



Audience Emotional Expression and Communication Culture in Esports: A Netnographic Study of YouTube Live Chat in Mobile Legends Bang Bang M7 World Championship Final Indonesia vs Philippines

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.47134/converse.v3i1.5879>

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Received: 28-04-2026

Accepted: 19-05-2026

Published: 05-06-2026



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Abstract: *This study examines the emotional expressions and communication culture of Indonesian and Filipino audiences in the YouTube live chat during the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang M7 World Championship Grand Final held on January 25, 2026, in Jakarta. The final between Aurora Gaming PH (Philippines) and Alter Ego (Indonesia), won by Aurora PH with a 4-0 score, generated 2,601 comments analyzed in this study. Employing a qualitative approach through netnography, this research applies Martin and White's Appraisal Theory as the analytical framework for evaluative language. Findings reveal that Filipino audiences' emotional expressions moved linearly from anxiety to intense celebratory euphoria, while Indonesian audiences displayed a more complex emotional spectrum: from initial pride, disappointment, strategic criticism, and systemic frustration to sportsmanship. Both groups' communication cultures demonstrate patterns of collective identity affirmation, symbol-based national support, competitive mockery, and cross-group sportsmanship. The communal narrative of #CumaEvos emerged as a discursive resilience mechanism within the Indonesian community. Similarities between both groups include the use of high graduation force, identity assertion, aggressive communication, and sportive expressions. Key differences lie in emotional orientation, responses to defeat, language use, and temporal orientation of comments. This study contributes to digital communication studies, participatory culture, and esports research in Indonesia.*

Keywords: *Emotional Expression, Communication Culture, Netnography, Esports, Youtube Live Chat, Appraisal Theory, Mobile Legends*

Introduction

The digital media phenomenon has transformed the practice of watching competitions from a passive, one-directional consumption activity into a participatory communication experience. In the context of platform-based live broadcasts, audiences no longer attend merely as passive spectators; instead, they participate simultaneously in responding to the course of matches, evaluating player performances, offering support, launching criticism, and constructing shared meaning through available interactive features ([Vlaga, 2025](#)).

Esports has developed into one of the fastest-growing forms of digital culture across numerous countries, including Indonesia and the Philippines. Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) occupies a prominent position in the Southeast Asian esports ecosystem, boasting an extensive fanbase and a highly active digital community. The M7 World Championship Grand Final held in Jakarta in January 2026 presented an ideal social setting for studying

audience communication: a world-stage final between Indonesia's representative (Alter Ego) and the Philippines' representative (Aurora Gaming PH), witnessed by more than 5.68 million peak concurrent viewers according to Esports Charts ([Heinonen & Medberg, 2026](#)).

YouTube live chat serves as a particularly relevant observational space, as it enables audiences to converge simultaneously within a single, open, and synchronous conversational arena. This feature not only distributes broadcasts but also functions as an arena where emotional expressions, social judgments, and group identities are collectively and in real time constructed ([Ochiai, 2025](#)). The issue of communication culture in live chat becomes all the more significant when a match brings together two comparably strong fanbases, since the language audiences employ does not merely convey reactions but also signals proximity, alignment, and differentiation between groups (Kristin & Kumpel, 2024).

Previous research on live streaming, digital communities, and toxic speech has tended to address these dimensions in isolation. Studies that specifically integrate audience emotional expression and communication culture within YouTube live chat during high-intensity esports events as a unified digital cultural phenomenon remain limited ([Yoki Yusanto, 2021](#)). This study seeks to fill that gap by comparatively analyzing the emotional expressions and communication cultures of Indonesian and Filipino audiences in the YouTube live chat during the M7 World Championship Grand Final.

This study aims to: (1) describe the forms of emotional expression exhibited by Indonesian and Filipino audiences in YouTube live chat; (2) analyze the forms of communication culture of both audience groups; and (3) compare the similarities and differences in their emotional expressions and communication cultures.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using the netnographic method. Netnography is an adaptation of ethnography for online environments, focusing on the culture, practices, and social meanings that emerge within online communities ([Kozinets, 2020](#)). This method is appropriate because the research object is not merely the content of individual comments but rather the interaction patterns, community norms, and communication culture dynamics that develop within live chat during the final match.

The research subjects are audiences who engaged in YouTube live chat interactions during the broadcast of the M7 World Championship Grand Final. The research object consists of conversational texts appearing in the live chat, including comments, phrases, symbols, emojis, capitalized letters, and other utterance forms. Data were collected through non-interventionist digital observation and systematic documentation, encompassing the time of comment appearance, match phase, and contextual match moments.

A total of 2,601 comments were analyzed, comprising: 653 comments from Filipino audiences (25.1%), 1,346 comments from Indonesian audiences in live chat (51.8%), 339 first-phase YouTube comments (13.0%), and 263 second-phase YouTube comments (10.1%). Data selection applied inclusion criteria requiring that comments contain emotional expressions and communication culture indicators.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis guided by [Martin and White's \(2005\)](#) Appraisal Theory. This theory operates through three principal systems: (1) attitude, encompassing affect (emotional expression), judgement (evaluation of human behavior),

and appreciation (evaluation of phenomena); (2) engagement, consisting of expansion (opening room for alternative viewpoints) and contraction (closing space for alternative viewpoints); and (3) graduation, which regulates the degree of evaluative intensity through force and focus. Data validity was maintained through theoretical triangulation, applying three layers of reading: netnography, Appraisal Theory, and the concepts of emotional expression and communication culture.

Result and Discussion

Overview of Live Chat Data

The M7 World Championship Grand Final, held on January 25, 2026, in Jakarta, brought together Aurora Gaming PH (Philippines) and Alter Ego (Indonesia) in a best-of-seven (Bo7) format. Aurora PH ultimately won 4-0, securing the Philippines' sixth consecutive M Series title. The YouTube live chat during the broadcast generated a dense, rapid stream of comments highly influenced by match moments.

Table 1. Distribution of YouTube Live Chat Data – M7 World Championship Grand Final

No.	Data Group	Number of Comments	Percentage	Notes
1	Filipino Audience (Live Chat)	653	25.1%	Data 1–653
2	Indonesian Audience (Live Chat)	1,346	51.8%	Data 654–1,999
3	YouTube Comments Phase 1	339	13.0%	Data 2,000–2,338
4	YouTube Comments Phase 2	263	10.1%	Data 2,339–2,601
TOTAL		2,601	100%	

(Source: Author's Compilation)

Indonesian audiences dominated quantitatively, consistent with Indonesia's position as one of the largest MLBB fanbases. Filipino audiences, though fewer in number, demonstrated a high intensity of expression, particularly in victory celebrations. The live chat during this match exhibited three defining characteristics: an extremely high velocity of comment flow, dense emotional content condensed into short utterances, and strong group identity formation through collective symbols and expressions.

Emotional Expressions of Filipino Audiences

Filipino audiences displayed a varied spectrum of emotional expressions that tracked the course of the match, categorizable into seven main groups based on Appraisal Theory analysis.

First, positive affect in the form of direct support dominated comments from the outset, marked by chants such as "GO TLPH", "LET'S GO TLPH #LAKASNGPINAS", and "LABAN PILIPINAS!". Graduation force in these comments was very high, expressed through capitalization, exclamation marks, and repetition. The engagement pattern was predominantly contraction, asserting group alignment without leaving room for doubt.

Second, positive affect expressed as optimism and confidence emerged when the team was behind, as in the comment "PINAGARALAN LANG NG TLPH YANG GAME 1" (TLPH just studied that in game 1), reframing the first-game loss as a deliberate learning

strategy. Third, negative affect manifested as anxiety and uncertainty through expressions such as "HUHUHUHU", "NAKOOOOO", and "nakakakaba" (heart-pounding), characteristic of Tagalog emotional language. Fourth, negative judgement and negative appreciation directed at their own team — including "TLPH TRASH", "TL CHOKERRRRR", and "BAT KASI ESME" (Why use Esmeralda?) — reflected the high standards audiences held for their team.

After Aurora PH began to dominate, fifth, positive affect in the form of celebratory euphoria took over, with graduation force at its peak. Comments such as "PH HAS NO COUNTER!!" and "AURORA PH 4-0 AE BOTS" exemplify absolute contraction, shutting out any alternative perspective. Sixth, mixed affect in the form of sportsmanship and empathy emerged from a subset of audiences acknowledging Alter Ego's effort, as in "congrats AE" and "Respect AE". Seventh, defensive engagement appeared as a response to internal bashers, revealing conflict dynamics within the Filipino community itself.

Emotional Expressions of Indonesian Audiences

Indonesian audiences displayed a more complex emotional spectrum, shaped by their position as supporters of the team that ultimately lost 0-4. This complexity produced a wide range of emotional expressions divisible into seven major patterns.

The first pattern is positive affect in the form of initial support and pride, which dominated comments before and at the start of the match. Comments such as "AE JAGO BGT AYO BANTAI" (AE is incredibly skilled, let's crush them), "BANGGA BANGET GUA SAMA LU NOO" (So proud of you), and "INDONESIA BANGGA SAMA KALIAN AE" (Indonesia is proud of you, AE) demonstrated very high graduation force. AE was explicitly positioned as Indonesia's representative, reflecting a communication culture that places esports teams as agents of national identity.

The second pattern is negative affect in the form of disappointment and shame emerging as the match progressed. Comments such as "AE BLUNDER", "ALTER EGG 0", and "NT AE, GW MALU SI KLO 4:0" (Nice try AE, I'm ashamed of the 4-0) trace an affective journey from hope to disillusionment. The third pattern is negative appreciation through strategic criticism: comments such as "fredrin, Khaled, dan harith harusnya dibanned" (fredrin, Khaled, and harith should have been banned) and "ganti si ale tuh" (replace that player ale) show that Indonesian audiences brought technical game knowledge into the live chat space.

The fourth pattern is positive affect through sportsmanship, as in "Thank you AE meski kalian hanya Runner up tapi kalian lah juara yg sebenarnya" (Thank you AE, even as runners-up you are the true champions), reflecting emotional maturity. The fifth pattern is negative affect in the form of systemic frustration extending beyond the match itself — "PH lagi PH lagi" (PH again and again) and "Kapan Indonesia Juara Lagi" (When will Indonesia win again?) — touching on deep historical frustration toward Philippine dominance.

The sixth and most prominent pattern is the communal narrative of #CumaEvos. Comments such as "Cuma Evos", "#cumaEvoss", and "EVOS LEGEND again, The First and still only Indonesian Team M-Series Champion" emerged en masse as a community

resilience mechanism, reactivating the memory of EVOS's glory as an alternative source of pride. The seventh pattern is sarcastic humor and symbolic mockery, such as "Alter Egg" and "AE?! More like AI", reflecting the way Indonesian audiences package disappointment within a distinctly characteristic form of linguistic creativity.

Communication Culture of Indonesian and Filipino Audiences

Communication culture in this study is understood as the patterns, habits, norms, styles, and interactional practices formed through communication among users within the YouTube live chat space (Lu et al., 2024). The following table summarizes a comparison of the communication culture patterns of both audience groups.

Table 2. Comparison of Communication Culture Patterns of Indonesian and Filipino Audiences

Communication Pattern	Indonesian Audiences	Filipino Audiences
Collective Identity	"Indo Pride", "INDONESIA BANGGA", ID flag symbol, #AE	"Pinoy Pride", "PH strong", "PH HAS NO COUNTER", PH flag symbol
Collective Support	"AE juara", "semangat AE", "INDONESIA BANGGA SAMA KALIAN AE"	"GO TLPH", "LABAN PILIPINAS", "GOOOO TLPH BAWI BAWI"
Rivalry & Mockery	"PH lagi PH lagi", "Filipina mulu", "Alter Egg", "Alter Zero"	"AE BOTS", "Indo Indo Hindi na kayo natuto", "Alter Egg 🍷"
Internal Criticism	"ganti si ale tuh", "draft jelek", "AE blunder"	"BAT KASI ESME", "out drafted eh", "TL CHOKERRR"
Sportsmanship	"NT AE gg RoRa", "congrats Aurora PH", "comeback stronger"	"Respect AE", "peluk dan salam dari Filipina", "congrats AE"
Communal Narrative	"#CumaEvos", historical narrative of EVOS as M Series champion	"PH MLBB era", "6th consecutive title", PH dominance narrative

(Source: Author's Compilation)

The communication culture of Indonesian audiences exhibits six primary patterns. First, collective support grounded in national identity: team AE is positioned as Indonesia's representative, not merely as a competition entrant. Second, internal criticism based on technical knowledge: audiences employ analytical communication directed at the team's strategy and performance. Third, historical narrative and community memory through the #CumaEvos phenomenon as a collective sense-making mechanism. Fourth, rivalry expressed through symbolic mockery via wordplay such as "Alter Egg" and "Alter Zero". Fifth, cross-group sportsmanship and empathy demonstrating fair play norms. Sixth, frustration directed at the system, including criticism of the tournament format (Polus & Carr, 2023).

The communication culture of Filipino audiences similarly exhibits six distinctive patterns. First, identity assertion grounded in community pride: symbols of "PH", "Pinoy", and the expression "Pinoy Pride" dominate. Second, victory celebration through claims of superiority: "PH HAS NO COUNTER" and "Philippines MLBB era" function as absolute contraction. Third, the use of Tagalog and Taglish as community markers. Fourth, aggressive responses toward opponents after victory, where verbal attacks intensify precisely after the match has been won. Fifth, the presence of an empathic internal critical

voice, including Filipino fans expressing boredom with PH dominance. Sixth, expressions of solidarity toward opposing audiences, as in "Respect AE".

Similarities and Differences in Emotional Expression and Communication Culture

Comparative analysis identifies four main similarities between the two audience groups. First, both employ high graduation force through capitalization, repeated exclamation marks, word repetition, and expressive emojis. Second, both assert group identity through collective symbols and utterances. Third, both display aggressive communication and cross-group mockery, demonstrating that incivility is a consequence of competitive situations generating identity polarization rather than a characteristic specific to any one group. Fourth, both exhibit sportsmanship and cross-group empathy among a subset of community members.

Four significant differences also exist between the two groups. First, emotional orientation: Indonesian audiences display a broader and more complex spectrum resulting from their position as supporters of the losing team, whereas Filipino audiences follow a more linear trajectory from anxiety to euphoria. Second, responses to defeat: Indonesian audiences employ diverse strategies (sportsmanship, criticism, systemic blame, historical narrative), while Filipino audiences move toward assertion and celebration. Third, language register: Indonesian audiences predominantly use Indonesian and digital slang (BGT, wkwk, njir), while Filipino audiences employ English, Tagalog, and Taglish. Fourth, temporal orientation: Indonesian audiences are future-oriented (hopes for a comeback), while Filipino audiences orient toward affirming the present and recording a history of dominance.

Theoretical Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of Appraisal Theory as an analytical framework for emotional expression in digital communication ([J. R. Martin, 2005](#)). The most prominent finding is that graduation — particularly force — is the most actively operative system within esports live chat. Nearly every comment carrying affective content also displays graduation markers, as participants must make their comments "visible" and "felt" within an extraordinarily dense and rapidly moving stream of messages.

It is equally significant that affect, judgement, and appreciation frequently co-occur within a single comment. The comment "AE JAGO BGT AYO BANTAI" simultaneously contains positive affect, positive judgement, and high graduation force. This condensation of three attitude systems within a single brief utterance represents a linguistic adaptation to the demands of the live chat medium, which requires speed and semantic density ([Nurdiyani, 2019](#)).

Regarding engagement, contraction proves more dominant than expansion, particularly when audiences occupy a winning position. Conversely, audiences in a losing position more frequently employ expansion, opening interpretive possibilities. This pattern suggests that competitive position directly influences linguistic engagement choices — a finding of considerable relevance for the study of competitive digital communication.

From a netnographic perspective, the most significant phenomenon is the #CumaEvos narrative as a coping strategy for the Indonesian community. When AE lost, the community did not collapse into collective despair but instead immediately activated communal memory of EVOS as an alternative source of pride (Kozinets, 2020). This constitutes a form of collective sense-making characteristic of digital communities. This finding reinforces the argument that YouTube live chat functions as a space where emotional expression and identity formation are inseparable (Mulyana & Mahmudah, 2025).

Conclusion

This study analyzed the emotional expressions and communication cultures of Indonesian and Filipino audiences in the YouTube live chat during the M7 World Championship Grand Final. Several principal conclusions can be drawn from this research.

First, Filipino audiences' emotional expressions moved from anxiety to intense celebratory euphoria, with very high graduation force expressed through capitalization, repetition, and expressive Tagalog language. Indonesian audiences displayed a far more complex emotional spectrum: from initial pride, disappointment, strategic criticism, and systemic frustration to sportsmanship and sarcastic humor.

Second, Indonesian audiences' communication culture is characterized by national identity assertion through team AE, internal criticism grounded in technical knowledge, the historical #CumaEvos narrative as a resilience mechanism, symbolic mockery through wordplay, and cross-group sportsmanship. Filipino audiences' communication culture is characterized by community identity assertion based on "Pinoy Pride", superiority claims through dominance narratives, the use of Tagalog as an in-group marker, and aggressive post-victory responses.

Third, the similarities between both groups include the use of high graduation force, collective identity assertion, aggressive communication as a consequence of competitive polarization, and sportive expressions from a portion of the community. Key differences lie in emotional orientation (linear vs. complex), responses to defeat, language register, and temporal orientation of comments.

This study contributes to digital communication scholarship by demonstrating that esports live chat constitutes a discursive space deserving serious academic analysis as a practice of digital culture. Appraisal Theory proves effective for reading the evaluative language that appears rapidly and contextually in live chat. Future research is recommended to expand data coverage to other platforms and to examine platform moderation dynamics in relation to problematic speech within esports live chat.

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