Social Media as a Catalyst for Supporter Conflicts and Riots in Indonesia

Andi Ahmad Hasan Tenriliweng*, Novia Fridayanti

Department of Sociologi, Faculty of Social and Politic Scoencies, Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia
*Corresponding author, e-mail: ahmadhasan@unhas.ac.id

ABSTRACT

In the digital age, social media has become a primary means of communication and interaction among football supporters in Indonesia. Beyond serving as a platform for sharing information and building communities, social media also acts as a catalyst for conflict between supporters, sometimes escalating into riots. This study aims to analyze how social media facilitates the spread of provocation, hate speech, and misinformation, which contribute to heightened tensions between supporter groups. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, the research examines several instances of fan conflict in Indonesia that were triggered by social media activity, including the communication patterns used by fans of Indonesia's League 1 and League 2 clubs. The findings reveal that social media accelerates and broadens the reach of provocative content, reinforces polarization, and intensifies rivalries through emotionally charged and partisan narratives. Moreover, social media algorithms tend to amplify exposure to such content, thereby increasing the likelihood of real-world conflicts. In conclusion, while social media holds the potential to foster solidarity among football supporters, without proper regulation and digital literacy, these platforms can become key drivers of unrest with harmful consequences for multiple stakeholders.

Keywords: Conflict; Football Supporters; Provocation; Riots; Social Media

ABSTRAK

Media sosial telah menjadi sarana utama dalam komunikasi dan interaksi di era digital, termasuk dalam ranah suporter sepak bola di Indonesia. Namun, selain menjadi platform untuk berbagi informasi dan membangun komunitas, media sosial juga berperan sebagai katalisator konflik antar suporter yang berujung pada kerusuhan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana media sosial memfasilitasi penyebaran provokasi, ujaran kebencian, serta misinformasi yang memicu eskalasi ketegangan antar kelompok suporter. Dengan menggunakan studi kasus pendekatan kualitatif penelitian ini mengkaji berbagai kasus konflik suporter di indonesia yang dipicu oleh aktivitas media sosial, termasuk pola komunikasi yang digunakan para suporter Liga 1 dan Liga 2 Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial mempercepat dan memperluas jangkauan provokasi, memperkuat polarisasi, serta memperburuk rivalitas melalui narasi yang bersifat emosional dan partisan. Selain itu, algoritma media sosial cenderung memperkuat eksposur terhadap konten yang bersifat provokatif, sehingga meningkatkan kemungkinan terjadinya konflik di dunia nyata.. Kesimpulannya, meskipun media sosial memiliki potensi untuk membangun solidaritas di kalangan suporter, tanpa pengelolaan yang baik, platform ini justru dapat menjadi pemicu utama kerusuhan yang merugikan banyak pihak.

Kata Kunci: Konflik; Suporter Sepak bola; Provokasi, Kerusuhan; Media Sosial

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become more critical in the sports industry for ticket sales, special deals, activating sponsorships, live game updates, and behind-the-scenes pictures and video sharing. Its

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affordability, which benefits businesses with limited resources, significantly drives its increase (Eagleman, 2013). Social networking has helped to close the supposed divide between athletes and supporters (Pegoraro, 2010). Athletes use these outlets to create fan connections, strengthen their brand, get sponsorships, and share personal experiences (Geurin, 2017). Following Grönroos (2004), Abeza et al. (2017) argue that companies should use social media to establish relationships using value-creation, communication, and participation activities. Since social media is easily accessible, sports disseminate event news (Filo et al., 2015; Pedersen, 2014). Digital platform content and social issues are connected. According to the agenda-setting theory, the media's focus on specific topics shapes the public's view of what is important (Rowe, 2014). Research on social media related to sports has helped one to understand user profiles in many different settings better (Clavio, 2011; Clavio & Walsh, 2014). Studies indicate that communicating with sports organizations makes fans happy, which motivates them to keep creating content for these platforms (Mahan, 2011). Sports social media research mainly addresses a range of subjects with an eye on user interactions.

According to Stiehler and Horky (2018), social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, have recently become increasingly significant in sports communication. Many football supporters on social media are essentially "followers," meaning they hardly engage with the clubs they support (Fenton & Helleu, 2019; Gibson, 2012). Syaputra (2016) claims that supporters are passionate football fans who think, talk, and focus on their chosen team. People often fight on social media to disseminate knowledge about their team using particular hashtags.

Though little research has been done, the public's view of sports fans is mainly positive. Sports enthusiasts are often considered more physically and socially appealing than fans of science fiction or fantasy (Cohen et al., 2017; Wann, Schinner, & Keenan, 2001). However, hooliganism is connected to several subcultures within sports fandom, such as Van Hiel, Hautman, Cornelis, and De Clercq (2007). Different degrees of participation among fans may cause them to acquire knowledge differently (Potter & Keene, 2012).

Football may be played in many ways outside of attending live events; hence, fans may remain involved even if they are not physically present. Motives significantly affect qualities such as club loyalty, match attendance, and loyalty growth (Funk & Brunn, 2007; McDonald et al., 2010). People exhibit their passion for sports by playing games and watching them on TV or the internet. This (Wann et al., 2001; Bauer et al., 2008) shows their passion for the game. Sports team fans use traditional approaches—such as going to games—and modern ones—such as joining online forums—to build a fan community (Kozinets, 1999). Lawrence and Crawford (2021) refer to the growing corpus of research on football supporters in the Internet age under the heading "digital football studies." Fans of the sport increasingly interact with digital tools such as video games (Crawford, 2015), podcasts (Pipini, 2018; Rivers & Ross, 2019), and peer-to-peer live streaming (David et al., 2017).

Due to the media's extensive coverage of sports, they are often used as platforms for disseminating political messages. In extreme cases, terrorist groups may target major sports events to amplify their propaganda (Atkinson & Young, 2008; Toohey & Taylor, 2008; Sugden, 2012). Building strong, trusting relationships with fans is essential for sports teams. However, social media can also amplify negative emotions, especially in competitive or hostile settings. Haq and Yudhistira (2022) suggest that football fan enthusiasm can escalate into divisive discourse, as online forums often intensify negative sentiments toward rival clubs.

This highlights the dual nature of social media—it can foster community and loyalty but also incite conflict. While it facilitates engagement and communication among football fans, it also serves as a platform for hate speech and protest organizations. Clubs and sports organizations must be aware of these dynamics and act responsibly in managing the complexities of modern fandom. The influence of social media on football-related violence and conflict is multifaceted. The technology has altered fan interactions, often intensifying rivalries and hostility. Unmoderated discussions on social platforms can propagate inflammatory content, increasing the risk of violence. Ben-Shalom et al. (2017) link spikes in football-related violence to the frequency, timing, and nature of illegal online activities. This suggests that social media does not merely reflect existing tensions—it actively fuels them. Moreover, the media often underrepresents football players in discussions of aggression, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing cycles of animosity (Junaedi & Sukmono, 2020).

Sometimes, the rejection of supporters is evident in damaging and violent behaviors (Rookwood & Spaaij, 2017). Natural climaxes—unplanned, intense expressions of collective emotion—occur when enthusiastic supporters create a social scene free from organizational design or direction. Bradford and Sherry (2015) describe English football as a "spectator-oriented conflict" whereby rival supporters

imitate intergroup violence inspired by the essential nature of the sport. Collins (2016) agrees, noting that most supporters become actively involved in this conflict.

Voight (2008) outlines the difficulties of officiating, "making challenging decisions," "conflict between officiating and professional responsibilities," and "conflict between officiating and familial responsibilities." The spread of false or harmful content on internet forums often fuels rivalries, a significant source of fan violence. The conflict between Perserikatan Sepak Sleman and Perserikatan Sepak Indonesia Mataram shows in Yogyakarta how strong loyalty may lead to violence, usually encouraged by stories shared on social media (Ah Ahmad, 2023).

Furthermore, negative perceptions of specific fan groups shaped by online discourse may lead to psychological stress and further conflict (Prastyawan & Junaedi, 2018). Globalization has amplified these issues. The European hooligan culture—accessible through social media—has influenced some Indonesian fan communities (Hendika & Nuraeni, 2020). This results in the imitation and internalization of violent behaviors as part of fan identity. The Kanjuruhan Football Disaster in Malang exemplifies how social media can be used to coordinate events, express opinions, and mobilize political and social support (Purwaningtyas et al., 2023).

From a criminological perspective, examining these acts of violence is essential. Research shows that media literacy interventions for fan groups and activists may help counteract the effects of disinformation and incitement (Junaedi & Sukmono, 2019). This study aims to investigate the role of social media as a cause of violence and riots among football supporters in Indonesia. Its goal is to determine what kinds of content and narratives on social media intensify fan group rivalry. The project seeks to elucidate the mechanisms underlying the dissemination of hate speech, provocation, and disinformation on digital platforms, as well as to investigate how these factors exacerbate tensions that could lead to violent acts or riots.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology—an approach widely used across academic disciplines to address complex social issues. As Stake describes, this method involves an in-depth examination of a case's unique characteristics and context to understand its behavior within specific situations (Harrison et al., 2017). The researchers adopted this approach to explore particular incidents and assess the influence of social media in escalating tensions among football supporters.

Data were collected from various sources, including blog posts, the movement's official website, and digital news outlets. Through this process, the researchers identified patterns of atypical behavior among supporters that could potentially spark disputes and disturbances, both within and beyond stadium environments. The case study approach allowed the team to focus on specific times and locations, with the selected cases highlighting the controversies surrounding social media usage. Fieldwork was conducted at multiple locations, such as the Indonesian Football Association (PSSI) headquarters, and among eight supporter groups affiliated with League 1 and League 2 teams across different Indonesian cities.

Participants were purposefully selected for their deep understanding of the contexts surrounding fan conflict and violence, especially as reflected through social media platforms. These informants—individuals with either firsthand experience or substantial involvement in supporter networks—provided critical insights into the dynamics of online conflict and the intensification of tensions in digital spaces. Their perspectives were vital for interpreting the nuances of fan behavior, emotional triggers, and patterns of digital communication that often incite hostility.

Based on the informants' narratives, several categories of social media confrontations were identified and classified according to their underlying causes. Prominent among these were hate speech, the deliberate dissemination of misinformation, and emotionally charged narratives designed to provoke antagonism. Such online interactions frequently serve as catalysts for real-world violence, exacerbating divisions between rival fan groups. These findings highlight the powerful role digital platforms play in amplifying hostility, where unregulated narratives and provocative language significantly contribute to the escalation of supporter conflicts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Causes of Supporter Conflicts and Riots on Social Media
The present condition of technological progress is inevitable since technology will perpetually evolve to mirror temporal and human pursuits. Technology has grown more vital to society due to its

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ability to provide benefits and conveniences in direct involvement and non-interaction. Social media has unequivocally altered interpersonal connections, uniting individuals across distances, aiding those with comprehension difficulties, and facilitating rapid access to information, especially in scientific domains. In the digital era, social media exerts both advantageous and detrimental influences. For instance, it may result in cyber conflicts as it eliminates human obstacles to social interaction. On the other hand, in the contemporary digital age, the probability of conflict has escalated, especially owing to social media's function as a principal catalyst of strife. The digital traces on social media sites are available to everyone, even football fans. This convenient access enhances confidence and fosters a motivation to influence circumstances to achieve personal objectives (Hidayat, 2002, p.124).

> *"The first is social media, the second is the situation on the field, and the third is prestige, which leads to each team feeling that their team is better than the other team. But the point is that when the prestige becomes too big and becomes a source of energy to bring down, it will trigger conflict like that. If the fourth one is a bit different, it is who is the friend and who is actually the enemy."* (Dicky Soemarno, The Jakmania, 2024)

From a sociology of sports perspective, the interview showed that a number of variables influence the social dynamics inside sports fan organizations such as The Jakmania. Social media is crucial for building group identity since it makes members more exclusive and connected. According to Watkins (2018), social media and sports foster contact between groups, which can deepen tensions and foster stronger intragroup ties. Safko (2010) emphasizes the use of social media as a tool for socializing. The match environment also influences intense feelings like pride or sadness, which can strain ties between opposing fan bases. Having grown up in the digital age and been born after 1995, Generation Z mostly depends on websites like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram for information (Newman et al., 2019). However, their frequent usage of social media is not always associated with a high degree of news and media literacy.

Additionally, a team or fan club's reputation greatly influences how groups construct their identities and make them more competitive. Supporters who think their team is better may feel superior, which can cause tensions and disputes. In order to distinguish between allies and opponents, this dynamic is intimately related to the formation of in-groups and out-groups. This strengthens internal cohesion and increases hostility against rival groups. These things can lead to fights between fans because they create a social structure that is strongly affected by group identity, status, and the social interactions that come with sports.

> *"Social media is good; it cannot be avoided. Social media for progress is good, but sometimes, it is also used in a bad or negative direction. Yes, it can be seen that people use social media for what and how."* (Heru Joko, Viking Persib Club, 2024)

In the course of the interview, HJ from VPC emphasized the dual nature of social media's impact on progress. While acknowledging its positive role, HJ also pointed out its inevitable drawbacks. Social media, according to HJ, serves as an effective tool for personal and societal advancement by providing access to information and expanding communication channels. As noted by Correa et al. (2010) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media allows users to engage in various content-sharing activities and facilitates social interactions. However, HJ cautioned that the misuse of social media can spread harmful content, potentially triggering conflicts between individuals or groups. Thus, the impact of social media largely depends on the user's intentions and goals.

Baudrillard's theoretical framework on the 'Spectator Society' underscores that in contemporary society, the media has converted humans into passive spectators who absorb commodified images and narratives (Kamaruddin et al., 2024). In football, the evidence indicates that fans no longer solely experience matches directly but also through media representations that generate and distribute identities, symbols, and emotions on a large scale. The emergence of social media has led to the digital manipulation of football representations, creating a hyperreality in which supporters' experiences and identities are commodified and consumed (Kamaruddin et al., 2024).

This viewpoint portrays social media as having both positive and negative aspects. On one hand, it can accelerate information dissemination, strengthen relationships, and promote collective awareness among like-minded organizations. On the other hand, when misused to spread hostility or defamation, it can have severely negative consequences. Research has shown that excessive use of social media can

negatively impact mental health, especially among adolescents and young adults, leading to increased anxiety, depression, isolation, and psychological distress (Hjetland et al., 2021; Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020). HJ emphasized the importance of individuals' ability to critically evaluate their social media usage based on its purpose and application, thereby developing a nuanced understanding of how social media affects interpersonal relationships, both positively and negatively. Studies suggest that image-based social media platforms foster greater intimacy compared to text-based ones, although the effect may vary depending on the specific type of social media used (Meier & Reinecke, 2020).

> *"For now, the first factor is the region, and the second factor is social media. Now, we challenge people on social media with a thumbs-up. In the past, I did not, in the days of Slemania and Semarang, that is for sure. Here it is called gojekan, that is the term. What is gojekan? Like a joke."* (Rengga Dian, Slemania, 2024)

In the conversation, RD from SLMN recognized two principal elements influencing the dynamics of supporter groups today: geographical borders and social media platforms. RD underscored that regional factors remain significant, with historical rivalries frequently arising from geographical closeness, shown by the animosity between Slemania and Semarang supporters. Nonetheless, these regional disparities have now transcended physical locations, enabled by social media. In the digital era, interactions across supporter groups have escalated via online platforms, facilitating provocations or subtle insults with a mere thumbs-up signal. This digital environment engenders conflicts or tensions that were hitherto exclusive to in-person interactions. Fenton et al. (2021) noticed that while social media creates new ways for supporters to get involved, these spaces are not always welcoming or positive, and they may worsen group interactions.

RD also saw considerable changes in the dynamics of supporter group interactions relative to previous periods. Historically, interactions among fans frequently manifested as jovial banter or "gojekan," characterized by informal and humorous taunting. Nevertheless, the advent of social media has transformed these relationships, making them more incisive and often leading to more significant conflicts. Previously seen as innocuous humor, it can now incite disputes since social media facilitates broader engagement in these interactions and accelerates the spread of their consequences. Fadilah & Putri (2024) noted that social media may undermine bonds among supporter groups if misused, fostering undesirable interactions such as verbal hostility, which profoundly affects fan behavior and fanaticism.

In the contemporary era, social conflict emerges in diverse ways, is significantly shaped by social media, and can result in violence. These disputes can impact individuals irrespective of time and location. Conflicts typically emerge spontaneously, driven by acute demands, often stemming from minor real-world occurrences that proliferate on social media sites.

> *"Joking in the sense of riots, we often do, but there was no age of social media, so when it happened, it was over. If it is not now, it means it is protracted. One of the factors is Instagram and Twitter, which makes the conflict continue. That is now the main thing in terms of social media."*(Rengga Dian, Slemania, 2024)

RD from SLMN asserts that social media has profoundly transformed the dynamics of confrontations among supporters. In contrast to previous times, when clashes were often brief, sites such as Instagram and Twitter today facilitate the prolongation and escalation of arguments. These digital environments enable real-world conflicts to persist, escalate, and evolve long after the initial event, complicating resolution attempts. Research indicates that social media platforms enhance fan loyalty and community connections, although they may also exacerbate conflicts among supporter groups (Prathap & Raizada, 2020; Girsang, 2022).

RD emphasized the significance of social media in exacerbating and extending tensions among supporting factions. Previously, transient conflicts can now persist due to the accessibility and information dissemination capabilities of these platforms. Social media enhances communication and exacerbates existing problems, making them more complex and difficult to settle. This issue is made worse by the fact that social media sites like to promote drama and heated arguments. This makes it easy for insulting words and rude comments to spread quickly, creating an atmosphere of hostility (Ong & Leng, 2022).

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The unbridled articulation of viewpoints on social media may result in societal strife. In the absence of adequate social restrictions, this unrestrained freedom may lead to possible disputes and disturb real-world relationships. The inherent weaknesses of social media can result in significant consequences, presenting challenges and risks to those who lack self-control in their online conduct.

> *"Because on social media, the dumbest person suddenly feels like a smart person, even if they can read and type. Even smart people can become stupid if they are attacked. As I said earlier, on social media, even the stupidest person, as long as they can read and type, will suddenly become smart, and vice versa. That is why during the working meeting, I said, 'Be careful, all of you, if you do not want to be called stupid, do not make wrong comments.' That is why it is said, 'Silence is gold!' Those who fight are fools. Why do I say fools? They want to be seen because they always want to be justified."* (Ocha Halim, The Macz Man, 2024)

During the interview, OH from TMM articulated apprehensions over social media interactions, observing that these platforms allow those with rudimentary reading skills to perceive themselves as intellectually superior, although maybe lacking a thorough or proper understanding. This scenario demonstrates how social media enables those lacking a platform to express ideas or remarks despite insufficient competence. As a result, this distorts the public image of knowledge and competence, as the internet environment allows for unregulated communication irrespective of material quality. Radmann et al. (2022) indicate that social media can promote cohesion and empowerment, although it also poses obstacles.

OH emphasized caution when participating on social media, as imprudent comments might incite conflicts or altercations. She explained that in the realm of social media, those with low comprehension frequently exhibit self-righteousness and disregard criticism, obstructing dispute resolution. This inclination might intensify circumstances as individuals persist in advocating their positions without contemplating different ideas. OH posits that abstaining from commentary is usually more prudent, as social media often transforms into a forum for the ill-informed, resulting in futile disputes. This critique underscores the conflict between free expression and appropriate social media use, a subject similarly examined by McCarthy et al. (2022). They illustrate how detrimental remarks may adversely affect the connection between sports clubs and their followers.

A few things must be true for social conflicts, such as important problems that both groups care about (and often argue over) involving competing interests. When the media engages in social conflict, it may provide news or narratives that sensationalize or exaggerate events, potentially provoking individuals to respond impulsively and lose composure. The proverb "Bad news is good news" illustrates the mass media's inclination towards material that might provoke public discussion and may have adverse outcomes.

> *"One of my criticisms at that time was the mass media. Because we did not have social media yet, we still refer to the mass media. How the mass media at that time, for reasons of newspaper circulation, made narratives as if we wanted to go to war! That further added to the embers on each side."* (Cak Tulus, Bonek, 2024)

In the interview, CT from PSBY articulated apprehensions over the influence of conventional mass media before the emergence of social platforms. He contended that these channels frequently exacerbated tensions among fan factions. CT explained that newspapers, in their need for increased readership, often constructed storylines that escalated tensions and appeared to incite violent conflicts among supporter groups. The sensationalized reporting by major media sources exacerbated tensions by depicting these groups as involved in conflict or possessing profound antipathy. This illustrates how, historically and contemporaneously, media may influence public perception and magnify events through narratives that emphasize sensationalism and profit rather than impartiality.

> *"When we were in Semarang, the riot in Purwodadi, Bonek was accused by the media of doing it, even though it was our friends Snake and Panser who did it. That is what has not changed, for us actually."* (Daeng Rojil Bonek, 2024)

During the conversation, DR from PSBY expressed dissatisfaction with media coverage, which he thinks frequently unjustly focuses on particular fan demographics. He referenced the Purwodadi riot in Semarang as an instance when the Bonek gang was erroneously blamed for inciting violence. At the same time, the actual perpetrators were members of the Snake and Panser organizations. DR highlighted the ongoing inaccuracy in media reporting similar events, resulting in unfair portrayals of supportive organizations. He observed that this pattern has persisted virtually unaltered, with news organizations favoring sensationalism over objective and truthful reporting of events.

> *"Then it goes back to the media that are encouraging this. Finally we seem to be held back to serve Malang. We need to catch up with Persija, but our energy is spent on Malang, trying to be our rival."* (Cak Tulus, Bonek, 2024)

During an interview, CT from PSBY discussed how media coverage influences the focus and enthusiasm of their fan groups. He explained that media outlets often exacerbate tensions by highlighting unnecessary rivalries, such as the one with Malang. This diverts supporters' attention from their primary rivalry with Persija, redirecting their energy toward a media-inflated conflict that portrays Malang as their main adversary. CT argued that focusing resources and paying attention to competing with more significant teams would be a more effective use of these resources. This situation demonstrates the media's ability to intensify conflicts by drawing attention to rivalries that may not be particularly relevant or beneficial.

> *"Symbolic violence is a stigma against Bonek. The media and society provide symbolic violence against Bonek, and there are still many, such as the media and others. Apparently, the media or outsiders should also have moved on, but the perception is still like before; it cannot be! Changes and the concept of supporters or communities will develop in the future. And then now we use the concept of the 90s, but it still sticks. Symbolic violence against Bonek is the most in-demand and sells well. If there is a riot, many people unconsciously look at Bonek, that is right."* (RU, Bonek, 2024)

RU from PSBY expressed concern during the interview about the ongoing negative portrayal of the Bonek supporters group in the media and society, despite the changing circumstances. RU highlighted that media organizations often associate Bonek with symbolic violence, reinforcing antiquated public stereotypes of fans as provocateurs of disorder or hostility. Despite the fans' community seeing positive developments and adopting new notions, the negative image perpetuated by the media persists. This demonstrates how mass and social media frequently perpetuate antiquated preconceptions, tarnish the reputation of specific groups, and neglect beneficial advancements within these communities. Meyers et al. (2020) observed that violent confrontations in online conversations can exacerbate fan relationships. Antagonistic remarks can shape views and attitudes toward content, leading to divided discussions that may intensify into fights.

Furthermore, RU emphasized the substantial influence of social media in perpetuating this stigma. During riots or violence, social media sites often quickly link these events to Bonek, regardless of the lack of substantiation. This fosters a prejudiced social perception of the tribe, with many persons unconsciously associating Bonek with violence, despite the countless positive transformations inside their society. Social media expedites the spread of possibly erroneous information, frequently neglecting context or favorable advancements within the supporters' group. This illustrates how social media may exacerbate preconceptions, despite significant advancements within the supporters' group. Chavez & Cuilan (2023) indicate that comedy on social media, often based on stereotypes, might reinforce detrimental social norms.

> *"That is why journalists are very careful about reporting on PSS. A tiny mistake could be attacked. In my opinion, the cruelest netizens are from Sleman, the most active. That is why I'm also careful; just a little mistake must be attacked. There are many who are short-winded, and there is not even a source at all. Suddenly, it explodes!"* (Rengga Dian, Slemania, 2024)

During the interview, RD from SLMN advised journalists to exercise caution when reporting on PSS, as even minor inaccuracies could trigger significant reactions from netizens, especially those from

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Sleman. Netizens from Sleman, according to RD, are known for their high activity levels and quick responses, frequently displaying aggressive behavior against perceived adversaries. He elucidates how these tensions may rapidly intensify wherever a minor grievance or error can swiftly culminate in a significant issue. RD observed that many netizens have a tendency to become easily provoked, which creates a delicate and unstable atmosphere in social media discussions. The rivalry between two factions of fans can incite confrontation, sometimes initiated through social media via hate speech. Hate speech begins before or after the match and persists on social media platforms.

> *"Eliminating hate speech, as long as there is hate speech, we cannot go to the second step, om. What are examples of hate speech? The most important is through social media. Can we jointly manage our members or our masses not to commit hate speech on social media? The second is racist songs. The third is racist merchandise. Okay, we tried that, but it did not work. It will not work; if it does not, we need another solution."*(Dicky Soemarno, The Jakmania, 2024)

In the interview, DS from The Jakmania emphasized eliminating hate speech as the first step toward constructive change within the supporters' group. He contended that continuing hate speech obstructs advancements toward an improved environment. Social media is the principal venue for soccer aficionados to express support and engage with their team, which is vital in cultivating positive relationships. These interactions assist both fans and teams while fostering a feeling of community and passion (Wang, R. 2022; Cao, Y. et al., 2023; Suryadi, M. et al., 2023).

DS highlighted the dangers of hate speech disseminated via social media, which he recognized as a critical concern among the supporting group. He referenced more expressions of hatred, including racial shouts and products featuring hateful slogans. DS recognized the intricacy of resolving this issue, emphasizing that it necessitates a more comprehensive remedy than simply alleviating the symptoms. This suggests that social media and other symbols, such as music or commerce, exacerbate conflicts if inadequately controlled. A more complete strategy is essential to achieve authentic transformation in fostering a healthier and more positive environment among supporters (Mansur et al., 2023; Seijbel et al., 2022; Corcuera et al., 2023).

The rapid expansion of social media is due to people's ability to establish their own media channels. The presence of social media impacts society's change and development, especially in the distribution and acquisition of knowledge. Although this can be advantageous and enhance communication, in the context of sports, particularly among fans, it may unpredictably influence people and social groups by endorsing deviant concepts, beliefs, or values.

> *"In the past, to be precise, in the 90s, I myself experienced a different situation. At that time, Arema came to Tambaksari Stadium and was well received by Surabaya supporters. Likewise, with Persebaya, who came to the Gajayana Stadium in Malang, they were warmly received. However, the difference now is that at that time, social media did not exist, or had not developed as it is now. Social media, which is very prevalent now, allows provocation from outside parties to enter and influence the situation between supporters."*(Achmad Gozali, Aremania, 2024)

In an interview, AG from Arema reflected on the 1990s competition between leading teams such as Arema and Persebaya. Notwithstanding intense rivalry, he saw a more friendly and courteous environment. AG emphasized the kind welcome shown to Arema fans at Surabaya's Tambaksari Stadium, while Persebaya supporters saw the same politeness at Malang's Gajayana Stadium. This example illustrates that fierce rivalries between notable teams can occur without inciting animosity or violence among supporters, with interactions being more controlled and tranquil throughout that period.

Nonetheless, AG noted that the emergence of social media has altered the dynamics of these competitions. He asserts that social media platforms have exacerbated tensions among fan groups by enabling the swift dissemination of external provocations to extensive audiences. Tensions formerly exclusive to stadiums may now endure and intensify on digital platforms, frequently exacerbating emotional strife. This transformation demonstrates how social media has modified fan relationships, rendering rivalries more complex and often more fierce. In accordance with this finding, several research studies suggest that social media might exacerbate extremist behavior among soccer fans,

creating an environment conducive to extreme ideas and attitudes that promote violence (Međedović et al., 2020).

> *"supporters who are not in the stadium but influence the digital world"* (Budiman Dalimunthe, LIB, 2024)

BD from PSSI underlined throughout the talk that supporters, via social media, greatly affect the match dynamics even if they are not physically present at the stadium. BD clarified that digital-savvy supporters may influence the match environment by spreading ideas, supporting teams, or starting conflicts that affect public opinion and exchanges among supporter groups. Nowadays, the influence of the internet goes beyond the actual boundaries of stadiums and significantly influences the football field and the dynamics among fan communities. This situation shows the impact of social media, which may cause controversy even when it helps to spread knowledge. Studies show that rather than providing bad information, social media generally disseminates good knowledge (Waterloo et al., 2018). In keeping with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which holds that individuals regularly compare themselves to others, this might cause people to feel jealous and worsen their general health.BD said followers may now support their teams in several digital ways provided by clubs or personal social media networks. By using these channels, any person may participate, impact, and challenge other supporting groups. Even without offenders at the stadium, psychological issues that can worsen the environment are usually present before the game. This suggests that social media lets people write the story and deepens tensions among fan groups, which were limited to real interactions at the stadium before.

> *"The way conflicts between supporters are resolved has changed. In the past, despite the tension, conflicts could be resolved in a lighter way, such as throwing stones, followed by a smile. However, this is no longer the case. Now, throwing stones is countered with bigger, even harder stones. This change is caused by the influence of social media that makes individuals want to appear bolder and more 'wow'. The character of young people today tends to seek recognition through extreme means. Conflict resolution can no longer be done just by casual conversation and eventually involves a third party, such as the police because it cannot be resolved only by the two parties."* (Rengga Dian, Slemania, 2024)

RD from SLMN highlighted a significant shift in conflict resolution among supporters during an interview, which has become increasingly confrontational. Although disagreements were prevalent in earlier times, they might be settled more amicably—specifically by playfully tossing stones to one another. The advent of social media and the need for attention among youth have exacerbated these tensions, occasionally culminating in significant riots. RD emphasized that disputes initiated online frequently escalate into real-world violence. The growing importance of social media complicates the resolution of issues through communication. RD noted that the provocative nature of social media has altered the manner in which young individuals manage problems; rather than opting for composed resolutions, they choose passionate and confrontational approaches. Numerous contemporary confrontations necessitate police intervention rather than direct conversation between the parties involved. This shift demonstrates how social media intensifies conflicts and alters the dynamics of problem-solving when it favors law enforcement or violence as the solution. Research indicates that social media instruments, such as photographs, comments, and live streaming, might exacerbate online conflicts, resulting in offline violence and perpetuating this trend. Research indicates that adolescents occasionally perceive personal insults on social media as exacerbating issues and increasing the likelihood of violent confrontations (Elsaesser et al., 2021).

Snyder and Spreizer (1989, p.242) examine violence in sports as follows: The Contagion Theory of Collective Violence elucidates the reactions or processes of individuals who exhibit heightened tension, restlessness, and fervor. During a match, you can determine the original condition by looking at who won and who lost. High emotions, excitement, and stimulation can worsen social contagion caused by irrational factors. The collective enthusiasm of the crowd may likewise affect others, therefore stimulating the individual.

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"Back then, the organization was young, young at heart. Being told about difficulties by elders, then feeling right, feeling that love is greater. That used to be a natural thing, especially among supporters groups, and to support anyone, because it proved our love was stronger and more passionate. Consciously, it used to be scary, daring to go there, daring to go here, even to Makassar. But now, if you think about it, it is scary. We used to be blind, but it was all because of our love for the team." (Heru Joko, Viking Persib Club, 2024)

In an interview with KH from VPC, he articulated the transformation of the supporting group's dynamics over time. The supporter group was once vibrant and enthusiastic, demonstrating deep devotion to the team. Young enthusiasts frequently perceive their fervor as paramount, as demonstrated by their intense rivalry with other supporter groups. They frequently do ambitious deeds; they even face danger by trekking into hazardous regions, such as Makassar. This enthusiasm was previously considered characteristic of supporters since their deep devotion to the team motivated them to face challenges boldly, sometimes overlooking potential consequences (Cho et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, KH saw a change in supporters' attitudes at the time. Currently, there is increased awareness of existing hazards, accompanied by heightened anxiety around long-distance travel and interaction with other supporting groups. Although loyalty to the club endures, supporters have adopted a more cautious approach and considered the consequences of their actions. This modification indicates a shift in fans' perspectives on competitiveness, as they increasingly emphasize safety and social awareness while maintaining their enduring attachment and allegiance to the team (Ogunseye et al., 2022).

This phenomenon pertains to identity fusion when supporters develop a deep emotional bond between their personal identity and that of the team they support. This approach elicits a deeper emotional response to the team's successes or failures, often motivating collective activity in support of the team. Rituals, such as chants and gatherings, function as means for supporters to strengthen their identification within the community (Newson et al., 2021; Tamir, 2022). The absence of supporters during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights their substantial influence on match outcomes. It demonstrates how emotional connections to the team may enhance subjective well-being and the propensity to attend future matches (Leitner et al., 2022).

"Our actions always felt right in the past, so we kept moving in that direction. Our actions are sometimes beyond reason because we feel love and do not feel wrong. That is what divides the region. Managing and organizing it becomes a great force. We have not acted destructively yet, but we invite people who have the same love, and it turns out that many come. They want to be invited because they also love their city, so it is recognized both inside and outside." (Heru Joko, Viking Persib Club, 2024)

During the discussion, KH from VPC articulated that a profound affection for the team frequently fueled the motivations of fan organizations in the past. This instilled in them a perpetual sense of correctness, even when their behaviors occasionally defied logic. Their extreme passion for the team led them to create strong rivalries and divide territories. KH articulated that they coordinated to establish a formidable entity, asserting that their activities constituted a genuine expression of love. Social media currently offers a venue for fans to articulate their affection and support, strengthening their social identity and sense of belonging. This is evident in how supporters rally behind the club at critical events, such as coaching transitions or significant matches, fostering a profound feeling of community and loyalty among them (Sanderson, 2013; Bajari, 2016; Chang, 2019).

KH also stated that the affection for the city or team is why many individuals participate in the movement. Despite the extremity of their behaviors, individuals have a sense of connection via a mutual affection for their city, therefore reinforcing their link. Supporter organizations can effectively organize to exert significant influence within and outside their community, even without purposefully damaging actions. According to informants who love their city, fans attend the stadium to enjoy the game and show their support for the team. Individual club supporters ultimately coalesced into a substantial collective that bolstered one another in the stadium's atmosphere.

The incorporation of Jean Baudrillard's concepts about commodification and the passivity of individual identity in contemporary society illustrates that media, particularly social media, function not merely as a communication medium but also as a domain for constructing identity and social reality. In this setting, football supporter identity is shaped by hyperreal digital representations, where acts,

symbols, and narratives of violence no longer mirror objective reality but transform into commodities of entertainment that are passively devoured and reproduced by the public.

This process establishes situations in which aggressive action is not only feasible but also promoted by expectations around the performance of group identities developed in virtual environments. Empirical research further substantiates the significance of social media as a trigger in the intensification of confrontations among football supporters in Indonesia. Prior research (Ferianto, 2023; Rabathy et al., 2023; Hendika & Nuraeni, 2020; Nurdiantara, 2024; Purwaningtyas et al., 2023; and Frassetto, 2019) indicates that social media has emerged as the predominant medium for disseminating provocation, hate speech, and antagonistic narratives that incite violent behaviour in the physical realm. In this instance, social media expedites the dissemination of information, influences public opinion, exacerbates polarisation, and intensifies group attitudes, which ultimately play a substantial role in the onset of physical confrontations among football supporters.

CONCLUSION

Social media plays a multifaceted role in the lives of Indonesian football fans. It serves as a space for supporting teams, staying updated on clubs, and promoting athletes. Still, it also spreads negativity, such as hate and provocation, leading to conflicts between supporters. Disagreements that begin online often escalate into physical confrontations in the real world, intensifying the animosity among fan groups. The competition for status on platforms like Instagram and Twitter further amplifies these tensions. Additionally, negative narratives fueled by mass media reignite past events that stir emotions, making conflict resolution even more challenging. Supporters, who are often emotionally charged, struggle to control the impact of their online actions, increasing the likelihood of disputes.

To reduce the negative influence of social media, there must be more focus on supporters' online behavior. Despite various comprehensive, data-driven awareness campaigns, social media remains a significant factor in escalating conflicts between fan groups. Therefore, a more strategic and in-depth approach is needed to encourage responsible use of social media among supporters. This will help minimize potential conflict and create a more positive atmosphere in digital and real-world spaces.

Further research is necessary to explore the psychological effects of social media interactions on football fans and to identify effective strategies for reducing online hostility. Additionally, studies on how emerging platforms like TikTok and YouTube influence supporter behavior are essential. By conducting more extensive research, better solutions can be developed to manage interactions between fans and reduce the detrimental effects of social media on their lives.

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