

# Managing the Communication of the Indonesian Football League From the Supporter Perspective

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## **Abstract**

*Sports communication is very important in the sports industry, including football. In football, supporters are an important asset for the industry's survival. However, the presence of supporters does not always have a positive impact on leagues and clubs if not managed properly. Managing the communication of the Indonesian football league from the supporter perspective must be understood by league and club management. This research used qualitative methods, conducting a literature review and interviews with informants related to Indonesian football, particularly those related to supporters. The results of this study indicate that supporters should be seen as partners by Indonesian league operator and football clubs. Continuous communication and interaction with football supporters and fans, both directly and through media such as mass media and new media (the internet, social media, and other digital media), is mandatory, considering that supporters and fans are the most important assets in the football industry.*

**Keywords:** *Communication, football supporters, Indonesian football league*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Communication is the foundation of human interaction, therefore its role of communication is very important in the process of interaction and delivery message. Communication is also the foundation of human and non-human interaction, and all of us can communicate through touch or sound, looks or symbols, words or sentences, and also by not doing or saying anything.

Sport, as a social reality, is increasingly appreciated by society. Sport has become an integral part of social life, creating norms and values that influence aspects of human life, such as economics, social life, culture, and even politics. Studying sports communication helps one understand and appreciate the important rules that make sports communication necessary in all sports organizations and fields (Syadzwina et al., 2024).

In sports, violence refers to any statement or action by a player, coach, referee, parent, spectators, or other participant in a sporting event that causes injury to those involved. Various types of violence in sports can be classified based on the perpetrator: violence between athletes, violence against officials, violence between coaches and athletes, violence against parents, and violence against fans (Supriyanto, 2022; Rahmat et al., 2011).

Holding the Indonesian football league competition is one the activity of sports management in Indonesia. Numerous football entities are involved, including players, coaches, management, supporters, media, and even sponsors. The presence of foreign players, single coaches, player transfers, support from fans in stadiums, management decisions, and match results are often hot topics of conversation among the public, from coffee shop conversations to social media timelines. This demonstrates that football connects people. It allows people to communicate and interact, even though they sometimes don't know each other. Communication, in any form, has been an important part of the development of football in Indonesia.

As the most popular sport in the world, football become a bridge of socio-economic, cultural, and national gaps, creating networks of communication, cooperation, and shared practices through diverse, participatory fan cultures (Biel, 2025). The continued development of football undoubtedly requires the participatory support of fans and supporters. The progress of football in a country also depends on the loyalty of its supporters, which continues to transform with the development of the football industry itself. While

previously, watching a favorite team play required traveling to the stadium, in recent years, supporters and fans have been able to watch their teams on television from various locations. Supporter communities even hold group viewings at coffee shops, cafes, restaurants, and hotels, inviting the public to join them. In addition to being initiated directly by supporters, the owners of these venues often hold group viewings to facilitate football fans' enjoyment of watching their favorite teams.

In the digital age, with increasingly advanced technology, supporters and fans have increasingly numerous ways or alternatives to connect with their favorite clubs and express themselves through digital media such as the internet, social media, and various other platforms. They utilize live broadcasts of football matches on television or live streaming, which can be accessed online through digital television platforms. Social media is not only used to support their favorite teams with positive and motivational comments, but it is also often a place to vent disappointment with insulting posts if their favorite team loses a match. Supporters and fans also use social media to interact directly with people associated with their favorite football clubs, such as players, coaches, officials, staff, and even the club's management.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication can be understood as a process in which meaning is constructed and exchanged through various symbols and media. Alberts, Nakayama, and Martin (2012) define communication as "a transactional process in which people generate meaning through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages within a specific context, influenced by individual and societal forces, and embedded in culture." Meanwhile, according to Everett M. Rogers, communication is the process by which an idea is transferred from a source to one or more recipients, with the intention of changing their behavior (Cangara, 2024).

Sports is an effective means of persuading the masses. Sports communication is defined as a process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor share symbols as they create meaning through interaction (Pedersen et al., 2007). Sports communication focuses on building relationships and fostering effective interactions within athletics, sports, and competition. Its development will naturally expand depending on the level of professionalism of the sportsperson, both individually and organizationally.

The football is the most-watched sport over the world with 4 billions of fans (Kloc et al., 2020). Furthermore, football has a leading role in large part of the entertainment industry, above any other sport (Carvalho and Fazenda, 2018). The presence of football fans on stadiums is very important for athletes, so fans are often called the team's "Twelfth Man". (Szczepkowski, 2021).

In the football community, supporters and fans are closely associated with support based on feelings of love and fanaticism for their favorite football team. Jock Stein said, "Football is nothing without fans" (Nugroho et al., 2013). Therefore, supporters and fans are key stakeholders in the football industry and are a vital asset influencing the future of the Indonesian football league. Irwin, Sutton, and McCarthy (2002), in their book *Strategic Sport Communication* (Pedersen et al., 2007), note that "community relations is the process of interaction and 'connection' between a sports organization and its assets on the one hand, and the community or service market and the target population within that community on the other hand." In football, the community referred to the supporters.

The popularity and passion for football are directly proportional to the formation of supporter organizations and communities to support the clubs competing in football competitions. This indicates that supporters are individuals or groups who love a particular team or player. Supporters will do anything to support their favorite team, even sometimes unacceptable to common sense (Siregar et al., 2021).

In the digital era, the role of media has become an important in sports communication. The emergence of new media such as the internet, social media, apps, and various other digital platforms has given people numerous options for accessing information, including sports-related information. As a new media, social media has undergone a remarkable transformation over time and has become an integral part of modern human communication.

Social media displays content tailored to the needs and desires of its audience. For example, the need and desire for sports broadcasts or content, such as matches and other related information about football. Therefore, the media will be more productive in creating content about football. People also tend to choose the right media to satisfy their needs and desires, even if it means paying for digital platforms like pay-per-view digital television, video streaming, and others. Social media has had a substantial impact on marketing communications (Pegoraro et al., 2021; Hutter et al., 2013).

Social media use has grown rapidly in the sports industry. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are integral to today's sports culture. The reach and scope of social media have particularly impacted various aspects of the sports industry and its various stakeholder groups, such as athletes, coaches, managers, teams, leagues, events, governing bodies, and fans. Today, the use of social media has gone beyond simple social communication, and in the sports industry, practitioners use social media platforms to implement various objectives such as live coverage, news updates, public relations, risk management, activism, promotion, sales, and relationship marketing (Abeza and Sanderson, 2022; Abeza et al., 2021).

The internet and social media have introduced more powerful means for sports organizations to communicate with their fans and have also changed the way many fans consume sports (Audra Diers-Lawson et al., 2018).

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method is a qualitative method, involving a literature review and interviews with informants related to football management, particularly those related to supporters. Literature review involves searching for relevant data and information through various document searches, including written documents, photographs, images, and electronic documents, that can support the study related to the issues being discussed. A literature study can also be defined as a data collection technique by conducting a review study of books, literature, notes, and reports that are related to the problem to be solved (Nazir, 2013). The data collection technique is by documentation method by collecting reading materials and literature especially related to sports communication, communication behavior, and football supporters in Indonesia. Other data were obtained from interviews with several informants in Indonesia. By using qualitative research methods, this study aims to obtain in-depth conclusions about the phenomena studied through a philosophical approach, as well as implementing a data collection and analysis process that focuses more on meaning than quantity (Dharmajaya et al., 2024).

The list of informants:

1. Mahir Pradana, PhD (Lecturer, Football Enthusiast)
2. Marsal Masita (Managing Director PT Garuda Sepakbola Indonesia)
3. Munafri Arifuddin (Director of PT Liga Indonesia Baru, 2023-2024)
4. Dr. Meistra Budiasa (Communication Lecturer at Bung Karno University)
5. Nugroho Setiawan (Security Practitioner, FIFA Safety & Security Officer, Consultant and Committee Children Safeguarding Papua Football Academy)

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Football has become a continuously growing and evolving industry, especially in the digital era. Communication is important to the advancement of football because it builds relationships between organizations, clubs, teams, athletes, and fans. Communication also creates emotional connections that can foster greater fan loyalty.

Among the various elements that make up the dynamics of sport, the role of supporters is a social phenomenon that cannot be ignored. Supporters are not merely passive actors present at the stadium to watch the match, but active entities that contribute to constructing the meaning, atmosphere, and even legitimacy of a sporting event (Tsaniyah et al., 2025).

Unfortunately, issues involving supporters still occur, such as riots between supporters of football teams. Clear regulations and rules are essential to ensure league administrators are not misguided in their decisions, especially when imposing sanctions or punishments on clubs due to supporter actions. Handling supporters during riots requires special attention. FIFA prohibits the use of tear gas in securing football stadiums during riots or criminal acts, as it can endanger the safety of supporters. According to Article 19 (b) of the FIFA Stadium Safety and Security Act, the use of tear gas is strictly prohibited both inside and outside stadiums. The use of tear gas can cause panic and can lead to pushing and shoving, oxygen deprivation, trampling, and other actions that can lead to death.

In the Indonesian League, supporters are still viewed as consumers, even outsiders. Many clubs still view supporters as mere decorations in the stadium. However, supporters are a vital asset to Indonesian football. Supporters can not only be maximized as a source of club finances but also contribute ideas to club management. Supporters are much-needed partners for the Indonesian Football League in an era without regional budget subsidies. The Indonesian League and all participating clubs must be able to embrace supporters as partners in generating revenue for the club's financial. They should not simply display euphoria on the field during matches without understanding that there are other things supporters can do to help the team generate income and build a shared image for the benefit of the Indonesian League and the clubs they support. (Syadzwina, 2014).

Lecturer and football enthusiast Mahir Pradana shared his opinion on supporters in Indonesia.

"If we look at it academically, there's a lot of literature discussing the crucial role of supporters in the football industry. In developed countries, they're considered a crucial part of clubs' strategic decision-making. In the Indonesian League, supporters are still viewed as consumers, or worse, outsiders. Many clubs still view supporters as 'stadium decorations,' even though supporters can be maximized as both a financial resource and a contributor to club management ideas."

Building relationships between football organizations, teams, athletes, and fans can create emotional connections that make fans incredibly loyal, closer, more passionate, and more willing to participate in the activities of the Indonesian League and participating clubs. Communication is key to building these relationships. The Indonesian League organizers and football clubs must be able to manage the emotional side of supporters to help the League and clubs improve their performance and financial independence.

The Director of PT Garuda Sepakbola Indonesia, Marsal Masita, emphasized the importance of communication in building relationships and creating emotional connections between football clubs or teams, athletes, and their supporters and fans.

"Communication is crucial in sports marketing because it helps build relationships between sports organizations or clubs, teams, athletes, and fans, and creates emotional connections that can foster fan loyalty. The key is how football entities, whether teams or clubs, can perform their roles to provide relevant engagement activities to encourage fans to participate or consume more."

In the digital era, fan engagement has grown rapidly, especially in terms of demonstrating their love for Indonesian football. Football entities, whether teams or clubs, are working to provide relevant activities to encourage them to participate and consume more. Supporter activities that increase fan engagement can certainly have a positive impact on merchandise and match ticket sales. In digital era, Football supporters and fans are increasingly following trends by making their participation in the sport a lifestyle. This is slowly changing the public's perception of supporters, becoming more positive.

Communication Lecturer, Meistra Budiasa, said:

"Supporters are evolving. Now, football support is like a trend, a lifestyle. Young people today are passionate about football. This is indeed an effect of the development of digitalization. The current influence of digitalization has significantly influenced the patterns of supporters' love of football."

Although there are still cases of supporters engaging in reprehensible acts that harm football organizations, teams, athletes, the community, and other supporters, the development of digitalization has provided supporters with the broadest possible access to watching football activities in Indonesia. For example, Indonesian National Team matches and Indonesian League matches can be accessed not only through mass media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, but also through new media such as social media, the internet, and other digital platforms. Therefore, this digitalization has influenced the communication patterns of supporters in their love of football. Supporters need spaces to express themselves and interact with their favorite clubs, their favorite football, and their favorite players. These spaces must be accommodated by the Indonesian League management, specifically PT LIB, and the football clubs involved.

Meistra Budiassa also explained how supporters should be handled during some negative actions.

"League management must handle supporters appropriately. We shouldn't treat them as if we were facing demonstrators with water cannons everywhere. Supporters need space to express themselves. We need to be given space to express themselves so they aren't perceived as a potentially aggressive crowd, even if some individuals still do. What's needed is measured action from the authorities, and we certainly see them in general, like in Europe. They can jump around freely without such strict supervision. They won't be brutal and aggressive."

Therefore, it is important to continuously disseminate rules and educate supporters as a form of moral responsibility for the League and football clubs, so that supporters understand what they can and cannot do that could harm Indonesian football, especially their favorite clubs. A community-based preventive and educational approach needs to be developed, including the involvement of the media, clubs, security forces, and educational institutions in fostering a healthy, sporting, and civilized supporter culture (Tsaniyah, 2025). In addition to providing education, supporters also need to be recognized for their good actions that have a positive impact on the Indonesian League. This will ensure that supporters or football fans feel valued and recognized by the Federation, League organizers, and the football clubs they support.

The Director of PT Liga Indonesia Baru 2023-2024, Munafri Arifuddin, said:

"First and foremost, we will definitely carry out preventive measures. And that starts with standardizing the handling system. Second, we will continuously provide education to supporters. We will collaborate with supporters, awarding supporters with the best performances, supporters of teams with the best supporters, how they build communication with their supporters, how they empower supporters, and so on."

Munafri Arifuddin further added that regulations or rules regarding supporters must be clearly established so that league administrators can avoid making mistakes in decision-making, especially when imposing sanctions or punishments on clubs due to supporter actions.

"Supporters are very important, both for clubs and Indonesian football. But the problem is, there are supporters who, in quotation marks, are unruly, which usually harms the club itself. So, regulations must be created that can truly serve as a basis for ensuring that supporters are indeed supporters of the club."

In the book "The Twelfth Player" (Nugroho et al., 2013), Delvira C. Hutabarat wrote that Bill Shankly, one of Liverpool's legendary coaches, once said, "Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure you, it's much more serious than that." Football is life itself, and supporters are its lifeblood. Professional football league and club management should encourage good communication with supporters, considering that supporters are football's greatest asset. Both league and club management have alternative communication channels that can be used to provide information and interact with supporters.

Nugroho Setiawan, a Security Practitioner and FIFA Safety & Security license, commented on supporters. He stated that, essentially, supporters simply want to be close to their favorite team and learn about their activities.

"The age of supporters, as an association, is usually older than that of a club's management. This club, with its new management, usually has a business mindset. They immediately look to football clubs abroad, especially in Europe. The club is already independent, legally registered, a business entity, and has sufficient

resources. Second, the coaching and communication patterns. The ego of this new management sometimes makes it insensitive to programs or anything related to the club. It's important to remember that these supporters are present based on the emotion of the moment. The progress of a club's development. Training plans, player recruitment plans, and strategies to be used can be shared with supporters. This allows them to understand the club's progress from zero to competition-ready. This is sometimes not transparent. This raises a big question for supporters. What is management doing? Supporters are the ones who truly love the club. They're curious and also jealous. This needs to be managed as romantically as possible. So, it doesn't have to be all public. But the program is important. If there's a problem, it must be resolved quickly. This is an internal issue, jealousy, misunderstandings—this must be resolved immediately."

Nugroho Setiawan then gave the example of one of the League One clubs, Persib Bandung, whose supporters often clash with the club's management.

Take Persib's problems with its Bobotoh (supporters). There's a problem, but it's not resolved immediately. Eventually, Bobotoh, or Persib supporters, will seek an outlet, using the opportunity during matches to vent their frustrations, which can gain media attention and force a resolution. However, this isn't a good idea. But if it's resolved early, before the match, when there's a complaint or the match is due tomorrow, our problem is solved, please support us. So simple. That's what happens. Sorry, I saw it from outside. When I wasn't at the club, I was outside in the east, and that's how I saw it. Objectively, that's how we see it."

Supporters should be treated as partners by the Indonesian League management and football clubs. There must be constant communication to foster mutual support and respect. Given the phenomenon of supporter communication behavior, clubs must recognize the positive side and strive to build good communication with supporters. Educate them by socializing the rules of what is and isn't allowed, and by disseminating match regulations and those set by FIFA, AFC, and PSSI, particularly regarding potential detrimental effects of fan behavior.

Continuous communication and interaction with supporters and football fans, both directly and through media such as mass media and new media (the internet, social media, and other digital platforms), is essential, considering that supporters and fans are the most important assets in the football industry. Fan engagement activities can create emotional connections that can make fans deeply loyal, deepen their love, and grow closer to their favorite football clubs. The use of digital media further connects the Indonesian League, football clubs and teams, players, and coaches with their supporters, thus positively impacting the progress of the Indonesian Football League.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Sports has become an industry that continues to grow and develop in today's digital era. Supporters and fans are important and vital assets in the football industry that must be well-managed. Therefore, good, effective, and targeted communication is essential.

Managing the communication of the Indonesian League from the supporter perspective requires considering the needs and desires of these supporters. Supporters need information about their favorite clubs or teams at all times, making social media a perfect platform for fans to express their support and interact. Supporters desire greater involvement in activities related to their favorite football clubs or teams. Therefore, league and club management must provide ongoing education, foster strong partnerships, provide awards, build communication, and empower supporters. Developing fan engagement is crucial because it can create emotional connections that foster loyal supporters. Therefore, the closeness built between Indonesian league administrators, clubs, teams, players, and their supporters can have a positive impact on the advancement of the football industry in Indonesia.

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