

Humor Content and Media Credibility: An Analysis of Audience Engagement on the Instagram Account @simamaungcom

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: March 27, 2025

Revised: April 14, 2025

Accepted: December 24, 2025

Keywords

Humor content

Engagement

Fan base

Digital communication

Instagram

ABSTRACT

Humor is a powerful communication tool that goes beyond entertainment to build emotional connection, ease tension, and increase message effectiveness. In today's digital era, it has become a strategic means of capturing attention, shaping perceptions, and sustaining engagement across social media platforms. This study examines the role of humorous content in enhancing audience engagement and strengthening media credibility on the Instagram account @simamaungcom, an independent platform focused on the Persib Bandung supporter community. Using qualitative content analysis of 24 humorous posts uploaded between January and March 2025, the findings indicate that humor significantly increases interaction and meets the audience's affective, social, and cognitive needs, consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Two primary forms of humor, identification and clarification, contribute to humanizing communication, simplifying complex football-related information, and reinforcing solidarity within the Bobotoh community. In the context of high social media use and a strong culture of humor among supporters, these results demonstrate that humor functions not only as an entertainment medium but also as an element that supports collective identity formation, sustains emotional closeness, and reduces tension during periods of poor team performance. These findings offer valuable insights for digital media practitioners in designing effective humor strategies to enhance engagement, strengthen audience relations, and uphold credibility within the dynamic environment of sports communication.

 DOI: [10.12928/channel.v13i2.1375](https://doi.org/10.12928/channel.v13i2.1375)

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INTRODUCTION

Humor has long been acknowledged as one of the most effective and influential tools in human communication. Beyond its entertainment value, humor functions as a complex social and rhetorical device that fosters emotional connection, mitigates tension, and enhances the persuasiveness of the message (Burgos et al., 2025). In the digital era, as communication increasingly unfolds across social media platforms, humor has become a key strategy for attracting attention, shaping perceptions, and sustaining audience engagement (Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Cai et al., 2025). The fast-paced and emotionally charged landscape of social media demands messages that are not only informative but also relatable, creative, and emotionally resonant. Within this context, humor emerges as a powerful mechanism that allows digital communicators—whether brands, influencers, or independent media—to bridge emotional distance, build affinity, and cultivate a sense of community among followers (Gal, 2019).

The proliferation of platforms such as Instagram has transformed the logic of digital communication, prioritizing interactivity, participation, and emotional engagement (Hidayat et al., 2024). Social media users no longer act merely as passive recipients of information but as active participants who interpret, remix, and respond to content (Kim & Johnson, 2016). Humor, with its inherently participatory nature, fits seamlessly into this environment. It encourages sharing, commenting, and liking—actions central to a social media account's algorithmic visibility and perceived credibility (Sewak et al., 2025). Humor in digital communication enhances message recall, relevance, and virality by inviting audiences to engage with content on both cognitive and emotional levels. A witty caption, a meme, or a playful parody can transform a simple post into a collective experience that resonates across an online community (Shiftman, 2014). Humor

thus functions not only as entertainment but also as a strategic means of constructing meaning, strengthening relational bonds, and shaping the communicator's credibility.

The Instagram account @simamaungcom presents a compelling case for examining the role of humor in the credibility of digital media. Established as an independent media platform dedicated to covering Persib Bandung, one of Indonesia's most iconic football clubs, @simamaungcom has become a central voice within the Bobotoh community. This passionate fan base surrounds the team. With over 800,000 followers and thousands of posts, as shown in Table 1, @simamaungcom occupies a unique position among other football-related media accounts, including @explorepersib, @persibinfo, and @republikbobotohcom. What distinguishes @simamaungcom from these platforms is its consistent use of humor to frame football news, commentary, and fan-related content. Through witty captions, memes, and comedic commentaries, the account not only reports events but also interprets them in ways that resonate emotionally and culturally with its audience. Humor becomes a discursive strategy through which the account maintains relevance, authenticity, and credibility within a competitive media ecosystem.

Table 1 List of Media Platforms Creating Content Related to Persib Bandung

Media	Instagram Account	Total Followers	Total Feeds
Simamaung	@simamaungcom	809K	8.338
Explore Persib	@explorepersib	906K	9.884
Bandung Football	@bandungfootball	343K	3.274
Remember	@rememberpersib	195K	2.948
Republik Bobotoh	@republikbobotohcom	565K	7.162
Persib Info	@persibinfo	787K	9.142
Bandoeng Indlansche	@bandoeng.indlansche	47.6K	650
Persib Talk	@persibtalk.id	59.7K	534
Persib Inside	@persibinside	208K	4.374
Path Persib	@path.persib	119K	5.377

As an independent media outlet that prioritizes community closeness, @simamaungcom's humorous approach serves multiple communicative functions. First, humor simplifies complex football-related discussions, making tactical analyses, managerial issues, and player controversies more accessible to a broad audience. Second, humor acts as a form of emotional regulation. During periods of poor team performance or controversy, lighthearted jokes, ironic memes, or self-deprecating humor can help diffuse tension and turn frustration into shared amusement. Third, humor reinforces group solidarity by expressing shared experiences and cultural codes unique to the Bobotoh identity. This relational dimension of humor aligns with Meyer's (2000) four functions of humor in communication—identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation—which collectively explain how humor can strengthen relationships, manage conflict, and affirm group norms. Within the Bobotoh community, humor serves as a form of identification that signals belonging, a mode of clarification that renders football culture intelligible, and a mechanism for enforcing shared values and differentiating insiders from outsiders.

While humor serves these relational purposes, it also plays a significant role in shaping the perceived credibility of @simamaungcom as a media source. Credibility in the digital age is no longer defined solely by journalistic authority or factual accuracy but by relational trust, transparency, and authenticity (Khalfallah & Keller, 2025). Humor contributes to these dimensions by humanizing communication—making the media voice appear approachable, self-aware, and emotionally intelligent. However, humor is a double-edged sword: when misinterpreted or perceived as inappropriate, it can provoke backlash, diminish trust, or alienate segments of the audience (Kerunga et al., 2020). Understanding this tension is crucial for explaining how humor functions as both an asset and a risk in digital credibility-building.

Despite the increasing recognition of humor's communicative power, academic research on humor in digital media has predominantly focused on commercial or political contexts. Studies have examined how brands, advertisers, and influencers use humor to attract attention, improve message retention, and enhance brand perception (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Shifman, 2014). In contrast, the use of humor within independent or community-based media, particularly those focused on sports, remains underexplored. The sports communication environment presents unique challenges and opportunities: fan communities are emotionally invested, discussions often involve high-stakes outcomes, and collective identity plays a central role (Koo et al., 2025; Aboul-Dahab, 2025). Humor in this setting is not merely an aesthetic choice but a mechanism for emotional regulation and social cohesion. Yet the intersection of humor, credibility, and engagement in such independent sports media contexts has received little scholarly attention. This gap is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where football fandom constitutes a significant cultural and media phenomenon, and where independent digital media outlets such as @simamaungcom play an influential role in shaping fan discourse.

This study addresses that gap by examining humor within @simamaungcom through three interrelated focal points. The first is humor content, which involves identifying and analyzing the types, themes, and stylistic elements of humor used in the account's communication. The second focus is sentiment analysis and humor in building credibility.

Here, the study investigates how audiences respond to humorous posts and how these responses, in turn, affect perceptions of @simamaungcom's credibility. The third, or last, focus examines engagement patterns and humor as mechanisms of community resilience. In the emotionally volatile world of football fandom, humor often serves as a coping mechanism, helping fans process disappointment and maintain optimism. Together, these three focal areas provide a comprehensive framework for understanding humor as a multifaceted communicative phenomenon. Rather than viewing humor as a simple tool for amusement, this study conceptualizes it as a strategic mechanism that shapes relationships, emotions, and perceptions in digital media.

Furthermore, integrating these dimensions reflects a more holistic approach that bridges the rhetorical, affective, and participatory aspects of humor in online communication. By situating the analysis within the context of @simamaungcom and the Bobotoh community, the study not only enriches theoretical discussions about humor and credibility but also contributes to understanding how independent media navigate the complex terrain of digital engagement. Theoretically, it extends the application of Meyer's (2000) humor Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory to the study of independent sports media. By examining how audiences derive cognitive (information and understanding), emotional (entertainment and tension relief), and social (identification and belonging) gratifications from humorous content, the study provides insights into how humor fulfills multidimensional audience needs.

This study also offers valuable implications for independent media practitioners, social media managers, and communication strategists. As competition for audience attention intensifies across digital platforms, the ability to communicate credibly and empathetically becomes crucial. Humor, when used strategically, can humanize communication, foster loyalty, and differentiate a media brand from others. However, it also requires sensitivity to context, timing, and audience sentiment. The insights from @simamaungcom's experience can thus guide practitioners in developing humor strategies that balance creativity with responsibility, thereby enhancing engagement without compromising credibility. In the broader landscape of digital communication, these findings underscore the potential of humor as both a creative and ethical practice, capable of sustaining meaningful dialogue and resilient online communities.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of humor in building the credibility of the Instagram account @simamaungcom as an independent sports media platform. It specifically seeks to (1) examine the forms and themes of humor used in @simamaungcom's content, (2) investigate how humor influences audience sentiment and perceptions of credibility, and (3) explore how humor-driven engagement functions as a mechanism for community resilience within the Bobotoh fan base. Through these objectives, the research endeavors to illuminate humor's dual role as a communicative strategy and as a cultural expression that sustains trust, participation, and emotional solidarity in digital fan communities. Ultimately, this study argues that humor—when applied thoughtfully and authentically—can be a cornerstone of credibility, enabling independent media like @simamaungcom to thrive as trusted and relatable voices in the dynamic world of social media communication.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the role of humor in the digital communication strategy of the Instagram account @simamaungcom, an independent sports media platform representing the Persib Bandung supporter community, Bobotoh. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables a deep, contextual understanding of meaning-making processes in digital communication (Creswell & Poth, 2016), allowing the researcher to examine how humor functions symbolically, emotionally, and relationally within a specific media environment. This approach is grounded in the theoretical and empirical gaps identified in the literature review, which showed that most studies on humor in digital media focus on marketing or advertising contexts (Kiljańczyk & Kacprzak, 20024; Voutsas, 2024; Kewlani et al., 2022). In contrast, limited attention has been given to how humor operates in independent, community-driven sports media. Addressing this inconsistency allows the study to contribute to media and digital communication scholarship by positioning humor as a strategic and relational practice that shapes credibility and engagement beyond commercial intentions.

The object of this research is the use of humor in @simamaungcom's Instagram posts, particularly between January and March 2025. During this period, the account published 8,338 posts, of which 24 contained clear humorous elements and were purposively selected for analysis. The sampling process focused on identifying posts that contained humor via textual cues, imagery, or captions and that elicited measurable audience engagement, measured by likes, comments, and shares. From these, one post was ultimately selected for in-depth qualitative analysis to illustrate the nuances by which humor shapes interaction and credibility within the online fan community. This purposive sampling strategy ensures that the data analyzed are relevant and representative of humor as a communication device within @simamaungcom's broader digital strategy (Memon et al., 2025).

This study utilized both primary and secondary data to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The primary data comprised humorous Instagram posts, captions, and audience comments from @simamaungcom, while the secondary data included expert interviews, engagement records, and observational notes. Data were collected through documentary analysis, observation, and semi-structured interviews with digital communication practitioners, sports media professionals,

and academics specializing in fan culture, selected via purposive sampling. Documentary analysis focused on identifying linguistic and visual humor forms and measuring engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares. Observations monitored posting patterns and audience reactions in relation to match outcomes, while interviews provided deeper insights into humor's strategic role in fostering engagement, trust, and emotional connection within digital sports media.

The analytical process followed the logic of qualitative content analysis, emphasizing the interpretation of meaning and communicative function. The data were first reduced by filtering out irrelevant materials and retaining only posts that exhibited humor and generated observable audience interaction. The selected data were then coded and categorized according to Meyer's (2000) humor framework, focusing on two primary types of humor: identification humor, which strengthens emotional bonds and community identity, and clarification humor, which simplifies complex football information and facilitates audience understanding. This categorization enabled a systematic examination of how humor contributes to engagement and credibility. The analysis then moved toward thematic interpretation, identifying patterns that revealed how humor was used to humanize communication, manage tension, and sustain trust within the Bobotoh community.

To ensure analytical rigor and reliability, the coding process involved double coding, in which two independent coders analyzed the same dataset and compared their results for consistency. Approximately 30 percent of the data were double-coded, and the intercoder agreement rate was 85 percent, indicating a high level of consistency in identifying and classifying humor (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This reliability check minimized subjective bias and enhanced confidence in the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating findings from documentary analysis, observation, and expert interviews. Triangulation ensured that interpretations were not based on a single data source but validated through multiple perspectives, thereby increasing the credibility and robustness of the findings.

The validity of the research was also supported through data triangulation and reflexivity. Data from different methods were cross-checked to identify convergent themes and discrepancies, which were then analyzed to produce more nuanced conclusions (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024). Reflexive notes were maintained throughout the research process to document analytical decisions and ensure interpretive transparency. The study also adhered to ethical standards by ensuring that all data obtained from Instagram were publicly accessible and that no private user information was disclosed. Expert informants provided informed consent before participating in interviews, and their identities were kept confidential to maintain ethical integrity. This multi-method approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how humor functions within the context of @simamaungcom's digital communication strategy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Humor Content on @simamaungcom

The qualitative content analysis of 24 humorous posts by @simamaungcom from January to March 2025 reveals that humor functions as a central and deliberate element of the account's communication strategy. Far from being a peripheral or decorative aspect, humor is systematically employed to enhance user interaction, strengthen credibility, and foster a sense of emotional proximity with the audience. Humor in digital media is a participatory form of expression that enhances message recall and relevance by fostering emotional connection with audiences (Shifman 2014). As an independent media platform rooted in the Persib Bandung supporter community, or Bobotoh, @simamaungcom uses humor to humanize its tone, foster solidarity, and maintain engagement among its followers.

The findings indicate that humor in @simamaungcom's posts can be categorized according to Meyer's (2000) typology of humor functions in communication: identification humor and clarification humor. These two categories capture the dual purpose of humor in @simamaungcom's digital communication: while identification humor reinforces emotional ties and community identity, clarification humor simplifies complex football information and enhances comprehension. Together, they demonstrate how humor simultaneously fulfills affective and cognitive functions, contributing to both engagement and credibility. The creation of humor also reflects a form of "double framing," in which a familiar scenario or shared reality is recontextualized to produce an unexpected or contrasting meaning (Beeman, 2025).

Identification humor emerged as the dominant type across the analyzed posts. This form of humor draws upon shared cultural references, local language expressions, and inside jokes familiar to Persib Bandung supporters. Posts frequently referenced recurring experiences among the Bobotoh, such as emotional reactions to matches, witty remarks about rival teams, and playful commentary on players' performances. These jokes often incorporated Sundanese language and localized expressions that resonate deeply with the fan community. Through such shared references, @simamaungcom constructs humor that feels intimate and authentic, allowing audiences to recognize themselves within the narrative immediately.

Identification humor functions as a symbolic boundary marker, distinguishing insiders from outsiders and reinforcing a collective sense of belonging among followers. According to Meyer (2000), this form of humor builds identification by emphasizing shared experiences and common ground between communicators and audiences. In @

simamaungcom's context, humor strengthens emotional closeness between the media and the fan base by portraying the account not as an external observer but as a fellow supporter sharing in the community's joy and disappointment. This proximity enhances perceptions of authenticity and trust, which are essential components of digital media credibility. The account's tone and humor reveal empathy with the community's sentiments, thereby cultivating relational credibility that extends beyond factual reporting.

Moreover, identification humor performs a crucial cultural function within the Bobotoh community. By integrating language, symbols, and humor specific to Bandung and West Javanese cultures, @simamaungcom reaffirms its audience's identity. Humor becomes a communicative practice that binds people through laughter, rooted in shared heritage and experiences. In this way, the account's humor not only entertains but also performs cultural work—it preserves collective memory and affirms communal values. The ability to "get the joke" serves as an indicator of insider knowledge and emotional membership in the Persib fan culture, thereby strengthening the group's social cohesion in the digital sphere.

In addition to identification humor, clarification humor was another recurring pattern observed in the data. This form of humor was primarily used to simplify complex or technical football information, such as match strategies, referee decisions, or transfer updates. Posts employed analogies, wordplay, or pop culture references to make football concepts easier to grasp. For example, a tactical failure might be compared to a humorous everyday situation, or a controversial referee call might be explained through a meme referencing a well-known comedy scene. These creative and humorous expressions enabled audiences with varying levels of football literacy to engage with the content without feeling excluded or overwhelmed.

Clarification humor aligns with Meyer's (2000) proposition that humor can serve as an explanatory device, reducing cognitive barriers to understanding. It increases message retention and comprehension by making information more relatable and less formal (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). In @simamaungcom's case, clarification humor serves an educational yet entertaining purpose—it turns analytical discussions about football into accessible, shareable content. The use of humor as a clarifying device enables the account to maintain informational credibility while reflecting the conversational and communal tone expected by its audience. Humor, in this sense, becomes a balancing mechanism between being authoritative and approachable.

The co-existence of identification and clarification humor reveals the multifunctional nature of humor in @simamaungcom's communication strategy. Identification humor fulfills the emotional dimension by nurturing solidarity and group identity, while clarification humor addresses the cognitive dimension by facilitating comprehension. The synthesis of these two functions positions humor as a strategic and integral part of the account's digital communication model. Rather than being spontaneous or random, humor functions as a purposeful discourse strategy that helps ensure that content remains engaging, understandable, and culturally resonant. Through this dual role, humor contributes directly to building audience trust and long-term credibility.

Furthermore, humor on @simamaungcom operates within the framework of participatory media culture (Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022), where audiences are not merely passive recipients but active co-creators of meaning. Comments under humorous posts often reflect this participation—followers respond with their own jokes, memes, or emotional reactions, creating a dialogue that reinforces communal identity. The interactive nature of humor fosters engagement loops in which laughter and emotional expression become shared communicative acts. This reciprocity strengthens both the relational bond and the perceived trustworthiness of @simamaungcom, affirming that credibility in digital media is co-constructed through ongoing audience interaction (Kim & Wang, 2024; Malhotra et al., 2025).

Another important finding is that humor enables emotional regulation and resilience within the Bobotoh community. During periods of poor team performance or public criticism, humor acts as a coping mechanism that diffuses collective tension. Instead of framing losses purely in negative terms, @simamaungcom uses self-deprecating or situational humor to foster emotional recovery and maintain optimism. This practice aligns with Meyer's (2000) argument that humor can be used to manage tension and maintain group morale. By reframing disappointment through humor, the account helps sustain community engagement even during difficult times, ensuring that frustration does not translate into disengagement or hostility.

The strategic deployment of humor also enhances @simamaungcom's credibility as a community voice. In digital environments, credibility is not built solely on objectivity or factual accuracy but also on perceived authenticity, empathy, and cultural fluency. The ability of @simamaungcom to "speak the language" of its audience—both literally and figuratively—reinforces its position as a trusted source. Humor thus serves as a communicative bridge between professional journalism and fan expression, demonstrating that credibility in independent media can be relational rather than institutional. The trust built through humor is sustained by ongoing dialogue, in which laughter symbolizes shared understanding and emotional alignment.

B. Sentiment Analysis and Humor's Role in Building Credibility

The sentiment analysis conducted during the research period reveals that 63 percent of audience responses to

@simamaungcom's humorous content were positive, while 37 percent were negative. This distribution illustrates how humor significantly influences audience perceptions and emotional reactions within the digital ecosystem of sports communication. Rather than existing as a mere stylistic device, humor on @simamaungcom actively shapes audience sentiment, particularly during periods of competitive challenges or disappointing team performances. As shown in Figure 1, humorous framing enables the platform to recontextualize unfavorable situations by appealing to shared emotions and collective values, mitigating negative reactions and preserving the platform's overall credibility.

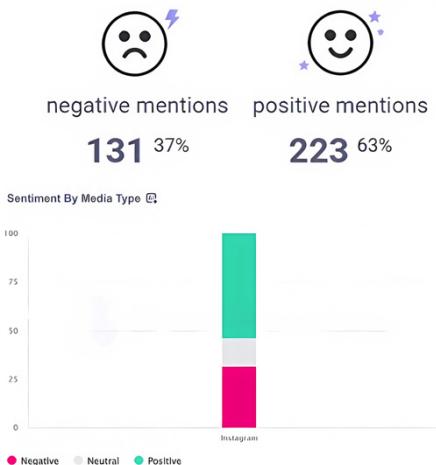


Figure 1. Sentiments Received by @simamaungcom Regarding Persib & Bobotoh
Source: Brandmentions (2025)

These sentiment patterns demonstrate that audiences engage with humorous content not only for entertainment but also for deeper communicative gratifications. Drawing from Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), it becomes evident that @simamaungcom's humorous posts satisfy audiences' affective, social, and cognitive needs. Humor provides emotional relief, reinforces social identity, and facilitates comprehension of complex information. The predominance of positive sentiment indicates that the account's humor aligns with audience expectations, thereby strengthening trust and promoting sustained engagement. In this sense, humor functions as both a communicative strategy and a psychological mechanism that enhances the audience's overall media experience.

From an affective perspective, humor on @simamaungcom provides emotional comfort and enjoyment, particularly during difficult periods for Persib Bandung. Posts that acknowledge the team's struggles while maintaining a lighthearted tone allow followers to process disappointment collectively, preventing frustration from escalating into hostility. This aligns with Meyer's (2000) argument that humor operates as a tension-management tool, enabling communicators to maintain emotional closeness even amid adversity. By reframing losses and controversies through humor, @simamaungcom transforms potential discontent into shared amusement. The ability to sustain positive emotional engagement during negative circumstances is a key indicator of affective gratification and a crucial foundation for building audience trust and perceived credibility.

Beyond its emotional function, humor fulfills social integrative needs by reinforcing the collective identity of the Bobotoh community. Identification humor—characterized by inside jokes, local language, and cultural references—serves as a form of symbolic communication that reinforces the boundaries of the fan community. Humor in digital culture functions as a marker of group membership, signaling who belongs and who does not (Shifman, 2014). Positive sentiment toward @simamaungcom's humorous content thus reflects successful community integration, where audiences perceive the platform as an insider and a genuine participant in the shared emotional landscape of Persib supporters. In this way, humor not only entertains but also consolidates social trust by reaffirming shared cultural codes and values.

Humor further contributes to cognitive gratification by making football-related information more accessible. Many posts employ clarifying humor to simplify complex tactical discussions, resolve controversies, or convey updates on transfers. By embedding humor into these explanations, @simamaungcom reduces the perceived complexity of football discourse, allowing both casual and knowledgeable fans to understand the content with ease. This finding supports prior research indicating that humor enhances cognitive processing by reducing informational barriers and improving message retention (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). Consequently, audiences regard @simamaungcom as not only an entertaining platform but also a credible and comprehensible source of football information. Humor thus bridges the divide between professional reporting and community conversation, enabling comprehension without sacrificing engagement.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that humor functions as a multifaceted credibility-building strategy. In digital sports media, credibility is not limited to factual accuracy; it also depends on emotional resonance, social connectedness, and the perceived ability of a platform to interpret events in ways that align with community sentiment. By strategically integrating humor, @simamaungcom balances the dual demands of entertainment and information. This integration ensures that even when emotions run high—after a loss, controversy, or criticism—the platform maintains an empathetic and authentic voice. Humor thus becomes a communicative buffer that transforms moments of potential alienation into opportunities for solidarity and shared understanding.

While positive sentiment predominates in the data, the 37 percent of negative responses should not be interpreted as a sign of communicative failure. In the context of sports fandom, emotional volatility is a defining feature of the community. Supporters' reactions are often amplified by passion, loyalty, and identification with their team. Consequently, negative sentiment reflects emotional investment rather than disengagement. Expressions of anger or disappointment within fan cultures are part of a broader affective economy in which emotion sustains rather than undermines engagement (Hermawan & Ginting, 2024; Liu, 2022). In this sense, criticism or dissatisfaction directed at @simamaungcom demonstrates active participation in a dynamic dialogue between the media platform and its audience, reinforcing relational credibility rather than eroding it.

Humor plays a pivotal role in managing this emotional volatility. When unfavorable outcomes or controversial incidents occur, humorous posts act as communicative mediators that temper emotional extremes. Rather than intensifying frustration, humor redirects negative energy into laughter and reflection, thereby allowing the community to maintain cohesion. This dynamic affirms that credibility in participatory media environments is not about avoiding criticism but about managing it constructively. By acknowledging the audience's emotions through humor, @simamaungcom demonstrates responsiveness and empathy—qualities that contemporary audiences increasingly associate with credible digital communication (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). Humor thus strengthens credibility not by silencing dissent, but by enabling emotionally intelligent dialogue.

Moreover, the interplay between positive and negative sentiment underscores the importance of contextual credibility in community-based media. Unlike mainstream journalism, which often maintains professional distance, @simamaungcom embraces a conversational tone that reflects the emotional rhythms of its audience. This approach aligns with emerging understandings of credibility in the digital age, which prioritize authenticity, responsiveness, and cultural resonance over detached objectivity. By creating space for both support and criticism, humor allows @simamaungcom to remain credible precisely because it mirrors the genuine emotional complexity of its followers. In this way, credibility becomes relational and adaptive—a product of ongoing negotiation between the platform and its audience.

Finally, the sentiment dynamics observed in this study illustrate how audiences actively negotiate meaning and satisfaction in their relationship with media content. Positive sentiment signifies fulfilled expectations, while negative sentiment often signals temporary dissatisfaction or heightened emotional engagement. Humor serves as a mediating mechanism that recalibrates these expectations, transforming frustration into amusement and restoring relational balance. This process highlights that credibility in community-based media is sustained not through uncritical approval but through adaptive emotional communication that sustains audience engagement over time. The sentiment analysis, therefore, is not simply a numerical measure of audience response—it is evidence of a dialogical, participatory process in which humor operates as both a relational and credibility-enhancing force.

C. Engagement Patterns and Humor as a Community Resilience Mechanism

Effectively utilizing Instagram's interactive features to foster audience engagement is essential for increasing interactions and enhancing the overall user experience (Yudaninggar & Damastuti, 2023). The analysis of audience engagement patterns shows that humorous content consistently generates higher levels of interaction on @simamaungcom than non-humorous posts. Posts containing jokes, puns, or playful memes receive markedly more likes, comments, and shares, suggesting that humor is an effective driver of engagement in the digital sports media environment. This elevated response reflects humor's dual ability to attract attention and evoke emotion, both of which are essential to sustaining interaction on visually oriented platforms such as Instagram. Beyond numerical metrics, however, the findings reveal that humor stimulates deeper, participatory forms of engagement in which audiences become active co-creators of meaning rather than passive content consumers.

In the comment sections of humorous posts, followers frequently extend jokes, build on punchlines, or insert additional cultural references related to the team and its supporters. This interactive behavior demonstrates a participatory communication culture in which humor serves as a collaborative language that connects the media platform and its audience. Positive comments, as seen in Figure 2, illustrate how humor can enhance audience engagement and strengthen the relationship between the social media account and its fan community. However, not all responses received are positive. Content that elicits emotional responses—particularly positive affect such as amusement or pride—tends to generate higher sharing and conversational momentum (Berger & Milkman, 2012). In @simamaungcom's case, humor performs precisely this function: it transforms individual reactions into collective discourse, converting simple engagement metrics

into dynamic, co-creative exchanges that strengthen communal bonds.



Figure 2 Positive Comments on Humorous Content @simamaungcom

Audience engagement patterns also fluctuate with situational context, particularly the outcomes of football matches. After victories, humorous posts celebrating team success tend to attract lively comment threads filled with memes, playful banter, and expressions of pride, amplifying the shared joy and reinforcing the Bobotoh community's collective identity. However, as shown in Figure 3, not all audience reactions are uniformly positive. Some negative comments reveal the challenges media managers face in meeting diverse audience expectations, since humor is inherently subjective and can be interpreted differently across individuals. This variation indicates that while humor effectively increases engagement, it also invites a range of emotional responses. Conversely, during defeats or controversies, @simamaungcom strategically employs humor to diffuse tension and reframe disappointment as a moment of shared resilience rather than individual frustration. This adaptive use of humor aligns with Meyer's (2000) assertion that humor functions as a coping mechanism, enabling communities to process adversity collectively without fragmentation. Through this approach, humor not only sustains audience engagement during emotionally difficult periods but also redirects attention from temporary discouragement toward collective perseverance and solidarity.



Figure 3. Negative Comments on @simamaungcom's Humorous Content

The contrast between positive and negative reactions to humorous posts also highlights humor's complexity as a communicative tool. While Figures 2 and 3 show that most responses to humor are supportive and affectionate, some audience members express criticism or misinterpret comedic intent. Such divergent reactions illustrate that humor, by inviting emotional participation, also exposes communicators to interpretive variability. Yet this variation does not necessarily undermine engagement; rather, it stimulates dialogue and reflection. The presence of differing opinions underscores the vibrancy of the fan community. It reinforces the view that active discussion—even critical exchange—is a sign of relational vitality rather than disengagement.

Within this context, humor emerges as more than an engagement strategy—it becomes a mechanism of community resilience. By reframing negative experiences through humor, @simamaungcom helps the Bobotoh community collectively process disappointment while preserving unity and optimism. Supporter-based media operate within emotionally volatile environments, where attachment to team performance can easily translate into fluctuating sentiment. Humor enables the community to confront failure without losing cohesion, thereby creating a discursive space in which emotional recovery is possible through shared laughter. This collective reframing maintains participation and mitigates the risk of alienation that often follows sporting setbacks.

The strategic use of humor during periods of heightened emotion also contributes directly to the sustained credibility of @simamaungcom. Instead of withdrawing from contentious moments or adopting a defensive tone, the account employs humor to openly and empathetically acknowledge audience emotions. This communicative responsiveness reinforces the perception that @simamaungcom is not merely a broadcaster of information but a participant in the shared emotional life of its followers. Relational communication strategies that emphasize emotional connection and reciprocity are essential for long-term credibility and trust in sports media (Williams & Chinn, 2010). It becomes an emotional bridge that aligns the media's tone with the audience's lived experience.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that humor on @simamaungcom performs a dual communicative function. At first glance, it enhances measurable engagement by increasing visibility and interaction rates. At a deeper level, it fosters community resilience by promoting emotional regulation, reinforcing collective identity, and sustaining participation even during moments of crisis. This dual role shows that humor should not be regarded merely as an engagement tactic but as a strategic resource that sustains both audience relationships and media credibility within a fluctuating emotional environment. Humor enables the platform to maintain cultural relevance while continually reaffirming its authenticity as a community voice.

Beyond immediate metrics, humor also plays a decisive role in cultivating long-term audience loyalty. Repeated exposure to emotionally resonant humorous content fosters familiarity and attachment, encouraging followers to return to the platform regularly. In the context of community-based sports media, such loyalty is grounded less in the pursuit of new information than in emotional identification. Audiences engage because they feel understood and represented. Through humor, @simamaungcom reinforces this sense of recognition, positioning itself as a constant emotional companion whose tone and personality remain consistent regardless of situational changes.

The participatory nature of humor further strengthens this loyalty by transforming engagement into sustained relational investment. As audiences contribute their own humor in response—posting memes, inside jokes, or playful critiques—they participate in shaping the communicative environment. This co-creative process mirrors Delwiche and Henderson's (2012) concept of participatory culture, where meaning emerges through continuous negotiation between producers and audiences. @simamaungcom thus evolves from a media outlet into a shared digital arena where humor sustains emotional energy, fosters dialogue, and deepens identification with the broader Bobotoh community.

Finally, the consistent use of humor across both celebratory and disappointing contexts provides followers with a sense of emotional stability. Regardless of match outcomes, audiences encounter a familiar humorous tone that conveys reassurance and continuity. This consistency cultivates what can be described as affective loyalty—a form of engagement sustained by emotional connection rather than situational satisfaction. By maintaining this steady humorous presence, @simamaungcom helps the community navigate the cyclical nature of sports emotions, ensuring that participation remains high even when optimism temporarily wanes. Humor, therefore, reinforces both the resilience of the Bobotoh community and the long-term credibility of @simamaungcom as an empathetic, trustworthy, and culturally grounded voice within Indonesian digital sports media.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that humor plays a strategic and multidimensional role in building the credibility of @simamaungcom as an independent digital media platform serving the Bobotoh community. The findings reveal that humor is deliberately employed not only to entertain but also to strengthen audience relationships and sustain participation. Through identification humor, @simamaungcom fosters emotional connection and community identity, while clarification humor simplifies complex football discussions, enhancing audience understanding. Sentiment analysis shows that 63 percent of audience responses were positive, demonstrating that humor effectively shapes perceptions, mitigates negative emotions, and reinforces trust. Moreover, humor-driven engagement transforms audiences from passive consumers into active participants, allowing @simamaungcom to maintain solidarity even during moments of defeat or controversy.

Theoretically, this research contributes to communication and digital media studies by extending Meyer's Humor Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory in the context of participatory sports media. It demonstrates that humor fulfills multiple gratifications, such as emotional, social, and cognitive, while transforming credibility from a static attribute into a relational and co-created process. In practice, the study highlights that independent media can strategically use humor to maintain authenticity, manage audience sentiment during crises, and cultivate long-term loyalty. For digital practitioners, adopting culturally resonant and context-sensitive humor can enhance engagement, strengthen community bonds, and build sustained credibility in emotionally charged online spaces.

Future research could explore humor's role across different digital environments or fan cultures to identify variations in how humor influences credibility and engagement. Comparative studies between independent and mainstream sports media, or across platforms such as TikTok and X (formerly Twitter), could reveal broader patterns of humor-driven interaction. Further inquiry might also integrate quantitative network analysis or ethnographic observation to better understand how humor circulates within online communities and contributes to the formation of digital solidarity. Such

extensions would deepen the understanding of humor as a vital communicative resource in shaping the dynamics of trust, identity, and participation in contemporary digital culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all who contributed to the completion of this research. Deep appreciation is extended to the research supervisor at Universitas Telkom for their invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and continuous encouragement throughout the research process. The author also wishes to thank the faculty members and colleagues at the School of Communication and Business, Universitas Telkom, for their insightful discussions and academic support that helped refine this study. Finally, heartfelt thanks are conveyed to the journal's editorial board and reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions, which have significantly improved the manuscript's quality.

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