that gathers the best teams from around the world, offering a platform for international competition and fan engagement (Šimić, 2024). Notably, Indonesia is home to RRQ Hoshi, the champion of the 2023 MSC, and Onic Esports, who won the 2022 MSC, both of whom have large fanbases (RRQ Kingdom and SONIC, respectively) (Echarts, 2022). Fans support their teams through various activities, such as wearing team uniforms, making banners, and organizing watch parties. These fan behaviors contribute to the growth of esports by promoting the popularity of Mobile Legends games (Subarkah et al., 2023). However, fans also engage in negative behaviors, such as verbal abuse and vulgarity, especially when their teams lose or underperform.

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia and the Philippines are two of the leading countries in the esports scene. Indonesia, with its 43.7 million active gamers (Safitri, 2020), and the Philippines, with its rapidly growing esports participation, are both dominant forces in the region in terms of active players and professional esports teams (Echarts, 2022). Teams like RRQ Hoshi and Onic Esports from Indonesia, and Blacklist International and Bren Esports from the Philippines, have cultivated vast and loyal fanbases. The performances of these teams in the 2022 and 2023 MSC tournaments have shaped fan cultures, evoking a range of emotional responses from their supporters.

The intense rivalry between Indonesia and the Philippines during these tournaments created a unique context for this research, with extreme emotions and expressions of national pride driving fan interactions. Indonesian fans, for example, expressed disappointment and anger following RRQ Hoshi's loss to the Philippines' RSG in 2022. Conversely, Filipino fans, even in the face of adversity, maintained strong support for their teams and expressed unwavering national pride. These behaviors reflect a deeper connection to national identity and loyalty to one's country, which play crucial roles in shaping fan engagement in esports (McMillan, 2006).

This study aims to explore how national pride and fan loyalty shape the online interactions of Indonesian and Filipino fans during esports tournaments. By

analyzing the YouTube comments made by fans, this research will examine the role of digital platforms in fostering national identity and social interactions among fans. Moreover, the findings will contribute to the understanding of how emotions, such as anger and pride, are expressed and moderated in digital spaces, offering valuable insights for esports organizers, game developers, and marketers interested in improving fan engagement and creating more inclusive and positive fan experiences.

Fan engagement in esports has become an integral aspect of its growth, with fans not only consuming content but also engaging interactively with it. Interactivity on platforms like YouTube allows fans to exchange messages, opinions, and support, which deepens emotional involvement and fosters a sense of connection between fans (Nedumkallel, 2020). Rafaeli and Sudweeks (2006) argue that such interactions, especially within online fan communities, reinforce emotional bonds and contribute to the sense of belonging within these digital spaces.

In esports, bridging social capital plays a pivotal role in fostering connections among fans from diverse social groups, facilitating the exchange of resources and ideas. This form of social capital allows individuals to transcend their immediate gaming communities, connecting with others from varying geographical locations and backgrounds (Ellison et al., 2007; Putnam, 2000). In particular, digital platforms like Discord and Twitch are crucial in enabling these interactions, offering spaces where fans can engage in discussions, share strategies, and form friendships that cross traditional social barriers (Menardo et al., 2022). The dynamics of rivalry within esports further amplify bridging social capital, as competitive interactions—whether hostile or playful—engage fans in meaningful ways, strengthening their connections and engagement (Granovetter, 1983). Additionally, esports engagement strategies, such as streaming events and community tournaments, harness bridging social capital to create inclusive, supportive environments. These activities encourage participation and foster a sense of community, enriching the esports experience by facilitating collective identities among fans (Nawaz et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2023).

Bonding social capital plays a critical role in the esports community by fostering strong, supportive connections within homogeneous groups, such as fans of specific teams or games. This form of social capital is crucial for cultivating a sense of belonging and emotional support, which enhances the overall fan experience and the sense of solidarity among fans and players alike (Ellison et al., 2007). In esports, bonding social capital is primarily manifested through shared experiences and interactions among fans. These interactions, whether through cheering for a favorite team, participating in local tournaments, or engaging in online discussions, foster emotional investment and loyalty, not only to teams but also to fellow fans

(Ribeiro et al., 2023). Emotional attachment to players further strengthens bonding social capital, as spectators who feel a deep connection to players are more likely to engage in community activities, creating tight-knit communities that offer support and encouragement, particularly in competitive environments (Navarro-Lucena et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the dimensions of interactivity (Quiring & Schweiger, 2008) are crucial in understanding fan interactions in digital spaces. Key elements such as playfulness, connectedness, sense of presence, and immersion shape the fan experience. Playfulness enhances engagement by making interactions enjoyable, while connectedness fosters a sense of social interaction and belonging (Ha & James, 1998; Putnam, 2000). The sense of presence refers to the feeling of being truly "present" in the digital environment, while immersion describes the level of engagement that makes users feel fully absorbed in the experience (Short et al., 1976; Vorderer, 1992).

To further contextualize fan interactions in esports environments, it is useful to consider theoretical perspectives that address cross-cultural communication patterns, emotionally driven engagement, and the structural affordances of online platforms. In addition to interactivity and social capital, several complementary theoretical frameworks can enhance understanding of digital fan behavior in esports contexts. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (2011), particularly the constructs of power distance and collectivism, provides a foundational perspective on how national cultures shape communication norms and emotional expression. Power distance reflects the extent to which individuals accept hierarchical structures, while collectivism emphasizes group cohesion and loyalty over individual autonomy (Hofstede, 2011).

These cultural values can influence how fans interpret and express support or criticism within online communities. Furthermore, the concept of digital emotion contagion helps explain how emotional expressions spread rapidly in online environments. Goldenberg and Gross (2020) define this phenomenon as the mirroring of emotions across users in digital spaces, often exacerbated by algorithmic amplification of high-arousal content. In asynchronous and text-based comment threads, such as those on YouTube, emotion contagion can intensify collective responses and contribute to polarized discourse. Relatedly, prior research has identified toxic behavior—including cyberbullying, flaming, and verbal aggression—as a common occurrence in competitive online communities (Kwak et al., 2015). Suler (2004) online disinhibition effect attributes such behavior to the affordances of digital environments, including anonymity, invisibility, and lack of immediate social consequences, which lower psychological barriers to hostile

expression. Together, these frameworks offer critical insights into the cultural, emotional, and technological mechanisms that influence fan interactions and emotional dynamics in esports-related digital spaces.

Through these theoretical frameworks, this research aims to understand how interactivity and social capital influence the dynamics of fan engagement and emotional expression during esports tournaments, with a particular focus on the interactions between Indonesian and Filipino fans in the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing thematic analysis to explore the interactions of Indonesian and Filipino netizens during the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) Mid Season Cup (MSC) tournaments in 2022 and 2023. The primary objective of this study is to examine how fans engage with content related to their own national teams' performances and to identify the emotional expressions associated with these interactions on the YouTube platform.

The data for this study were gathered from the YouTube comment sections of official Mobile Legends and MPL channels, which hosted live streams of the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments. YouTube was selected because of its high level of fan interaction, enabling real-time commentary and engagement during the live broadcasts. The 2022 and 2023 MSC tournaments were specifically chosen for analysis because they represent the newest available data at the time of the research. These tournaments provided a timely snapshot of fan behavior, making them relevant to the study's investigation of contemporary fan engagement.

The comments were selected using the web tool ExportComments.com, which randomly collects comments from the comment section after the live broadcast ends. This tool retrieves comments from a large pool of user-generated content, and while the selection process is random, it ensures a diverse range of fan reactions to the tournament content. A total of 100 comments per video were extracted, resulting in a total of 400 comments. The random selection method provides a broad representation of fan interactions, although it does not prioritize comments based on emotional tone or content relevance.
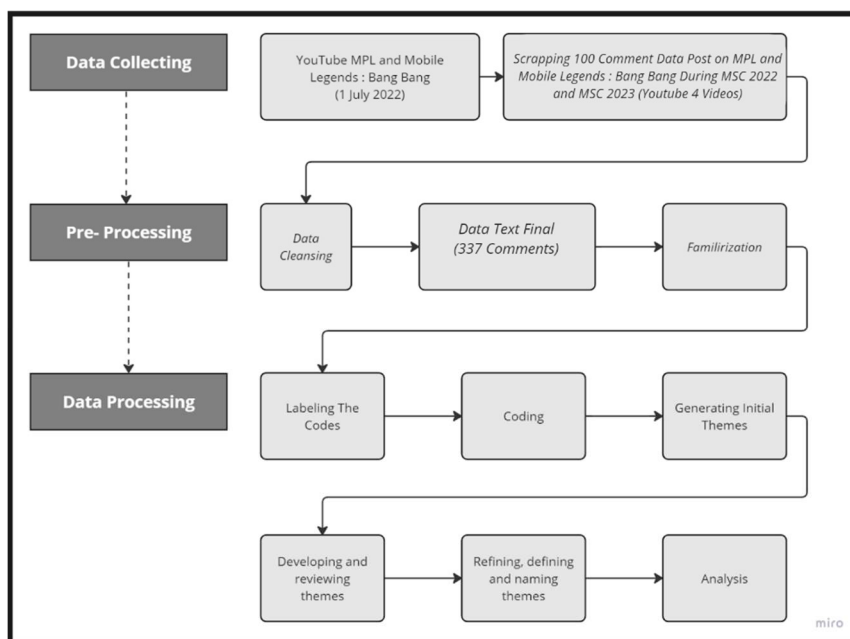
Figure 1. Data Analysis Technique
Source: Researcher (2023)

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that identifies and interprets recurring patterns within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The process began with the research team reading all 337 comments to develop a broad familiarity with the content and observe initial patterns, including emotional tones such as support, disappointment, pride, and rivalry. To ensure the credibility and dependability of the analysis, the study applied researcher triangulation as recommended by Nowell et al., (2017). Multiple researchers independently coded a subset of the data using a collaboratively developed codebook. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, allowing for refinement of the thematic categories and ensuring consistency across the analysis. This approach minimized researcher bias and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

Next, the comments were coded based on the emotional content they expressed. These codes were designed to capture key themes such as supportive behavior, anger, pride, and disappointment. Once the initial coding was completed, the codes were grouped into broader themes. The key themes that emerged from the analysis included national pride, emotional expression, competitiveness and rivalry, and fan loyalty. The themes were refined and reviewed to ensure that they accurately represented the content of the comments and addressed the research questions.

Finally, the themes were analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of how fan behavior was influenced by national identity and team performance. This analysis was guided by the theoretical frameworks of interactivity, social capital, and emotion, providing insights into how fans expressed their support for their teams and interacted with other fans on YouTube. The thematic analysis highlighted the complex emotional and social dynamics within the fan communities of Indonesia and the Philippines.

Although the study did not involve direct interaction with human participants, it adhered to established ethical guidelines standards for digital communication research, particularly in the use of publicly available data. All comments analyzed were sourced from open-access YouTube comment sections related to the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments, accessible without login barriers. To ensure user privacy, no personally identifiable information—such as usernames, profile photos, or channel names—was collected or disclosed. Data were treated with strict confidentiality, analyzed in aggregate thematic form, and used solely for academic purposes. The study followed ethical principles of anonymization and responsible data handling in accordance with widely accepted guidelines for internet-mediated research (Townsend & Wallace, 2016), balancing the goals of scholarly analysis with the imperative to minimize potential harm to individuals whose digital traces were examined.

One limitation of this study is the focus on YouTube comments, which may not fully capture the entire spectrum of fan engagement on other platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, or Discord). Additionally, the study only considered textual comments, which may not fully reflect the complexity of fan emotions or the variety of interactions fans have across different media forms. Future research could expand this study by exploring fan behavior on multiple platforms and incorporating other forms of fan engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the descriptive findings of fan interactions from Indonesian and Filipino commenters during the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments, as observed in the YouTube comment sections. A total of 337 relevant comments were analyzed using thematic analysis. The identified themes were categorized based on dimensions of social capital, interactivity, and emotional expression. This section reports the dominant thematic combinations separately for Indonesian and Filipino fans.

Table 1. Indonesian theme combination, data under 5% are omitted

Perceived Bridging Social Capital	Perceived Bonding Social Capital	Interactivity Dimension	Reactance	Percentage (%)
Competitiveness and Rivalry	Collective Identity	Immersion	Anger	19.81%
Competitiveness and Rivalry	Sense of Belonging	Immersion	Anger	13.81%
Identification with Nation and Club	Collective Identity	Sense of Presence	Anger	11.60%
Identification with of nation or club	Collective Identity	Sense of Presence	Happiness	8.84%

Source: Researcher (2023)

This is the thematic combinations that emerged from the YouTube comments posted by Indonesian fans during the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments. Out of the total 337 comments analyzed in this study, four major theme combinations from Indonesian commenters met the threshold of 5% or more and are thus included in this result. This theme combination was the most dominant in the Indonesian data set, accounting for 19.81% of the total comments analyzed. Comments in this category expressed strong engagement with the competitive dynamics of the match, often focusing on Indonesia's rivalry with the Philippines or other regional opponents. These comments frequently reflected group alignment, emphasizing the identity of the commenter as part of the Indonesian esports community or as supporters of specific national teams such as RRQ Hoshi or Onic Esports. The mode of interaction demonstrated immersive involvement in the gameplay, with comments reflecting emotional and psychological investment in the match outcomes. The most recurring emotional tone in this theme was anger, often directed at perceived injustices, poor team performance, or rival teams.

The second most frequent combination involved competitiveness and rivalry, this time paired with a sense of belonging rather than collective identity. This theme represented 13.81% of the total Indonesian comments. While the theme still centered on the match's competitive context, the emphasis shifted slightly toward the fan's personal attachment to the fanbase or national group. Comments under

this combination often showed users identifying with a community of supporters, sharing frustration and emotional intensity as a group. The use of immersive language and reactions further indicated a deep sense of involvement. Anger remained the most prominent affective response in this group, showing that personal and group disappointment with performance outcomes was a recurring emotional driver.

The third most dominant theme combination, appearing in 11.60% of the data, featured fan interactions centered around identification with both the national team and specific esports clubs. This identification was paired with expressions of collective identity, further emphasizing the fan's alignment with the broader Indonesian esports community. Unlike the more immersive forms of interaction in the previous categories, this theme involved a strong sense of presence, where fans positioned themselves not just as supporters but as participants in the digital space of the broadcast. This presence was marked by verbal gestures of national pride, player affiliation, and team alignment. Despite the strong identification, the emotional response remained predominantly anger, indicating dissatisfaction or disappointment either with outcomes or the conduct of the match.

The final major theme combination comprised 8.84% of the Indonesian comments and represented one of the few clusters where the dominant emotion expressed was happiness. As with the previous category, these comments revolved around identification with the national team or specific esports clubs. Fans often referred to victories or positive performances by Onic Esports or RRQ Hoshi, reinforcing their alignment with a collective Indonesian identity. Interaction remained anchored in a sense of presence, but the emotional tone here was celebratory. Happiness in this case reflected a moment of national or team pride and a sense of successful representation on the international stage.

Table 2. Filipino theme combination, data under 5% are omitted

Perceived Bridging Social Capital	Perceived Bonding Social Capital	Interactivity Dimension	Reactance	Percentage (%)
Identification with nation or club	Collective Identity	Sense of Presence	Happiness	23.08%
Competitiveness and Rivalry	Collective Identity	Sense of Presence	Happiness	10.26%
Competitiveness and Rivalry	Collective Identity	Immersion	Anger	8.97%
Mitigating Conflict and building Bridges	Shared Values and Beliefs	Sense of Presence	Happiness	7.05%
Competitiveness and Rivalry	Collective Identity	Immersion	Happiness	6.41%

Source: Researcher (2023)

Meanwhile, the YouTube comments posted by Filipino fans during the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments has five dominant theme combinations. This theme combination accounted for the largest portion of Filipino fan comments, comprising 23.08% of the analyzed data. Comments in this group were characterized by strong expressions of national or team identification, often referencing the country (Philippines) or specific esports clubs such as Blacklist International. These expressions were anchored in a collective identity, as commenters positioned themselves as members of a shared community. The mode of interaction showed a sense of presence, indicating a heightened awareness of being part of the fan environment, especially during matches or critical moments. Emotional responses were overwhelmingly positive, with happiness being the dominant emotional tone in this theme. The language used often celebrated achievements, showed encouragement, or simply expressed pride in being part of the Filipino fanbase.

The second most frequently occurring combination involved competitiveness and rivalry as a bridging element, alongside collective identity, and a sense of presence. This theme accounted for 10.26% of the comments. Unlike typical rivalry discourses that may invoke negative emotions, this category featured expressions of joy, enthusiasm, and pride within the context of competitive play. Comments in this category were often celebratory in tone and reflected excitement in the context of regional or team-based competition. The emphasis on sense of presence indicated that fans perceived themselves as actively engaged in the moment of the game or its surrounding conversations.

This theme was notable for being the only Filipino theme where anger was the dominant emotion. It represented 8.97% of the comments. These responses were primarily triggered by the dynamics of rivalry and the immersive nature of fan interaction. Fans who fell into this group often expressed frustration, disappointment, or criticism in reaction to game events or outcomes. Immersion, as coded in this theme, was reflected in comments that emphasized real-time match events, player actions, or competitive intensity. The anger expressed in these comments was situated within a framework of loyalty to a team or national identity, as indicated by the collective identity dimension.

This thematic combination made up 7.05% of the analyzed Filipino comments and featured a distinctive tone compared to other categories. The bridging social capital dimension here was oriented toward mitigating conflict and building bridges, indicating a desire to reduce tension and foster positive relations, particularly in the context of international or inter-fandom discourse. Bonding capital was framed through shared values and beliefs, often centered around sportsmanship, perseverance, and mutual respect. The comments were rooted in a sense of presence and maintained a positive emotional valence, with happiness being the predominant response. This category stood out for its emphasis on reconciliation, encouragement, and the desire to maintain harmony despite the competitive nature of the event.

The final category of notable size, accounting for 6.41% of the Filipino comment sample, featured a mix of competitive engagement, group identification, and immersive interaction, all expressed through a tone of happiness. This theme shared structural similarities with the earlier 10.26% category but differed by emphasizing immersion over sense of presence. The comments in this group often demonstrated active involvement in game strategy, close following of match events, and detailed observations of player performance. Despite the intense engagement and rivalry context, the emotional tone remained positive, with fans expressing satisfaction, gratitude, and excitement toward their teams' performance and efforts.

Discussion

The findings reveal contrasting emotional and communicative patterns between Indonesian and Filipino esports fans during the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments, particularly in how fans express national identity, emotional alignment, and community affiliation on YouTube. These differences are interpreted through the lenses of interactivity theory, social capital, and social identity frameworks. Among Indonesian fans, anger emerged as the dominant emotional tone, particularly in the context of competitive losses. Approximately 33.62% of Indonesian comments reflected anger, often aligned with immersive engagement and expressions of collective identity.

This high emotional investment is consistent with literature on online sports fandoms, where negative emotional expressions such as blame, mockery, or aggression intensify during high-stakes events (Dubé & Darmody, 2025; Parsakia & Jafari, 2023). In this context, immersion appears to function as a double-edged sword: while it deepens user involvement, it can also amplify reactivity and hostility. For example, fans continued to display aggression in comment sections even after victories, not just in defeat—suggesting that emotional expression was driven by competitive identity assertion as much as by outcomes.

In contrast, Filipino fans predominantly expressed happiness and optimism, even in moments of defeat. Comments reflecting national pride, encouragement, and resilience dominated the Filipino dataset. This emotional steadiness is aligned with social identity theory, which posits that strong group affiliation often promotes in-group reinforcement and loyalty even under pressure (Cui, 2023; Fenton et al., 2023). Emotional expression among Filipino fans was framed less by performance-based allegiance and more by stable cultural narratives of unity and perseverance. These affective dynamics also map onto broader patterns of social capital. Indonesian fans exhibited bonding social capital—supportive of in-group cohesion—but at times at the expense of cross-group dialogue. This is evident in the taunting and mockery directed toward rival teams and their supporters, particularly Filipino teams. Bridging social capital, in contrast, was more visible in Filipino responses, especially in theme combinations focused on mitigating conflict and upholding shared values (7.05% of cases). These findings reflect different uses of interactivity within the YouTube comment space: for Indonesian fans, interactivity became a tool for assertive dominance and emotional release, whereas Filipino fans used it to build presence, encouragement, and collective support.

The results also highlight the relevance of interactivity theory in shaping fan engagement. Indonesian fans' behavior, strongly tied to immersion, aligns with

Rafaeli and Sudweeks (2006) second-order interactivity, where participants not only respond to content but also react to other users' reactions. This type of engagement often increases emotional intensity and group identity salience. In contrast, Filipino fans demonstrated more engagement through sense of presence, which fosters emotional identification without necessarily escalating conflict. This indicates that different dimensions of interactivity can produce divergent community dynamics depending on cultural context and group norms.

Moreover, Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2011) provide a framework for interpreting these national differences in fan behavior. Filipino fan behavior—characterized by supportiveness, restraint, and emotional consistency—is reflective of high power distance and collectivist orientations, which encourage deference, loyalty, and group harmony. Indonesian fans, while also collectivist, may be more expressive in digital settings due to cultural tolerance for confrontational yet communal discourse. These cultural values influence the way emotions such as anger or pride are socially acceptable or encouraged in fan communities.

In terms of emotion contagion, the patterns observed suggest that online comment sections function as emotionally charged spaces where collective expressions are not only shared but amplified. Goldenberg and Gross (2020) describe digital emotion contagion as the mirroring and escalation of emotions in online platforms. This phenomenon helps explain how individual expressions of disappointment or celebration rapidly evolve into broader emotional currents that characterize entire comment threads. Anger in Indonesian comment clusters and happiness in Filipino ones likely reflect such contagion, facilitated by algorithmic amplification and asynchronous, text-based interactions.

Finally, the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004) may further explain the intensity of fan discourse in comment sections. The anonymity and lack of immediate consequences in digital spaces allow users to express themselves with less restraint. For Indonesian fans, this often manifested as aggressive or mocking behavior, especially in highly competitive contexts. Conversely, Filipino fans appeared to maintain self-regulation, possibly shaped by cultural norms or community expectations.

Emotional Tone and Reactance

Indonesian fans frequently exhibited negative emotional expressions, particularly following defeats. The prevalence of anger (over 30% combined) suggests a high emotional investment in competitive outcomes. This aligns with the concept of emotional expressions and toxicity in online sports fandoms, where frustration and

blame often surface in response to perceived failure in high-stakes contexts (Dubé & Darmody, 2025; Parsakia & Jafari, 2023). Following RRQ Hoshi's loss to RSG in MSC 2022, comments included direct insults and expressions of disappointment.

Notably, even after Onic Esports' victory, many Indonesian fans continued to mock the opposing team, indicating that emotional reactivity is driven not only by performance outcomes but also by a desire to assert dominance and self-identity (Suler, 2004). This aligns with the online disinhibition effect, where anonymity and lack of immediate consequences in digital platforms allow users to express hostility without the usual social restraint (Suler, 2004).

In contrast, Filipino fans responded with greater emotional restraint and positivity. Even after Blacklist International's defeat, fans expressed gratitude, encouragement, and optimism, demonstrating emotional resilience and a community-based sportsmanship ethos. These findings align with social identity theory (Cui, 2023; Fenton et al., 2023; Li & Pang, 2024), where group affiliation fosters positive in-group reinforcement, even amid setbacks. Happiness, as a recurring emotional tone, reflects stable loyalty rather than performance-based allegiance. This stable emotional stance is also indicative of the high power distance and collectivist orientation in Filipino culture, where group solidarity and mutual respect are prioritized over individual competitive emotions (Hofstede, 2011).

Comment Types: Taunting vs. Constructive Feedback

The behavior of Indonesian fans often skewed toward taunting, mocking, and hostile competitiveness, particularly in their comments directed at Filipino teams. This behavior is consistent with intergroup conflict theory, which posits that competitive environments increase out-group antagonism, especially in situations where group identity is salient (Cui, 2023; Fenton et al., 2023; Li & Pang, 2024). In the context of esports fandoms, fans who feel strongly aligned with their own team are more likely to engage in behaviors that assert dominance over opposing groups, even when such behaviors are socially harmful. The bonding social capital observed in these exchanges—where loyalty to the team is reinforced—often comes at the expense of bridging social capital, which fosters cross-group dialogue and mutual respect. This suggests that the strong in-group cohesion seen in Indonesian fans can sometimes limit opportunities for intergroup reconciliation or shared emotional expression.

On the other hand, Filipino fans leaned more toward constructive feedback and emotional support. Many of the comments expressed phrases like "Proud of you" or "We'll come back stronger," which align with autonomy-supportive interactions

as proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985). These interactions emphasize the importance of encouragement, self-determination, and positive reinforcement, even when faced with adversity. Unlike the aggressive responses seen in Indonesian fan behavior, Filipino fans engaged with their team's performance in ways that both supported the team and maintained social harmony within the fandom. This type of feedback reflects the bonding social capital characteristic of Filipino fans, where shared values and emotional resilience are prioritized. It also shows a more emotionally regulated form of interaction that helps to strengthen the sense of community and reduces the escalation of negative feelings, even after competitive losses.

These contrasting comment behaviors highlight the different uses of interactivity in the YouTube comment space. For Indonesian fans, interactivity often served as a mechanism for assertive dominance and emotional release, allowing fans to express frustration and dissatisfaction directly toward rival teams. In contrast, Filipino fans used interactivity more constructively to build collective identity, offer emotional support, and foster a sense of presence within the fan community. This reflects the dimensions of interactivity theory, where immersion (as seen in Indonesian fans) and sense of presence (as seen in Filipino fans) significantly influence how fans engage emotionally and socially with each other in digital spaces.

Interactivity and Fan Engagement

Applying Quiring and Schweiger (2008) dimensions of Interactivity, the findings indicate that Indonesian fan behavior was heavily tied to immersion, which amplifies emotional reactivity. Immersion is the sense of being fully absorbed in the digital environment, making fans feel as though they are part of the action. This emotional involvement tends to intensify reactions, particularly in highly competitive contexts. As Rafaeli and Sudweeks (2006) suggest, second-order interactivity, where users react not just to content but to other users' emotional expressions, escalates the emotional intensity in the comment sections. For Indonesian fans, this immersion likely contributed to their high levels of anger and aggressive responses to both performance failures and successes. Fans deeply immersed in game narratives are more likely to adopt combative or emotionally intense engagement styles, as they perceive the outcome of the match as an extension of their own identity and self-worth. This dynamic can lead to toxic behaviors such as mockery and insults, as emotional reactance overrides the desire for cooperative engagement.

Conversely, Filipino fans engaged more through sense of presence, which focuses on the feeling of being there and emotionally identifying with the experience, rather

than immersing themselves entirely in the narrative or competitive intensity. This dimension of interactivity, according to Quiring and Schweiger (2008), promotes a more emotionally regulated and supportive form of engagement. For Filipino fans, sense of presence facilitated positive reinforcement and group solidarity even during periods of rivalry or defeat. By feeling connected to their community and players, they engaged through words of encouragement, resilience, and praise. This type of engagement also aligns with Deci and Ryan (1985) autonomy-supportive interactions, where fans offer emotional support while respecting individual and collective autonomy, even if the team's performance is subpar. The sense of presence encourages a collective experience, where fans feel connected to the event but not overwhelmed by the competitive stress that drives more extreme emotional reactions.

This difference between immersion and sense of presence not only affects emotional reactions but also shapes how fans interact with one another. In the case of Indonesian fans, the strong sense of immersion results in fans engaging in more intense, reactive, and sometimes hostile behaviors in comment sections. They actively express their emotional involvement by displaying pride, anger, or frustration through direct engagement with other users, especially in relation to national or team identity. On the other hand, Filipino fans, while emotionally invested, appear to use sense of presence to foster a more supportive and inclusive atmosphere within their fan community. Their comments tend to be emotionally stabilizing, reinforcing feelings of belonging and shared identity regardless of the match outcome.

Ultimately, the dimensions of interactivity—immersion and sense of presence—are shown to have distinct impacts on fan engagement. The degree of immersion determines how emotionally reactive and combative fans become, while the sense of presence promotes a more emotionally regulated and supportive form of engagement. The contrasting engagement styles observed between Indonesian and Filipino fans underscore the significance of platform affordances (such as comment sections and live streaming) and cultural context in shaping fan behavior.

National Pride and Social Capital

National pride was a central motivator in both Indonesian and Filipino fan behavior, though it was expressed in distinct ways reflecting their respective cultural contexts. Indonesian fans linked national pride closely with competitive superiority, which often manifested as dominance over rivals. This emotional attachment to team success fueled comments that were aggressive or mocking, particularly directed at opposing teams. The pride associated with victory was frequently

accompanied by expressions of mockery or disparagement aimed at rival teams, especially Filipino teams. This behavior aligns with the concept of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), where loyalty to one's own group is reinforced, sometimes at the expense of external relations. Fans within this group exhibited deep emotional connections with the team, where competitive success translated into social validation and in-group solidarity.

However, this bonding capital came with its own limitations. The intense loyalty within the Indonesian fandom often led to exclusionary behavior toward rival fans, particularly those from Filipino communities. Such interactions illustrate how intergroup conflict theory (Cui, 2023; Fenton et al., 2023) can contribute to negative emotional exchanges, particularly in highly competitive environments like esports tournaments. Fans who feel a strong connection to their team may experience heightened levels of emotional arousal and frustration when their team faces setbacks, resulting in hostile comments directed at rivals. The lack of bridging capital in these interactions, where meaningful dialogue between groups is absent, contributes to a toxic fandom culture that perpetuates negativity and out-group antagonism.

In contrast, Filipino fans expressed national pride more through unity and shared cultural values, even in the face of defeat. Their comments often reflected gratitude, encouragement, and perseverance, demonstrating an emotionally resilient approach to fan engagement. This behavior reflects the bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) where, even amidst competitive loss, Filipino fans found ways to support one another and build solidarity. The concept of bridging capital is especially evident in the way Filipino fans engaged in cross-group emotional regulation, attempting to maintain a positive atmosphere even when faced with rivals' mockery or hostile behavior. These fans encouraged not only their team but also expressed pride in the team's efforts and resilience, fostering inclusive interactions that extended beyond in-group loyalty.

The expression of national pride among Filipino fans is closely tied to cultural values such as collectivism, mutual respect, and solidarity—values that are strongly embedded in Filipino culture. The high power distance in Filipino culture also encourages respect for authority, which may explain the more restrained and respectful tone in their fan engagement. Filipino fans, unlike their Indonesian counterparts, did not frame their national pride in terms of rival dominance but rather as group cohesion and a collective identity. This reflects the low-conflict and high-respect approach seen in other collectivist cultures, where pride is expressed inwardly (within the group) rather than outwardly through aggressive competition. Both fan groups demonstrated bonding social capital but utilized it differently: Indonesian fans formed strong internal bonds around their competitive identity,

often at the expense of bridging capital. Filipino fans, in contrast, bridged their social connections not only within their fanbase but also attempted to build positive connections with fans of rival teams, even when faced with adversity. The sense of national pride within both groups acted as a driving force behind fan loyalty and emotional investment, but the expression of pride in each community revealed fundamental differences in cultural orientation and group dynamics.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that national pride is an essential element in understanding fan behavior but must be interpreted in relation to the social capital each group utilizes. Indonesian fans tend to prioritize bonding social capital, which can fuel intense, competitive emotions but also hinder positive interactions with rival groups. In contrast, Filipino fans demonstrate a more balanced approach, blending bridging social capital with bonding capital, allowing for emotional resilience and group solidarity even in the face of loss. These differences underscore the importance of cultural values in shaping online fan engagement, and they highlight the need for further research on how cultural dimensions influence digital fan behavior across different communities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the emotional and communicative behaviors of Indonesian and Filipino esports fans by analyzing YouTube comments during the MSC 2022 and 2023 tournaments. The findings reveal distinct national patterns of digital engagement shaped by emotional tone, interactivity, and expressions of social capital. Indonesian fans were more likely to express anger and dominance-oriented pride, often through taunting and negative intergroup discourse, particularly after competitive outcomes. In contrast, Filipino fans consistently demonstrated loyalty, encouragement, and optimism—even in defeat—underscoring a culture of constructive engagement and emotional solidarity.

The study contributes to a growing body of literature on digital fandoms in Southeast Asia by applying an interdisciplinary framework combining interactivity theory, social capital, and emotion research. The contrasting fan behaviors illustrate how national identity and cultural values manifest in mediated communication, offering valuable insight into how audiences co-construct narratives of pride, rivalry, and belonging on digital platforms. Practically, these findings can inform esports organizers, platform moderators, and digital marketers in shaping healthier and more inclusive fan environments. Understanding the emotional logic behind digital fan behavior can aid in designing community engagement strategies that balance competitive enthusiasm with mutual respect.

Future research should broaden the data sources across platforms (e.g., TikTok, X/Twitter, Discord) and incorporate cross-cultural interviews or sentiment analysis to further validate and contextualize online behaviors. As esports continues to expand globally, understanding the sociocultural dimensions of digital fandom will be increasingly essential in fostering inclusive and sustainable gaming communities. Altogether, these findings underscore the complex interplay between national identity, emotional dynamics, and platform design in shaping online fan engagement in Indonesia and Filipino. They reaffirm the critical role of digital platforms like YouTube in fostering both bonding and bridging social capital within and across fan communities. By understanding these dynamics, esports organizers, community managers, and platform designers can create more inclusive, constructive, and respectful fan environments, ultimately enhancing the sustainability of the region's vibrant digital fandoms.

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