

Fans' Online Comments on Controversial Refereeing Decisions: An
Appraisal Analysis

THESIS

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Appraisal Analysis

THESIS

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I state that the thesis entitled "**Fans' Online Comments on Controversial Refereeing Decisions: an Appraisal Analysis**" is my original work. I do not include any material that has been previously written or published by others, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. With this, if there are any objections or claims, I am the only person responsible for that.

Malang, 26 June 2026

The Researcher

A handwritten signature in black ink is written over a rectangular stamp. The stamp contains the text "10000" at the top, "METERAL TEMPER" in the middle, and "006ANX424065078" at the bottom. There is also a small logo or emblem to the left of the text in the stamp.

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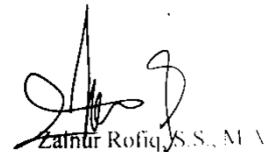
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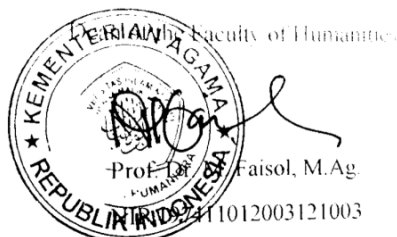
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MOTTO

“Once you bid farewell to discipline you say goodbye to success”

‘Sir Alex Ferguson’

DEDICATION

With gratitude to Allah SWT, I dedicate this thesis to my parents: my mother, Zuhriyah, who patiently raised me to become the man she sees as great; and my father, M. Syifak, whose guidance has made me as strong as he is. I also want to thank my two siblings, Siti Nur Cholilah and M. Izuddin, who have been by my side as I've grown into adulthood. I also want to thank my siblings' partners, A. Dwi Prasetyo and Ayu Afifatul K., who have also been part of my journey so far. And finally, my three nephews, Adam, Kinan, and Wisnu, who inspire me to grow so that I can bring happiness to them while they are still young.

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In closing, I would like to offer my sincerest apologies if this research is still imperfect and has many shortcomings. However, I hope that, to some extent, this research will be of benefit to readers.

ABSTRACT

Fawaid, Muhammad Sholahuddin (2026) *Fans' Online Comments on Controversial Refereeing Decisions: an Appraisal Analysis*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Zainur Rofiq, S.S., M.A.,

Keywords: *Appraisal theory, Social Identity Theory, evaluative language, football fans, VAR controversy*

This study aims to examine how online fans' evaluative comments on Instagram regarding referees' decisions in English Premier League matches can shape a group identity. It draws upon Appraisal Theory (Martin & White 2005) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979). This study aims to identify the types of comments fans use to evaluate referees' decisions and how a group's identity is formed through these evaluative comments. This study collected 25 comment data points from 5 posts related to controversial referees' decisions in the English Premier League discussed on the Instagram account @liveherewego. The 5 posts selected represent 5 incidents that occurred during "big matches" pitting two major teams against each other—teams that have dominated English football over the past few years. Based on these 25 data points, comments of the "Judgment" type dominate the fan comments used to evaluate referee decisions. Furthermore, heteroglossia in engagement and force in graduation are also frequently used by fans to express their evaluations of controversial referee and VAR decisions. Additionally, Social Identity Theory is employed to examine the three concepts outlined by Tajfel & Turner for assessing an individual's group membership based on their comments. Fan identity is mostly formed based on fans' defense of their team by negatively evaluating referee decisions perceived as detrimental to their team; subsequently, identity formation occurs through comparison, which in this context is found to be aimed at disparaging another group or an out-group.

ABSTRAK

Fawaid, Muhammad Sholahuddin (2026) *Fans' Online Comments on Controversial Refereeing Decisions: an Appraisal Analysis*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Zainur Rofiq, S.S., M.A.,

Keywords: *Teori Appraisal, Teori Identitas Sosial, Bahasa Evaluatif, penggemar sepakbola, Kontroversi VAR*

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana komentar evaluasi penggemar online di Instagram terhadap Keputusan wasit dalam pertandingan liga Inggris dapat membentuk sebuah identitas. Menggunakan Appraisal Theory (Martin & White 2005) dan Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis jenis komentar yang digunakan penggemar dalam mengevaluasi Keputusan wasit dan bagaimana identitas sebuah kelompok terbentuk melalui komentar evaluatif tersebut. Penelitian ini mengumpulkan 25 data komentar dalam 5 postingan terkait kontroversi Keputusan wasit di liga inggris yang dibahas di postingan akun Instagram @liveherewego. Adapun 5 postingan yang diambil merupakan 5 kejadian yang terjadi pada “big match” yang mempertemukan dua tim besar yang mendominasi sepakbola inggris selama beberapa tahun terakhir. Berdasarkan 25 data tersebut, komentar dengan tipe Judgement mendominasi komentar penggemar yang digunakan untuk mengevaluasi Keputusan wasit. Kemudian, heteroglossic dalam engagement dan juga force dalam graduation juga sering digunakan penggemar dalam mengungkapkan evaluasinya terhadap Keputusan kontroversi wasit dan VAR. selanjutnya Teori Social Identity digunakan untuk melihat tiga konsep yang dijelaskan oleh Tajfel & Turner untuk menilai keanggotaan seseorang berdasarkan komentarnya. Identitas penggemar kebanyakan dibentuk berdasarkan pembelaan penggemar terhadap timnya dengan mengevaluasi negative Keputusan wasit yang dianggap merugikan timnya, kemudian pembentukan identitas melalui perbandingan yang dalam hal ini ditemukan bahwa perbandingan yang digunakan bertujuan untuk menjatuhkan kelompok lain atau out group.

ملخص

فوايد، محمد صلاح الدين (2026) تعليقات المشجعين عبر الإنترنت على قرارات التحكيم المثيرة للجدل: تحليل تقني. أطروحة البكالوريوس. قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية S.S.، M.A.، الحكومية في مالانج. المشرف: زينور الرفيق

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية التقييم، نظرية الهوية الاجتماعية، اللغة التقييمية، مشجعو كرة القدم، الجدل حول تقنية (VAR) الفيديو المساعد

يهدف هذا البحث إلى معرفة كيف يمكن لتعليقات التقييم التي يكتبها المشجعون عبر الإنترنت على منصة إنستغرام، بشأن قرارات الحكام في مباريات الدوري الإنجليزي أن تشكل هوية معينة. وذلك باستخدام «نظرية» (Tajfel & Turner 1979) «و» نظرية الهوية الاجتماعية (Martin & White 2005) «التقييم» البحث إلى تحديد أنواع التعليقات التي يستخدمها المشجعون في تقييم قرارات الحكم وكيف تتشكل هوية المجموعة من خلال تلك التعليقات التقييمية. جمع هذا البحث 25 تعليقًا في 5 منشورات تتعلق بالجدل حول قرارات الحكم في أما المنشورات الخمسة. Instagram @liveherewego الدوري الإنجليزي والتي نوقشت في منشورات حساب التي تم أخذها فهي 5 أحداث وقعت في «المباريات الكبرى» التي جمعت بين فريقين كبيرين سيطرا على كرة القدم الإنجليزية خلال السنوات القليلة الماضية. استنادًا إلى تلك البيانات الـ 25، هيمنت التعليقات من نوع «الحكم» على «تعليقات المشجعين المستخدمة لتقييم قرارات الحكم. كما يستخدم المشجعون في كثير من الأحيان «التعددية اللغوية في التفاعل و» القوة» في التدرج للتعبير عن تقييمهم لقرارات الحكم المثيرة للجدل ونظام الفيديو المساعد للحكم علاوة على ذلك، تُستخدم نظرية الهوية الاجتماعية لدراسة المفاهيم الثلاثة التي أوضحها تاجفيل وتيرنر. (VAR) لتقييم انتماء الشخص بناءً على تعليقاته. تتشكل هوية المشجعين في الغالب بناءً على دفاعهم عن فريقهم من خلال التقييم السلبي لقرارات الحكم التي يعتبرونها ضارة بفريقهم، ثم تشكل الهوية من خلال المقارنة، والتي وجد في هذه الحالة أن المقارنة المستخدمة تهدف إلى الإطاحة بمجموعة أخرى أو مجموعة خارجية

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS.....	i
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP.....	iii
APPROVAL SHEET.....	iv
LEGITIMATION SHEET	v
DEDICATION	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
ABSTRACT.....	xi
ABSTRAK	xii
ملخص.....	xiii
CHAPTER I	1
A. Background of the study	1
B. Research Questions.....	6
C. Significance of study.....	6
D. Scope and Limitations	7
E. Definition of Key Terms	8
CHAPTER II.....	9
A. Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL)	9
B. Relation Between Interpersonal Metafunction and Appraisal.....	10
a. Attitude	12
b. Engagement.....	13
c. Graduation.....	14
D. Social Identity Theory	14
a. Social Categorization	15
b. Social Identification	15
c. Social Comparison	16
E. The Analysis of Emoji	16
CHAPTER III.....	18
A. Research Design.....	18
B. Research Instruments.....	18
C. Data & Data Sources	19

D. Data Collection.....	20
E. Data Analysis.....	20
CHAPTER IV	21
A. Findings	21
<i>Datum 1</i>	25
<i>Datum 2</i>	27
<i>Datum 3</i>	28
<i>Datum 4</i>	29
<i>Datum 5</i>	30
<i>Datum 6</i>	31
<i>Datum 7</i>	32
<i>Datum 8</i>	34
<i>Datum 9</i>	35
<i>Datum 10</i>	36
<i>Datum 11</i>	37
<i>Datum 12</i>	39
<i>Datum 13</i>	40
<i>Datum 14</i>	41
<i>Datum 15</i>	42
<i>Datum 16</i>	43
<i>Datum 17</i>	45
<i>Datum 18</i>	46
<i>Datum 19</i>	47
<i>Datum 20</i>	49
<i>Datum 21</i>	50
<i>Datum 22</i>	51
<i>Datum 23</i>	52
<i>Datum 24</i>	53
<i>Datum 25</i>	54
B. Discussion	55
CHAPTER V	60
A. Conclusion	60

B. Suggestion.....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	62
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	66
APPENDIX.....	67

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the study

Over the past few decades, every football team has been improving their playing style, from tactics and analysis of their opponents to changes in playing style in order to win every match. With these developments, referees in competitions have also implemented new rules to ensure that matches remain fair. New technologies such as VAR have also been introduced to help referees monitor incidents during matches. Technological innovations in football help make matches more competitive (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2020). Various countries are striving to develop their football technology to deliver better matches (Chaterjee, 2023).

However, the final decision still rests with the referee on the pitch. Referees often make subjective decisions, which may be due to psychological attacks from supporters and referees' misunderstanding of incidents on the field (Nazarudin et al., 2024). Therefore, technological development in football has received widespread support because controversial referee decisions are still often found in matches (Winand et al., 2021). Due to these controversial incidents, many fans have begun to voice their dissatisfaction with referee decisions on social media. Various pro and con opinions have been gathered in the comments section.

This study focuses on how fans use language to express their opinions on VAR, particularly how they assess referees' decisions and judge whether those decisions are fair or unfair. The language used by fans on social media not only reflects emotional expression, but also serves as an indicator of a person's ideological and social views (Papadima & Photiadis, 2019). Through social media, fans often post assessments, criticisms, and support that indirectly reveal their identity in the world of football. Sometimes, fanbases have their

own distinctive way of responding to current issues when commenting, and the language and words they use often share certain similarities.

This focus is important because in this digital age, public opinions such as comments and social media posts spread more quickly and can influence many parties, unlike in the past when public opinions were only obtained through discussions and magazines and their dissemination was also very slow. Studies on this discourse not only add to our understanding of how emotions and identity can enter contemporary football culture, but also provide insights for refereeing institutions such as PGMOL (Professional Game Match Officials Limited) in the English league and other refereeing institutions in European leagues, to improve the effectiveness of communication, respond to fan criticism, and be more careful in making decisions on the field.

In particular, several previous studies have applied appraisal theory to analyze comments or evaluative discourse used by speakers or commenters regarding a particular discourse. One of the studies (Wahyudi & Chusna, 2015) utilized appraisal theory to examine how the judges on Indonesia's "Factor X" program provided their evaluations. (Yuliyanti, 2023) that used one of the subsystems of appraisal theory—attitude—to analyze netizens' evaluative comments regarding a controversial case on Twitter. Furthermore, there are studies that used appraisal theory to analyze discourse in football (Križan, 2024; Subin, 2023; Tran & Ngoc, 2022). Several of these previous studies analyzed various discourses in football (Križan, 2024) which compared match reports using one of the attitude subsystems of appraisal theory. (Subin, 2023) which analyzed online comments on Facebook pages; and (Tran & Ngoc, 2022) which analyzed the evaluative language used in live match commentary.

Furthermore, the application of Social Identity Theory in the context of sports and social media has also been widely used by several previous studies (Newson et al., 2023)

which, through Social Identity Theory, found that emotional bonds among supporters of a particular club give rise to attitudes of hatred and hostility toward rivals or out-groups. Furthermore (Koo et al., 2025) using Social Identity Theory, demonstrated that the behavior of football fans has largely merged with the emotional attitudes of the fans. Additionally, (Kural & Özbek, 2023) using Social Identity Theory, demonstrated that the behavior of football fans has largely merged with the emotional attitudes of the fans. Additionally, (Liddelow et al., 2025) demonstrated that fans' social identity motivates them to actively engage in physical activities within the realm of sports. In addition, in the context of social media, (Pérez-Sabater & Maguelouk-Moffo, 2020) demonstrated that social media comment sections can reinforce fan identity and facilitate verbal attacks through the choice of words used. In most previous studies, the application of Appraisal Theory and Social Identity Theory has been aligned with the discourse under examination and has proven to yield significant findings and address issues related to specific discourses. For example, (Wahyudi & Chusna, 2015) used Appraisal Theory to analyze the percentage of evaluations by the judges of Indonesia's Factor X. Furthermore, a study by (Yuliyanti, 2023) found that Twitter users' evaluative comments on a particular issue can reveal their identity. Furthermore, (Križan, 2024; Subin, 2023; Tran & Ngoc, 2022) demonstrated that by applying Appraisal Theory to the field of football, issues within it can be resolved in a structured manner and categorized based on the subsystems of Appraisal Theory.

On the other hand, the application of Social Identity Theory in previous research has shown that football fans' social identity and in-group cohesion are directly related to how fans react to out-groups or rivals and to fan conflicts on social media (Koo et al., 2025; Kural & Özbek, 2023; Newson et al., 2023). Social Identity Theory also demonstrates that fan identity can serve as a motivator for actions in the realm of sports (Liddelow et al., 2025),

including how fans react through their comments on social media and express their identity as fans (Pérez-Sabater & Maguelouk-Moffo, 2020).

However, most of these studies have focused on formal texts, such as the study by Križan (2024), which analyzed match reports, and the study by Tran & Ngoc (2022), which focused on live commentary from a single football match, and have not yet addressed the global social media discourse. Although the study by Subin (2023) focuses on social media, it still centers on club rivalries in general and has not examined in greater depth how identities and forms of rivalry are constructed through evaluative comments directed at referees. Furthermore, from the perspective of Social Identity Theory, analyses of social identity formation generally focus only on how conflicts between fans are viewed through the lens of Social Identity Theory and have not delved deeper into how this theory can be used to examine fans' spontaneous comments on controversial issues within football matches.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of Appraisal Theory and Social Identity Theory, which has not been done in previous research. The integration of these two theories aims to determine how fans' evaluations of issues—such as controversies over referees' decisions—can shape their identities through evaluative comments. Through this approach, Social Identity Theory will be used to demonstrate that evaluations or expressions of support are not merely assessments of an issue; rather, there may be hidden motives behind fans' evaluations of referees or VAR—whether intended to justify what happened to their team or to genuinely evaluate the referee's decision. Click or tap here to enter text.

After conducting a literature review, the conclusion reached was that most previous studies only focused on rivalries between fans, the construction of fan identity through chants and comments on VAR, which was considered to be biased towards the more favoured team or player. These studies have not sufficiently explored how fans use

evaluative language to assess refereeing institutions in European football as a protest against the disadvantage of one of the supported teams. The limitations of the data obtained from previous studies, which focused on only one event or one club, make this study important to examine, as fan or viewer criticism and assessment are needed to make world football fairer. Using appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) helps define fan comments as rejection and acceptance of VAR decisions and fan solidarity. This classification aims to define the types of comments from both fanbases, which will then hopefully become an evaluation of refereeing institutions around the world.

This study aims to explain and analyse how football fans express their assessments, emotions, and attitudes towards the PGMOL institution and VAR technology decisions through evaluative language used on social media. Using the framework of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), this study will identify the forms of attitudes, engagement, and gradations expressed by fans in digital media. Furthermore, by combining Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this study will also explain how the linguistic expressions used by fans reflect the formation of group identity, solidarity, and opposition to refereeing institutions in football. Academically, this study contributes to expanding the application of Judgement Theory to the realm of digital sports discourse, which has rarely been studied by linguistic studies to date. This study also provides new insights into the breadth of language in football, as in the Penn's (2016) study which explains how discussions about football, such as comments about a club, can become a unifying language in various parts of the world. It is hoped that this study will add new perspectives in the field of linguistics related to the football discourse, such as evaluative comments by fans about referees as a *lingua franca*.

The data analysis that will be used in this study employs the Appraisal Theory framework proposed by Martin and White (2005) as the primary approach. This theory was

chosen because it provides linguistic analysis tools suitable for identifying how attitudes, engagement, and graduation are expressed in the text. Through this framework, researchers can see how football fans evaluate referees' decisions, express their emotions towards VAR, and construct perceptions of the fairness and authority of PGMOL through evaluative language on social media. In addition, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) will also be used as a basis for understanding how these linguistic expressions can construct group identity and social solidarity among fans. This analytical approach is qualitative and based on discourse analysis, with the aim of exploring the evaluative and social meanings behind the use of digital language. These two theories were chosen because they are both suitable for explaining the relationship between language, emotion, and power, and help interpret how language becomes a tool for representing a group's attitudes in modern sports discourse.

B. Research Questions

1. What types of evaluative language, based on Appraisal Theory, are used by football fans in Instagram comments to evaluate controversial referee and VAR decisions in selected English Premier League matches?
2. How do football fans construct social identity through evaluative language in the comment sections of @liveherewego Instagram posts about controversial referee and VAR decisions in selected English Premier League matches?

C. Significance of study

This study focuses on the use of fan language in expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with VAR decisions on social media. This study aims to explain how language structure and comments can provide evaluation for refereeing institutions. Furthermore, for football fans, this study can provide insight into how they voice their

opinions about VAR decisions. Using appraisal theory and social identity theory, this study analyses how fan comments on social media shape judgements, emotions, and identity formation in response to decisions that are considered fair or unfair on social media. Through this identity formation, it can be determined whether the comments are biased or truly evaluate the referee. This approach provides a new contribution to understanding how language can provide evaluation and identity formation. This research can also provide insights for refereeing institutions in understanding media perceptions when commenting on decisions made on the field, thereby serving as an evaluation to improve communication among referees and exercise caution when making decisions.

D. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on analyzing football fans' comments regarding VAR decisions, with a primary emphasis on the use of Appraisal Theory to identify attitudes, emotions, and evaluative judgments, as well as Social Identity Theory to examine the formation of group identity in digital discourse. The research data is limited to public comments collected from Instagram during a specific time period, and thus does not encompass all forms of discussion or other conversations. This study analyzes only linguistic discourse without evaluating aspects of VAR usage, the accuracy of referees' decisions, or institutional injustice. This study focuses on the English Premier League, which has a global fan base. The qualitative approach used also limits the study to the depth of analysis rather than the generalizability of findings. With these limitations, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the evaluations and social identities constructed through fan language, without claiming to represent all fans on social media more broadly.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Appraisal Theory: An analytical framework, which is a branch of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), used to identify how language is used to evaluate and express speakers' attitudes and opinions.

2. Attitude: A component of appraisal theory used to identify the evaluation of emotion. This is divided into affect, judgement and appreciation. These categories are used to analyse feelings, evaluate behaviour and assess the value of an object, event or phenomenon.

3. Engagement: a component of evaluation theory used to analyse the source of the voice, speaker's position and involvement in a utterance. This system is divided into heterogloss and monogloss.

4. Graduation: A component of appraisal theory used to assess the speaker's level of meaning. This system is used to measure the strength or weakness of an utterance. It is divided into two categories: force and focus.

5. Social Identity Theory: an analytical framework used to identify comments and find out identities through comments.

6. Video Assistant Referee (VAR): technology in football created to review decisions or fouls that occur in a match.

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

A. Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic approach developed by M. A. K. Halliday that studies how language can shape meaning, learning, and social change. This approach views language as a systemic choice used by speakers, aiming to achieve communicative goals among fellow speakers in accordance with the context of the situation and culture (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). (Lewis, 2014) explains that every use of language has three main functions, which in SFL are called metafunctions: first, the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction, and the textual metafunction.

The ideational metafunction is a function of language in Systemic Functional Linguistics that serves to explain how language describes processes and experiences in the world described in the transitivity system. Through this transitivity, language formation is explained in three main components, namely process (describing the activity being carried out), participant (nouns and who or what is involved in the process), and state (describing details such as setting or time).

The interpersonal metafunction is used to explain the function of language in social interactions. It looks at how sentences can convey actions, such as requesting, ordering, or stating something. Here, language is also used to convey expressions such as attitudes, judgments, and social expressions that can be seen through mood elements. With these mood elements, sentences can be seen as declarative, interrogative, or imperative. In addition, this function also looks at whether sentences are mandatory, certain, or possible through modality.

Textual metafunction is a language function in Systemic Functional Linguistics that serves to organize and arrange information that is clear and appropriate in the existing

context. This function is formed in the form of sentences that are seen through the theme, which is the beginning of a sentence or interaction on the topic being discussed, then through the rheme, which is an additional explanation of the theme by adding other elements to the discussion, such as participants, attitudes, or connectors.

B. Relation Between Interpersonal Metafunction and Appraisal

Based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the Interpersonal Metafunction serves to explain how language is used to express attitudes, social relationships, and the positions of the speaker and the addressee. Through this metafunction, language can be used to perform actions, such as commanding, requesting, and stating. Not only that, language also functions as a builder of social relationships with others. Halliday & Matthiesen (2014) (Lewis, 2014) further explain that the interpersonal metafunction is implemented through mood, which includes declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Then, there is modality, which includes degree of certainty, obligation, and inclination. All of these give the speaker a social position in an interaction.

Although the application of interpersonal metafunction has provided a detailed explanation of how language is used in forming social relationships, this framework has not explained in detail how the use of evaluation and attitude plays a role in this linguistic field. Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) was proposed in order to further explore how language can be used to evaluate others. This theory is used to analyze the semantic level of discourse (Discourse Semantics). It is an extension of Interpersonal Meaning that focuses on how speakers express attitudes, position themselves, and define their roles within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). As shown in the following figure:

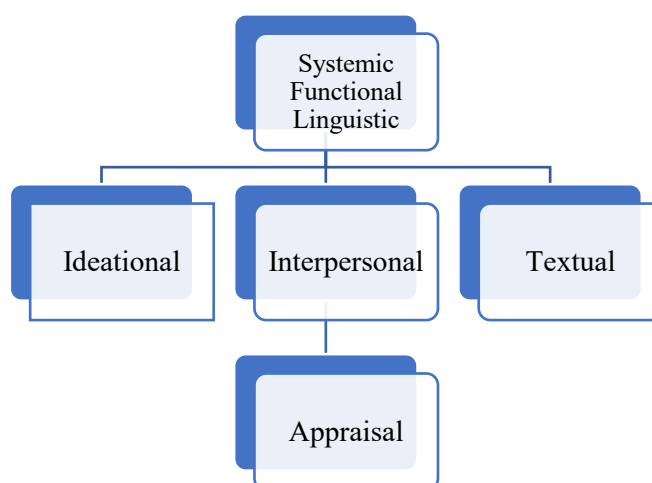


Figure 1 Appraisal System (Adapted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 38)

Martin and White (2005, p. 33) explicitly positions the Theory of Evaluation within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as a development of the resource of interpersonal meaning rooted in Halliday's theory.

C. Appraisal Theory

Based on Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory, this is an extension of the interpersonal metafunction found in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework. Interpersonal is used in building social relations and the position of the subject in a discourse (Hasan, 2015). The use of appraisal includes an interpersonal semantic system that also functions in building social relations through language, not just a collection of evaluative lexical items. Appraisal is seen as a link between the grammatical structure of interpersonal communication and the wider social environment by adding elements that have not been touched upon in the interpersonal metafunction. This appraisal theory was developed by Martin and White (2005) and is divided into three main systems, namely attitude, which focuses on how the text constructs or expresses evaluative attitudes; graduation, which focuses on how the speaker focuses on what is used to strengthen or weaken the evaluation; and finally, engagement, which focuses on how the speaker positions themselves.

a. Attitude

Attitude is a source of interpersonal meaning that focuses on emotions, judgements of behaviour, and evaluations of something. Attitude is divided into three subsystems, namely affect, judgement, and appreciation. Affect focuses on negative and positive emotions or feelings, judgement focuses on assessments of people and behaviour, and appreciation focuses on assessments of non-human entities and circumstances.

Affect in attitude is used to express the speaker's subjective emotions and feelings towards an event, experience, or participant. Affect serves to see how the speaker feels about an event, not how the speaker judges other people or objects. (Martin & White, 2005) classify main categories of opposing semantic emotions, namely unhappiness and happiness, insecurity and security, dissatisfaction and satisfaction, disinclination and inclination. Affect can be expressed explicitly using sentences that contain emotion, or implicitly through metaphors, irony and the choice of sentences that contain specific meanings. (Martin & White, 2005) classify affect into six dimensions.

First, determine whether the emotion is negative or positive. Examples of positive emotions include happy and relieved, while angry and disappointed are examples of negative emotions. Second, determine whether the intensity is high or low. Examples of low intensity include annoyed, while furious is an example of high intensity. Third, it is surge and disposition, which is whether the emotion that arises is momentary or permanent. An example sentence is 'fans were furious after the decision,' which shows the fans' momentary reaction after seeing the decision. Another example is 'He is an easily frustrated player,' which shows that this emotion tends to last a long time. Fourth, it is how affect appears through feelings or habits. An example is 'I feel sad for him,' which falls under the category of feeling, and another example is 'the fans

booed the referee,' which falls under the category of behaviour (affect invoked). The fifth is who is experiencing the emotion, whether it is the speaker or someone else. An example sentence is 'I am disappointed,' which is authorial affect, followed by another example, 'the fans were frustrated,' which is non-authorial affect. The sixth is how the emotion is mentioned, whether explicitly or implicitly. An example sentence is 'I am furious,' which is an example of inscribed affect, followed by 'another five minutes waiting for VAR,' which is an example of invoked affect.

The second subsystem in attitude is judgement, which relates to the evaluation of a person's behaviour, character and morals. Judgement is divided into two main keys, namely social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem includes assessments of normality, capacity and tenacity. Then there is social sanction, which includes veracity and propriety.

The third attitude subsystem is appreciation, which involves evaluating objects, events and material. (Martin & White, 2005) classify appreciation into three main groups. The first is reaction, which involves seeing how something can influence feelings. The second is composition, which involves seeing how something can be structured. The last is valuation, which involves seeing the value of something.

b. Engagement

Engagement is a form of personal emotional experience. Through engagement, we can see how the speaker positions their opinion or evaluation among other opinions. Engagement positions the speaker's opinion as either absolutely correct or still open to question and debate. This concept originated from Bakhtin's dialogic concept (Thompson et al., 1981), which discusses that every utterance is essentially dialogic, meaning that one utterance or one speaker dialogues or relates to another utterance. In accordance with the concept of dialogue, engagement can open up space for opinion

or dialogue with other utterances, or close the space for opinion or dialogue with other utterances.

According to (Martin & White, 2005), engagement is divided into two main focuses, namely Monoglossic and Heteroglossic. Monoglossic gives the impression of speech as an indisputable opinion that is firm and spontaneous. Monoglossic is further divided into two types, namely factual monoglossic and focal monoglossic. Factual monoglossic is a statement that is factual and cannot be changed, while focal monoglossic is an irrefutable and debatable hypothesis. Next is Heteroglossic, which is divided into two main focuses, namely dialogic expansion and dialogic contraction. Dialogic expansion occurs when the speaker opens a dialogue with an expression of uncertainty or possibility, which opens up opinions for the other party. Meanwhile, dialogic contraction denies or opposes other utterances.

c. Graduation

Graduation is how a utterance can provide a level of strength and sharpness to an evaluative utterance. Graduation considers how the speaker strengthens or weakens the evaluative meaning in accordance with the speaker's purpose in conveying their evaluation. (Martin & White, 2005) divide the main focus of Graduation into two groups, namely force, which is related to quantification and intensification, which looks at how and to what extent the evaluation is strengthened or weakened. Force is usually formed by using sentences that contain reinforcement and repetition, and then focus, which is the graduation utterance used to sharpen or blur the evaluation.

D. Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a theory of human psychology that explains how individuals construct their identity within a group, as well as how the process of individual development within that group influences the attitudes and behaviour of each group. According to Tajfel

& Turner (1979), the formation of an individual's character is based on their perception of the members of a group. This theory helps to understand how meaning, attitudes, and social evaluation are formed. According to Tajfel & Turner (1979), the formation of social identity occurs through three main concepts, namely social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.

a. Social Categorization

Social categorization is the process where people group themselves and others into specific groups, resulting in the formation of in-groups and out-groups within a larger group. They typically use pronouns such as “we”, “us”, “they”, and so on to refer to a group. This allows them to belong to a group, in other words, they form their own social identity. In the context of this research, fans will usually express their opinions using phrases such as “as a (certain club) fan”, which defines them as supporters of that club; their views may be biased or the opposite. Social categorization is used to describe groups and make them easier to understand; for example, we define school students as children who attend school and wear the school-prescribed uniform.

b. Social Identification

Next comes social identification, which occurs when a person makes their membership of a group part of their identity; this becomes deeply integrated into their emotions and psychology, so that emotionally they feel they belong to that group. At this stage, the individual begins to adopt the values of the group. A person's self-esteem is derived from how the group reflects them; this leads to a shift in the individual's sense of identity from “I” to “Us”. According to Tajfel (1981), this process of social identity forms the basis for the development of the individual and influences how individuals respond to social situations.

According to Tajfel (1979), this identification constitutes a social identity that is ingrained within an individual; it is this that ultimately gives rise to the values, emotions and distinctive characteristics of a group within that individual. Tajfel also explains that, within this identification, a group will foster an attitude of favouring its own group, or ethnocentrism. This is often seen within a fan group; members will identify with the group and act in accordance with what the fan group does, including favouring their own fan group.

c. Social Comparison

The final process in this theory is social comparison, which is the process whereby an individual compares their own group with another group in order to highlight the positive aspects of their own group and emphasise the weaknesses of the other group. According to Tajfel & Turner (1979) social comparison is used in the formation of an individual's social identity by involving others to evaluate one's own attitudes, which subsequently reveals differences between one's own group (in-group) and other groups (out-group). Through this social comparison, an individual typically utilises group identity to boost their self-esteem, as the group they belong to is perceived as superior.

E. The Analysis of Emoji

The use of emojis in social media interactions currently is not merely a complement or embellishment to text; emojis have become an additional means of communication in digital and social media to convey the speaker's expressions, emotions, and identity. According to Cyberpragmatics, the function of emojis is highly dependent on the text and can vary depending on general conventions and the communicative goals being pursued (Hilal & Wahyudi, 2025). According to Semiotics, emojis are divided into three main types of signs: icons (resembling real objects), indices (having a physical relationship), and symbols (dependent on convention or culture). In the analysis of social media data—such as

comments—users employ these different types of emojis to reinforce the contextual meaning being conveyed and to add a deeper visual and emotional dimension to their messages (Hilal & Wahyudi, 2025).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

This study utilises a qualitative approach because the data collected consists of words (Weyant, 2022). This approach is appropriate for the object of this study, as the data collected consists of social phenomena in the form of netizen comments. As explained by Creswell, qualitative research data is collected by reading and compiling documents (Weyant, 2022), through comments relevant to the issues in this study. This approach is more appropriate because the object of this study is perceptions and phenomena of language use (Yahya, 2023). The observation of social phenomena here aims to develop knowledge through theory and data (Yahya, 2023).

According to (Rahardjo, 2023), qualitative research is more appropriate in the development of scientific knowledge on the analysis of human behaviour. The use of a qualitative approach is very appropriate for the object of this study, which focuses on the analysis of human behaviour, namely fans' responses to VAR decisions. This approach involves researchers in gaining a deeper understanding of the context and phenomena occurring among humans (Fadli, 2021). Therefore, this study uses a qualitative approach to explain and interpret the phenomenon of football fans' language on social media.

B. Research Instruments

The research instrument in this study is the researcher himself as an instrument in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data collected through Instagram accounts @liveherewego that discussing issues surrounding the VAR controversy. The mechanism used in this study is to determine relevant data by searching for fan comments discussing issues surrounding VAR on Instagram, then taking screenshots of comments that use

evaluative language to express their opinions. Furthermore, from these comments, the researcher also explain the identity of the fans in expressing their opinions.

C. Data & Data Sources

The data contained in this study is in the form of comments written by fans. The comments collected are those that contain evaluative language in commenting on VAR decisions in matches. The collected data is from instagram account posts from @liveherewego that discussing the controversy surrounding VAR decisions in several big match in English Premier League during the 2025/2026 season. The data collected consists of comments that can be accessed by anyone on Instagram. Social media Instagram chosen as data sources because through this media, fans can convey their evaluations directly/in real time, allowing users to freely watch live matches and convey their evaluations of events in a match (Fadilah & Putri, 2024).

This study select Premier League as data objects because English football language is a register of global football language that can bridge communication across regions, so in sociolinguistic terms, the English league offers a variety of languages that can be studied (Ohlander, 2020). beside that these leagues have a major influence and the most watched worldwide. Based on data obtained from the Sportsdunia (2026), which displays data on the 10 most-watched leagues, and the Premier League occupy the top positions as the most-watched leagues on the website.beside that, The data was collected based on global viewership, stadium attendance, and social media interaction. Through this data, it can be concluded that discussions on social media about this leagues are always heated, providing this study with a wide variety of data. This data also includes information from the most recent season, making this topic highly relevant for discussion. The data was collected from Instagram because this platform is widely used today and serve as a platform for fans to express their opinions.

D. Data Collection

Researchers collected data through documentation techniques, namely by collecting existing documents in written form on social media pages. The researchers select the social media platform Instagram as the subject of this study, and select data objects from the @liveherewego account that contain posts related to the controversy surrounding VAR decisions in the English league. The Researcher then take screenshots of relevant comments posted in the comments section of the @liveherewego Instagram account discussing controversial decisions in matches.

Data collection also be carried out deliberately and based on specific criteria, such as comments containing evaluative language towards VAR, comments selected from posts on the Instagram account @liveherewego, and written in English. The first step in data collection is to find information related to the controversy surrounding VAR decisions in featured English Premier League matches, then collect several comments. After that, several comments that fall into the evaluative category by fans selected, then screenshotted, and final step the selected specific comments were then analysed one by one.

E. Data Analysis

Data analysis conducted in several ways. First, news reports on Instagram, namely posts from the @liveherewego account about football matches involving VAR controversies, searched for, and then several comments using evaluative language towards referees selected. This stage aims to understand which ones are appropriate and to see a general picture of the attitudes, assessments, and group identities through these comments. After that, the selected words, phrases, or sentences analysed using Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), which focuses on attitudes, engagement, and graduation. After each sentence is analysed using Appraisal Theory, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is also used to analyse fan identity through these comments.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

A. Findings

The findings of this study were analyzed using Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory to examine the structure and form of commenters' evaluations of controversial referee decisions. Furthermore, Social Identity Theory (1979) was used in this study to examine, more broadly, the identity of fan comments based on the form of their evaluations. The object of study in this research was the @liveherewego post discussing the controversy surrounding the referee's decision in the 2025–2026 English Premier League season. In these posts, various evaluative comments directed at referees and other fans were found. This is because the controversy surrounding these decisions impacts the final outcome and the course of the match. Fan reactions through Instagram comments were then analyzed to identify comment types based on Appraisal Theory and Social Identity Theory.

In selecting the data, the researcher collected five posts collected based on the highlight reels posted by the @liveherewego account, each discussing a controversial refereeing incident in the English Premier League. The controversial incidents selected were also based on “big matches” featuring major teams in the English Premier League; these teams have dominated the top of the standings in recent years. The teams that dominate the English Premier League are commonly referred to as the Big Six. Matches between the Big Six are always a topic of debate among many fans and enrich the quality of the data, as referees' decisions sometimes spark heated debates among fans, as well as among English Premier League enthusiasts and supporters of the Big Six teams scattered across the globe. As a result, many evaluative expressions and responses related to identity are frequently found. Some of these matches include:

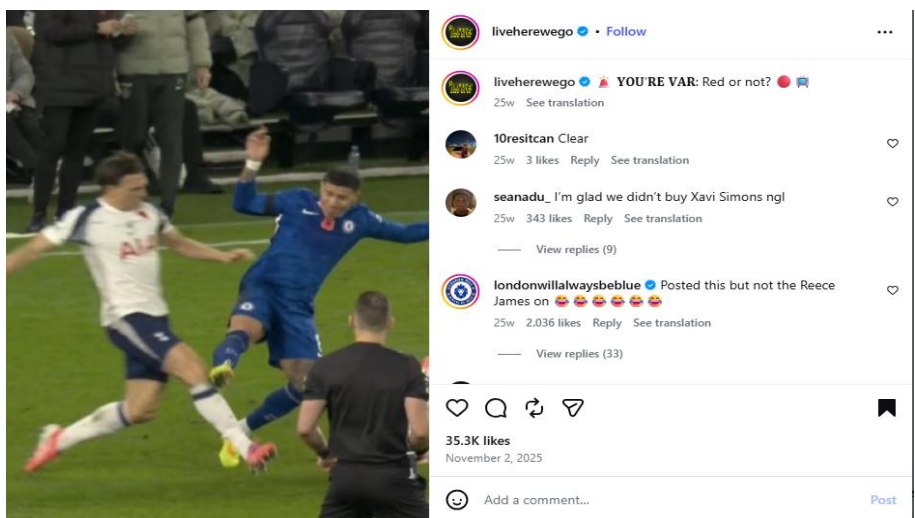


Figure 3 Screenshot of Controversial Incident post (Tottenham vs Chelsea November 2, 2025)



Figure 2 Screenshot of Controversial Incident post (Liverpool vs. Manchester United October 19, 2025)

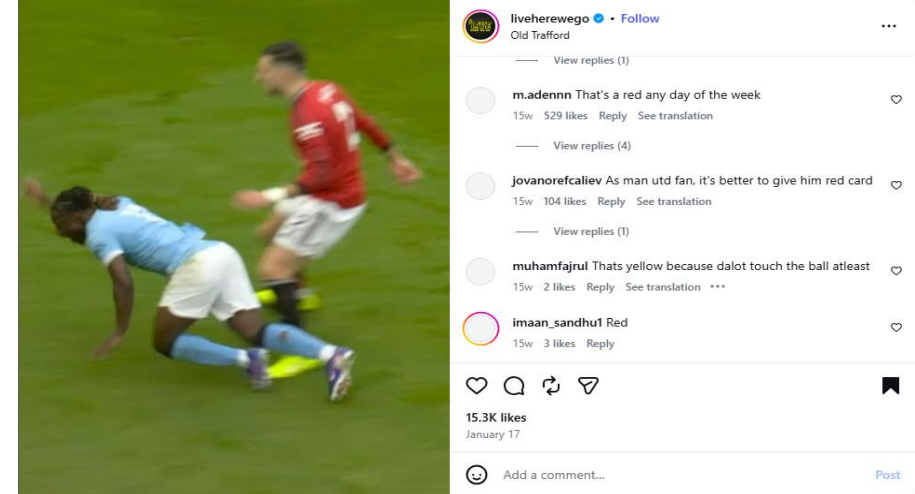


Figure 3 Screenshot of Controversial Incident post (Manchester United Vs Manchester City Januari 17, 2026)

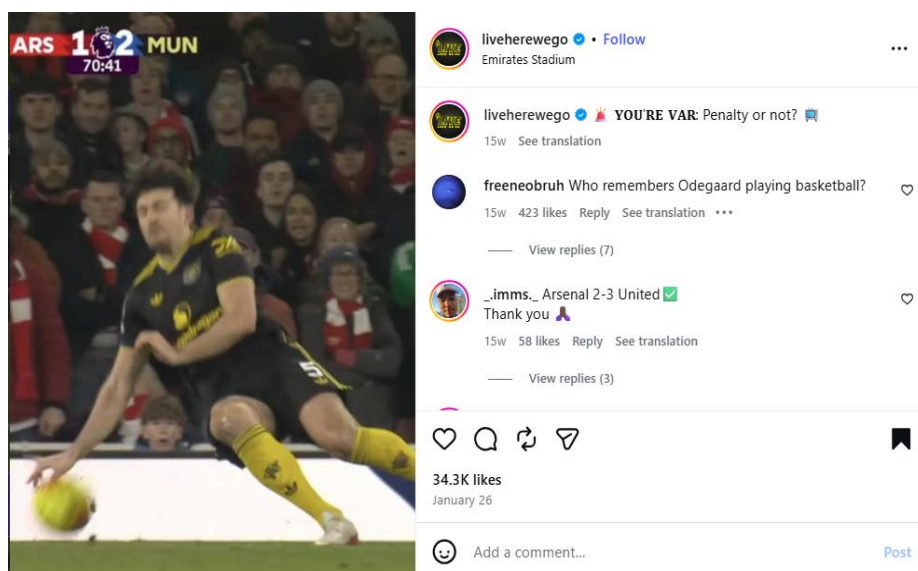


Figure 4 Screenshot of Controversial Incident post (Arsenal vs Manchester United January 8, 2026)

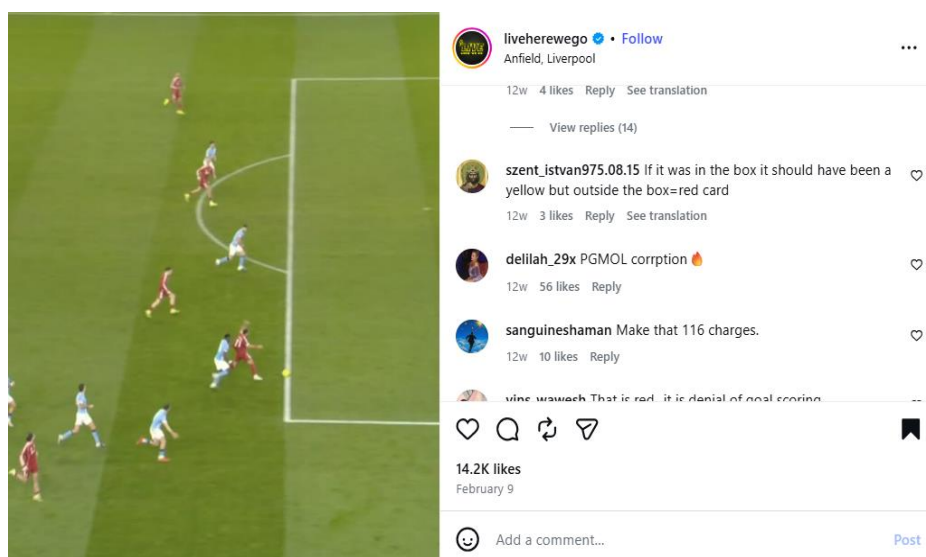


Figure 5 Screenshot of Controversial Incident post (Liverpool vs Manchester City February 8, 2026)

In these posts, several controversial referee decisions that subsequently became the subject of discussion among many fans in the comment sections.

Based on the findings, among the 25 comments used to evaluate referee decisions, the most dominant type of comment was “judgement,” with 23 comment data points identified in this study for evaluating referee decisions. Two of these fell into the “appreciation” category. Regarding engagement, 24 data points were classified as “heteroglossic,” while one was categorized as “monoglossic.” In terms of graduation, 23 comments were classified as “force,” whereas only two were categorized as “focus.” The following is a general

overview of the findings based on an analysis of Appraisal Theory and Social Identity Theory

Appraisal System	Category	Example	Total
Attitude	Appreciation	"Posted this but not the Reece James on 😂😂😂"	2
Attitude	Judgement	"How is that not a red?"	23
Engagement	Heteroglossic Contraction	"never a pen"	21
Engagement	Heteroglossic expansion	"I guess....."	4
Graduation	Force	"absolute corruption"	23
Graduation	Focus	"but, when it comes to....."	2

Findings from the collected data show that the "Judgment" category of the attitude system dominates fan comments, indicating that most fan comments evaluate the referees' competence in officiating matches. Furthermore, in the engagement system, fan comments mostly fall into the "heteroglossic contraction" category, indicating that fans believe their arguments are irrefutable and reject other opinions. Finally, in the "Graduation" system, fan comments mostly fall into the "Force" category, due to the large number of comments that place strong emphasis on evaluating the referees.

These comments were analyzed based on the evaluative sentences used by fans; the evaluative expressions fans used toward the referee may be biased and may not truly evaluate the referee's decisions.

Furthermore, an analysis based on Social Identity Theory revealed that many fans' comments reflected their club identity through their support for or opposition to the referee's decision. In addition, many drew comparisons to other incidents in order to boost their group's self-esteem and to belittle other groups. This study identified several patterns which have found in large numbers of identity formation through comments, as shown in the table below:

Identity Process	Pattern Found	Example	Total
Social	In group vs Out	"as a Man	4
Categorization	group	Utd fan..."	
	Distinction		
Social	Defensive	"we're	1
Identification	alignment	robbed..."	
	with club		
Social	Comparing	"Saliba...got	7
Comparison	similar	sent off..."	
	Incidents		

The data consists of a collection of comments that explicitly describe the characteristics of statements or comments consistent with Social Identity Theory. Many fan comments explicitly compare the events of the match with the seven data points; some fans also evaluate controversial decisions by mentioning the fan alliance to which the commenter belongs; and one data point shows how the commenter identifies with the team on a deeper emotional level.

Datum 1

"@londonwillalwaysbeblue : "Posted this but not the Reece James on 🤔🤔🤔"

This comment evaluates a post by the @liveherewego account showing a foul committed by Enzo Fernandez on Joao Palhinha. The image shows Enzo making contact with Joao Palhinha's knee at what seems to be a high foot level; Enzo was given a yellow card by the referee, which has sparked a debate, with many arguing that he deserved a red card. In Attitude, this comment falls under the 'Appreciation' category because Commenters are evaluating the decision from the @liveherewego account, who only posted the foul committed by Enzo, whilst a similar foul committed by Rodrigo Bentancur against Reece James was not posted on that account. The use of the emoji “😂😂😂” serves as a complement to a sentence that could be a sharp criticism, but is instead used as playful mockery. This comment falls under the “Appreciation” category of “Composition” as it evaluates the uploaded content. Both players received yellow cards in that match.

In 'Engagement', the phrase 'but not' constitutes heterogloss, as it allows others to respond to the evaluative comment; the phrase falls under the category of 'dialogic contraction', which is used to challenge the framing of the post. In Graduation, the comment undermines the view of someone who believes that the foul deserved a red card. The comment falls into the 'force' category, with the added phrase “but not the Reece James one” comparing the two offences; according to the speaker, the offence committed by Reece James was more deserving of a red card than the one committed by Enzo Fernandez.

In the context of social categorization, this statement implicitly identifies the commenter's group. He positions himself as part of the in-group of Chelsea supporters, thereby casting the media and the referee as the out-group. This is evidenced by the phrase “but not Reece James who”, which indicates the commenter's placement within the in-group of Chelsea supporters. Then, in terms of social identification, through this sentence, the speaker indicates that he is a Chelsea fan. The commentator begins to defend his team, which he feels has also been wronged by the referee. The commentator then goes on to compare

two refereeing decisions that are both considered controversial. Here, the commentator compares the referee's decisions from different incidents, namely Rodrigo Bentancur's foul on Reece James. The commentator considers this foul to be more serious than Enzo's foul on Palhinha. This social comparison aims to defend his team, which has become the target of media criticism suggesting the team was favoured by the referee because Enzo's foul was not penalised with a red card.

Datum 2



utdpatty How is that not a red 🤔🤔



26w 36 likes Reply See translation

@utdpatty : “How is that not a red 🤔🤔”

This comment evaluates the referee's decision to issue Enzo a yellow card for the foul; in terms of attitude, this comment falls into the ‘Negative Judgement’ category, as it questions the referee's decision to issue only a yellow card, which the commenter believes should have warranted a red card. In terms of engagement, the comment falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction, through the use of the phrase “how is that not a red card” which indicates that the commentator disagrees with the referee's decision as the speaker poses an alternative question regarding the referee's decision. This question appears to limit statements that contradict the commenter's view.

In this context, the comment falls into the ‘force’ category; the addition of the emojis “🤔🤔” which is an icon representing disappointment suggests that the comment reinforces the commenter's disappointment regarding the referee's decision, which, in the speaker's view, should have warranted a red card.

Furthermore, through Social Identity, the commenter implicitly positions themselves as a fan who disagrees with the referee's decision, whilst the referee is positioned as an out-group through their comment. Furthermore, in terms of Social Identification, the comment

falls under emotional alignment, placing the commenter within a group opposed to the VAR decision. Additionally, in terms of Social Comparison, the fan compares the VAR/referee's decision in that match with their own view that the foul in question should have resulted in a red card. Through this comparison, the commenter constructs the perception that the referee in that match made an inaccurate decision.

Datum 3



loayzaaroor dangerous play bro its a red



26w 114 likes Reply See translation

@loayzaaroor: dangerous play bro, its a red

This comment evaluates the referee's decision, which the commenter believes was a dangerous foul, meaning Enzo deserved a red card. In terms of attitude, the comment falls into the category of negative judgement, as it criticises the referee's decision to issue only a yellow card.

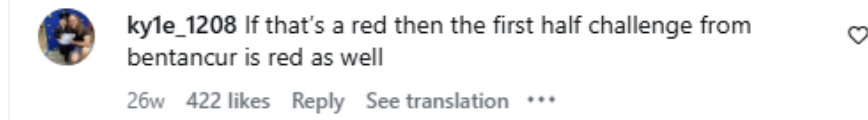
Furthermore, in terms of engagement, the comment falls into the 'monoglossic' category, as evidenced by the use of the phrase 'it's a red', which suggests that the commenter is dismissing others' views and insisting that their own opinion is the most accurate.

The commentator's use of the phrase 'dangerous play' to reinforce their opinion regarding the referee's controversial decision constitutes a form of 'force' in the 'graduation' process. The commentator reinforces the validity of their view—that the decision should have resulted in a red card—by explaining just how dangerous the foul was.

This comment implicitly places the commentator within the group of fans who oppose the referee's decision, thereby positioning the referee and VAR as the out-group within the framework of Social Identity Theory. Furthermore, through this comment, the commentator positions themselves as part of the group opposing the referee's decision. Subsequently, in

a social comparison, the commentator contrasts the referee's decision with their own view that the foul was a dangerous one. Through this comparison, the commenter seeks to demonstrate that the referee's decision was incorrect.

Datum 4



@kyle_1208 : “if that’s a red then the first half challenge from Bentancur is red as well”

This comment indicates that the commenter is evaluating two identical refereeing decisions; in the match, the referee issued a yellow card for both offences. In terms of attitude, the comment falls into the ‘appreciation’ category, as the commenter seeks to refute the view that the offence warranted a red card by comparing it to another incident which, in the commenter’s view, was more deserving of a red card.

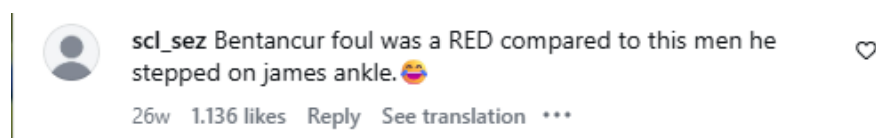
In terms of engagement, the comment falls into the ‘Heterogloss expansion’ category, as the argument uses the phrases ‘If that’s’ and ‘then the...’, which open up space for others to support or refute the commenter’s view.

In terms of graduation, this comment falls into the ‘force’ category, as indicated by the intensified use of the word ‘as well’ at the end of the sentence; the commenter wishes to emphasise that there were even more serious fouls in the first half that also resulted in yellow cards.

This comment provides an implicit explanation that the commenter supports the referee’s decision and Chelsea, as previously one of their players had been fouled more severely and received a yellow card from the referee. Based on Social Categorization, this comment positions the commenter as part of the ‘in-group’ regarding the referee’s decision and Chelsea, whilst placing those who reject the referee’s decision into the ‘out-group’.

Based on Social Identification, the comment implies that the fan supports Chelsea because they are challenging the views of other football fans who claim that the foul deserved a red card. The commenter then compares it to other incidents in the match which, in their view, were more deserving of a red card—an example of Social Comparison. The comment suggests that the commenter wishes to boost the self-esteem of the Chelsea team, which was singled out for that yellow card, even though there were more serious offences that only received a yellow card.

Datum 5



@scl_sez: Bentancur foul was a RED compared to this men he stepped on james ankle. 🤔

This comment evaluates the referee's decision-making standards, which remain unclear when penalising player fouls. It addresses the referee's on-pitch leadership, which was somewhat disappointing. In terms of attitude, this falls under the 'propriety' category of judgement, as evidenced by the phrase 'Bentancur's foul was a RED', indicating that the commenter considers the referee to be lacking in competence when determining fouls.

This comment also refutes other comments framing Enzo's foul as more deserving of a red card by offering a counter-argument regarding Bentancur's foul in the first half, which only resulted in a yellow card. This falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction, as the commentator rejects the framing adopted by most fans who focus solely on the foul committed by Enzo.

In Graduation, this comment falls into the 'force' category due to the emphasis evident in the commenter's writing style, such as the use of ALL CAPS in RED, which draws the reader's attention to the incident that, in the commenter's view, should have resulted in a red card: Bentancur's foul.

This comment indicates that the commenter is on the side of Reece James's team, Chelsea, as seen in the final phrase of the comment, 'he stepped on James's ankle', which implicitly proves that they are part of the in-group of Chelsea fans, thereby making other fans who reject the referee's decision the out-group based on Social Categorization. Through this comment, the commenter defends their team against attacks from fans who believe Enzo's foul deserved a red card, in order to uphold the team's pride—perceived as having been aided by the referee—which aligns with the second SIT process: Social Identification.

Fans also began comparing this to other incidents which they felt deserved a red card more than Enzo's foul. This is evident from the phrase 'Bentancur's foul was RED', from which it can be concluded that fans wanted to highlight that their team had also been wronged by the referee's decision.

Datum 6



@mattyfc_: “Oh please 😂😂😂😂😂😂 never a pen”

This comment indicates that the commenter wishes to refute the views of Liverpool fans or other football fans who believe that the incident where the ball struck Amad's elbow warranted a foul and should have been awarded as a penalty. This comment is categorised as 'Judgement', under the 'propriety' category, as the commenter considers the referee to have acted fairly in not awarding Liverpool a penalty for the incident. The use of the phrase “oh please”, followed by a laughing emoji, demonstrates that the commenter considers the fans' view that the incident was a penalty to be incorrect.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction. This is evident in the phrase “never a pen”, which proves that the commenter is absolutising their opinion and that it is beyond dispute that the incident was

not a penalty. In terms of intensity, this comment is categorised as “force”, evident from the repeated use of the “😬” emoji, which has intensifying characteristics, implicitly conveying that the person claiming it was a penalty is utterly ridiculous.

Through this comment, based on Social Categorization, the commenter has grouped themselves into the ‘in-group’ of fans who consider the referee’s decision to be fair, and fans who do not consider the incident to be a penalty. Consequently, fans who do consider the incident to be a penalty are classified as the ‘out-group’. Then, in terms of Social Identification, the commenter defends their team against fans who believe the incident was a penalty, through the choice of phrases they use, such as “oh please” and “never a pen”. Then, within Social Comparison, this comment positions the opposing group (namely those who consider the incident to be a penalty) as inferior through the use of the phrase “never a pen”, which makes the commenter’s argument seem more valid than that of the other group. Through this, the commenter seeks to boost their team’s self-esteem after they were perceived to have been favoured by the referee.

Datum 7



___ash___ish Its epl then its not a penalty but when it comes to laliga really i don't know 🤔
28w Reply See translation

@___ash___ish: “Its epl then its not a penalty but when it comes to laliga really I don’t know 🤔”

This comment evaluates the referee’s decision to allow play to continue without awarding a penalty to Liverpool because the ball struck Amad’s elbow inside the Manchester United penalty area. In terms of attitude, this comment falls under the ‘judgement’ category of propriety; through their comment, the commenter evaluates the EPL (English Premier League) referee’s handling of the match and their decision-making regarding fouls. The

commenter suggests that if this had occurred in LaLiga, a penalty might well have been awarded.

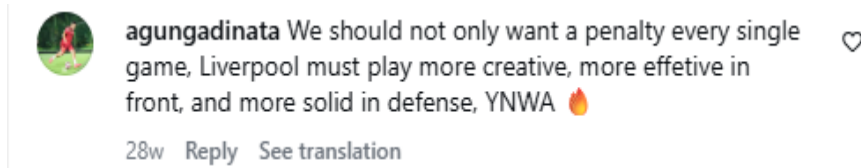
Then, in terms of Engagement, this comment falls under the category of Heteroglossic Dialogically Expansion. It opens up space for others to respond to the argument. The use of the phrase “I don’t know” indicates that the commenter is not taking a definitive stance or establishing a fixed position based on their comment as well as the referee’s inconsistency in determining fouls.

In the context of the discussion, this comment falls under the ‘Focus’ category, as the commenter implicitly seeks to soften the penalty standards in the English Premier League (EPL) by shifting the focus to a comparison of refereeing decisions with those in the Spanish league, suggesting that the final outcome might differ through the phrase “but, when it comes to La Liga...”. Although at the end of the sentence the commentator writes “really I don’t know”, which indicates that they genuinely do not understand the referees’ decisions in the English league.

Through this comment, the commenter positions themselves as a football fan who rejects the referee’s decision to allow play to continue without awarding a penalty against Manchester United. Therefore, it can be concluded that the commenter aligns with the group of Liverpool fans and those who disagree with the referee’s decision in terms of Social Categorization. Furthermore, in terms of social identification, The commenter identified himself by comparing the English Premier League with La Liga in terms of decision-making. the commenter aligns with the group of fans who believe that the incident should have resulted in a penalty for Liverpool; however, through this comment, they merely express their disappointment whilst acknowledging the EPL referee’s standard in awarding a foul, which the commenter considers poor, as seen in the phrase “It’s the EPL, so it’s not a penalty”.

Then, to support their argument at the start of the sentence “If it’s the EPL, then it’s not a penalty”, the commenter compares the standard of refereeing decisions in the EPL with that in La Liga, thereby implicitly suggesting that La Liga referees are of a higher calibre than their English counterparts. This is in line with the process of social comparison, whereby, through this comment, the commenter seeks to boost the team’s self-esteem by suggesting that the standard of refereeing decisions in the EPL remains poor.

Datum 8



@agungadinata : “We should not only want a penalty every single game, Liverpool must play more creative, more effective in front, and more solid in defense, YNWA 🔥 ”

This comment evaluates the majority of Liverpool fans who questioned the referee’s decision not to award a penalty to their team. In terms of attitude, this comment falls into the ‘Judgement’ category, specifically ‘capacity’, as the commenter evaluates Liverpool’s performance rather than the referee’s decision. This is evident in the phrases “Liverpool must play more creatively”, “more effectively” and “more solidly”, which collectively assess Liverpool’s style of play.

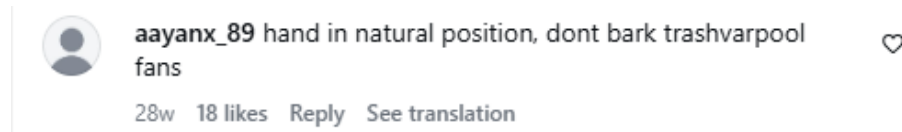
Then, in terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of Heterogloss Contraction, as the commenter narrows the focus of most Liverpool fans, who were questioning the referee’s decision, to focus solely on Liverpool’s performance. This is expressed in the statement “We should not only want a penalty every single game”.

In terms of graduation, this comment falls into the ‘Force’ category, evident from how the commenter emphasises the intensity of Liverpool’s playing style, as seen in the statement

“Liverpool must play more creatively” and the subsequent repetition of “more”, which underscores the intensity of Liverpool’s play.

Based on social categorization, this comment positions the commenter as part of the in-group of Liverpool fans, as reflected in the slogan at the end of the sentence they wrote, “YNWA”, which is the slogan of Liverpool Football Club. This, in turn, places other fans in the out-group. Based on social identification, the commenter demonstrates that Liverpool fans focus their criticism more on their team’s style of play than on the referee’s decisions, through which the commenter constructs a positive identity for Liverpool fans. Furthermore, in terms of social comparison, based on the comment, the commenter compares standards within their own club to elevate its status above that of its rivals or other teams, who are treated as the out-group.

Datum 9



@aayanx_89: "hand in natural position, don’t bark trashvarpool"

This comment evaluates Liverpool fans who consider the ball striking Amad’s elbow to be a penalty, even though Amad’s hand was in a natural position. This comment falls under the category of judgement and propriety. It is classified as such because the commenter assesses the number of Liverpool fans who believe the referee’s decision was wrong for not awarding a penalty to their team. The commenter also refers to the rule regarding the natural position of the hand, which is not considered handball.

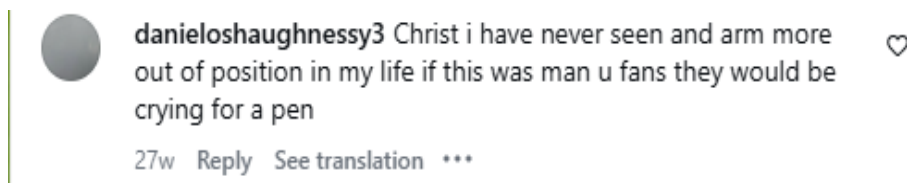
In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction, evidenced by the commenter’s use of the imperative expression “don’t bark”, which aims to limit the opinions of Liverpool fans who believe the incident should have been a penalty. In terms of gradation, this comment falls into the ‘force’ category, as

the commenter directs their evaluation specifically towards Liverpool fans. In the word ‘trashvarpool’, the commenter clearly directs their evaluation towards Liverpool fans who believe the incident should have resulted in a penalty.

Through this comment, the commenter clearly identifies the in-group and out-group in this discussion. The commenter positions themselves as a Manchester United fan and a supporter of the referee’s decision, whilst identifying Liverpool fans as the out-group. The commenter labels Liverpool fans as “trashvarpool fans”. In social identification, the commenter identifies themselves as a fan of Liverpool’s opponents, which in this match is Manchester United. The commenter demonstrates this through their vehement rejection of the Liverpool fans’ view that the incident was a penalty and dismisses the Liverpool fans’ opinion as mere barking.

In social comparison, the commenter contrasts his view with that of Liverpool fans, which is the exact opposite; the commenter states it was not a penalty, whilst Liverpool fans maintain it was. The commenter explains that the hand was in a natural position, and therefore it was not a foul. Through this explanation, the commenter asserts his position as a fan and seeks to establish in others’ minds that his view is more rational.

Datum 10



@danieloshaughnessy3 : "Christ i have never seen and arm more out of position in my life if this was man u fans they would be crying for a pen"

This comment assesses the decision to let Amad off for a foul on the grounds that the position of his hand when it touched the ball was not normal, and according to the commenter, was not a natural position. The commenter then takes a dig at Manchester United

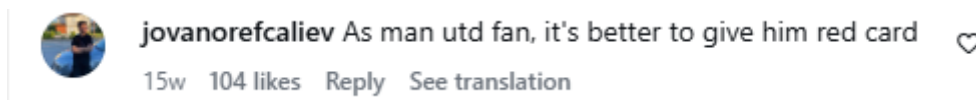
fans who agree with the referee's decision, suggesting they would have reacted differently had it happened to their team: "if this was Man U fans they would be crying for a pen". This comment falls under the categories of judgement and propriety.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of heterogloss, as the writer posits a hypothesis that introduces another social position within the comment—in this context, that of Manchester United fans. This comment opens up a space for conflict regarding the social position the commenter has established, with a subsequent debate over whether their hypothesis will be rejected or accepted.

Based on this comment, the commenter places Manchester United fans in the out-group, whilst the commenter themselves are in the in-group—that is, the group opposing the decision to let Amad off for a foul and award a penalty against Manchester United. Then, based on Social Identification, the commenter has defined themselves as part of the in-group opposing the referee's decision to let Amad off for a foul, as seen in the first sentence the commenter wrote: "Christ, I have never seen an arm more out of position in my life".

In social comparison, the commenter contrasts the situation by applying it to the out-group, namely Manchester United fans. The commenter posits that Manchester United fans would be begging for a penalty if the situation had occurred to their own team: "they would be crying for a pen". Through this comparison, the commenter seeks to demonstrate that the out-group holds double standards and lacks objectivity.

Datum 11



@jovanorefcaliiev : "As man utd fan, it's better to give him red card"

This comment evaluates the referee's decision not to issue a red card for Diogo Dalot's foul. During the match, Diogo Dalot was seen making a high tackle with his boot raised, striking Jeremy Doku's shin. The point of contention is whether the foul warranted a red card or merely a yellow card. This comment falls under the categories of Judgement and Propriety. Based on the opinion "it's better to give him a red card", the commenter argues that a red card for Dalot is more appropriate.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of 'heteroglossic dialogic contraction', as the commenter first identifies themselves as 'a Man Utd fan' before presenting a counter-argument: whilst most fans would typically support a referee's decision that favours their club, here the commenter takes the opposite view, stating that Dalot should have received a red card.

In terms of graduation, this comment falls into the 'force' category, as the commenter reinforces their evaluation by suggesting the harshest possible penalty—a red card—which implies that the offence committed was extremely serious.

Based on the comment, the commenter positions themselves as part of the in-group of Manchester United fans, which they state explicitly at the start of the sentence: "as a Man Utd fan". Then, based on Social Identification, the commenter confidently and consciously acknowledges that he is a true Manchester United fan; based on the comment he wrote, it can be implicitly understood that he is beginning to establish himself as part of the Manchester United fanbase, as he emphasises his identity as a Manchester United fan more than his personal identity.

In social comparison, the commenter implicitly wishes to highlight the contrast between their own group (in-group) and another group (out-group) by demonstrating positive distinctiveness regarding the image of the in-group fans. By demonstrating their

objective values, the commenter shows that Manchester United fans do not condone their players' mistakes; rather, they criticise the fouls committed by their players.

Datum 12



oscarbwoyofficial That is a Red and this shows the inconsistency of the VAR in the league. It's better to just remove it



15w 110 likes Reply See translation ***

@oscarbwoyofficial: “That is a Red and this shows the inconsistency of the VAR in the league. It’s better to just remove it.”

This comment evaluates the referee’s decision and the VAR system, which are perceived as biased. The phrase “That is a Red” indicates that the commenter is firmly convinced that the foul committed by Diogo Dalot was a serious offence and fully deserved a red card. In terms of attitude, this comment falls under the ‘Judgement’ category within the ‘Propriety’ category, as the commenter considers the use of VAR and the referee’s decision to be unjustifiable.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls into the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction, as the commenter strongly rejects other views regarding the referee’s decision and the failure of the VAR system. Through the statement “That is a Red”, the commenter is absolutely convinced that the foul should have been, and was fully deserving of, a red card.

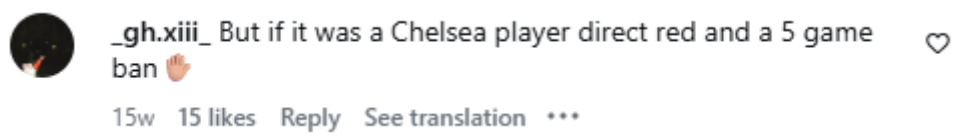
In terms of graduation, this comment falls into the ‘force’ category, as the commenter directly states that the foul is absolutely deserving of a red card. The use of phrases such as ‘that is a red’ and ‘just remove it’ reinforces the commenter’s tone in evaluating the referee’s decision and the use of VAR.

In terms of social categorization, this comment indicates that the commenter positions themselves as part of the in-group of fans who reject the referee’s decision and believe that

VAR is not working, as evidenced by their criticism of VAR, which highlights the inconsistency of the system. In terms of social identification, the fan demonstrates a reinforcement of their identity by showing that they are firmly opposed to the referee's decision and the function of VAR, as evidenced by their comments: "that is a red", "the inconsistency of the VAR" and "It's better to just remove it." These remarks are directed at the referee and VAR.

Commentators also highlight the contrast between the intended roles of the referee and VAR and the actual events on the pitch, which are diametrically opposed. During the match, commentators consider that the referee and VAR are not performing their duties as they should. Commentators suggest that the referee and VAR have yet to meet the required standards in managing the match and making decisions.

Datum 13



@gh.xiii_: " But if it was a Chelsea player direct red and a 5 game ban 🖐️ "

In terms of attitude, this comment falls under the category of judgment regarding propriety, as the commenter evaluates the referee's decision as unfair and inconsistent by suggesting that if the foul had been committed by a Chelsea player, the decision might have been even harsher. In the quote, "if it was a Chelsea player, a direct red card and a 5-game ban," the commenter indirectly implies through this comparison that the referee's decisions are often biased.

In Engagement, this comment falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction because the commenter narrows down another opinion—which states that the referee's decision was entirely correct—by adding a comparison to their own hypothesis, which posits that if the foul had been committed by a Chelsea player, it would have been

penalized more severely. This discussion narrows down other opinions because the commenter directly focuses the comparison on another team, without opening up to other perspectives.

In Graduation, this comment falls under the “force” category due to the intensification in the phrase “direct red card,” which emphasizes the severity of the penalty. Additionally, the quantification in the phrase “5-game ban” provides a concrete measure of how severe the offense is, based on the commenter’s hypothesis.

The commenter, based on social categorization, positions themselves as part of the in-group of Chelsea fans. This is because the commenter defends Chelsea, whom they feel is often wronged by referees. Based on this comment, the referee is classified as part of the out-group. In social identification, this comment is emotional; the fan expresses the referee’s unfairness toward their club (Chelsea), which is treated worse by the referee, even though the match is between Manchester United and Manchester City. In social comparison, the commenter compares a hypothetical scenario where the incident was committed by a Chelsea player with the referee’s actual decision on the field, which was to issue only a yellow card. The commenter constructs a narrative of the referee’s unfairness toward other clubs and the referee’s inconsistency in calling fouls.

Datum 14



dami031905 Red card all day. if it was Caicedo he'd be sent to prison



15w 100 likes Reply See translation

@dami031905: “Red card all day, if it was Caicedo he’d be sent to prison”

This comment evaluates the referee’s decision not to issue a red card to Diogo Dalot for the dangerous tackle he committed. The commenter strongly believes that the foul warranted a red card. This is evident in the phrase “Red card all day,” which proves that the foul truly deserved a red card.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction because the commenter considers their opinion to be absolutely correct and unchallengeable by other viewpoints. In the phrase “if it was Caicedo he’d be sent to prison,” the commenter is certain that Caicedo would be sent off if he committed a similar foul. In terms of gradation, the intensity of this comment is set at 100%—absolute and indisputable—as evidenced by the phrase “Red card all day,” which indicates that the commenter is absolutely certain the foul should have resulted in a red card from the referee.

In terms of social categorization, the commenter positions themselves as a Chelsea fan, which they implicitly indicate by mentioning “Caicedo,” a Chelsea player. In terms of social identification, this comment shows that, emotionally, the commenter is expressing their disappointment and solidarity with other Chelsea fans, who believe the referee’s decision regarding their team could have been far worse. Then, in social comparison, the commenter contrasts the referee’s decision in this incident with his hypothesis regarding a similar foul committed by Caicedo. This evaluative comparison aims to convey the perception that referees in the English league remain inconsistent in determining penalties.

Datum 15



s_u_n_n_y_rhs That costed the game I guess it's var vs man city this season

15w 6 likes Reply See translation

@s_u_n_n_y_rhs : “That costed the game I guess it’s var vs man city this season”

This comment evaluates the referee’s decision not to show Diogo Dalot a red card for that harsh foul. Consequently, this comment falls under the ‘Judgement’ category in the ‘propriety’ subcategory, as the commenter assesses the referee’s unfairness in officiating the match, which ultimately disadvantaged the team they support. The commenter expresses this in the sentence “That costed the game [sic]”.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of “heteroglossic dialogic expansion”, as the commenter explicitly leaves open the possibility of other opinions rather than presenting an absolute truth. This is evident from the use of the phrase “I guess”, which reduces the certainty of the commenter’s claim.

In terms of Graduation, this comment falls into the ‘force’ category, as the commenter increases the intensity of their evaluation through the phrase ‘costed the game’, which broadens the scope of the evaluation; this is interpreted as a loss for their team, as a result of the referee’s and VAR’s errors, their team failed to secure three points.

In social categorization, the commenter explicitly states that they categorise themselves as part of the in-group of Manchester City supporters, and places the referee and VAR in the out-group. Then, through social identification, the commenter identifies as a supporter by the way they defend their club, expressing their disappointment in evaluating the referee’s and VAR’s decisions which disadvantaged the team they support.

Then, in social comparison, the commenter compares the referee’s and VAR’s decisions regarding Manchester City and other clubs; according to the commenter, Manchester City is always treated more unfairly than other teams. Through this comparison, the commenter constructs a perception that the referee and VAR are extremely unfair towards the club they support.

Datum 16



humanalien846 Saliba on the half way line got sent off for this last season against bournemouth 
12w 6 likes Reply See translation ...

@humanalien846: “Saliba on the half way line got sent off for this last season against Bournemouth”

This comment evaluates the referee’s decision not to issue a red card to Marc Guehi, who was seen pulling Mohammed Salah back whilst the latter was in an unmarked position

near the Manchester City penalty area. This comment falls under the ‘Judgement’ category of propriety, as the commentator assesses the referee’s inconsistency in awarding fouls. The commentator compares this incident to a similar one involving Saliba last season, in which Saliba received a red card but Marc Guehi did not.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the “factual monoglossic” category, as the commenter presents factual information about the incident without using the modal expression “Saliba on the halfway line was sent off for this last season”. This explains Saliba’s sending-off last season for a foul identical to the one committed by Marc Guehi. By presenting these facts, the commenter undermines the referee’s position through their comment.

In terms of graduation, this comment falls under the category of force and quantification, as the commentator explains the scope of the quantification he refers to in the phrase “on the halfway line”. This clarification of the scope of quantification aims to explain that the foul committed by Saliba last season was further away than the one committed by Marc Guehi. However, it was Saliba who received the red card. Through this clarification, the commentator wishes to demonstrate that the foul was categorised as a serious offence and that Marc Guehi should have received the red card.

Based on Social Categorization, the commenter identifies themselves as a fan criticising the referee’s inconsistency in officiating the match. Although Saliba’s name is mentioned in the comment, the commenter cannot yet be described as an Arsenal fan, as their identification as such remains unclear.

The commentator identified himself as someone who had criticised the referee’s inconsistency in officiating, pointing to a similar foul committed by Saliba last season against Bournemouth. He then compared this to the incident involving Marc Guehi and Mohammed Salah. Through this, the commentator explained that the EPL referees’

standards in determining fouls have not been consistent, which has resulted in one team being disadvantaged.

Datum 17



mgfhamilton Absolute corruption. Ref and VAR could not have done more for city. ❤️

12w 5 likes Reply See translation

@mgfhamilton: “Absolute corruption. Ref and VAR could not have done more for city.

This comment evaluates the referee's unfairness in officiating the match between Manchester City and Liverpool. The commenter criticises the referee's officiating, which is deemed biased and overly favourable to Manchester City, for failing to issue a red card to Marc Guehi, who brought down Mohamed Salah whilst he was in a clear goal-scoring position. This comment falls under the ‘Judgement’ category, in the ‘propriety’ subcategory.

Through their comment, the commenter argues that their team felt wronged by the referee because they believe the referee was too biased towards Manchester City. The comment rejects other opinions through the phrasing used in the phrase “Absolute corruption”, implying that their opinion is utterly irrefutable. In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of Heteroglossic Dialogic contraction.

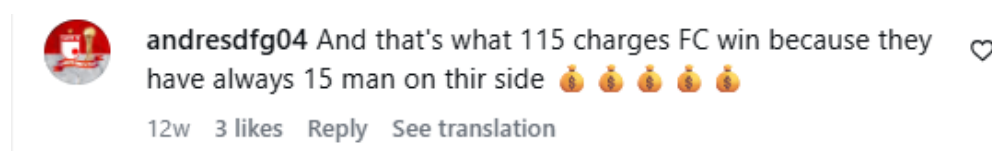
In terms of graduation, this comment falls into the ‘force’ category; the commenter intensifies their criticism of the referee and VAR by adding sharp remarks such as the phrases ‘absolute corruption’ and ‘could not have done more’, which heighten the level of criticism directed at the referees’ association and VAR.

Based on these comments, the commenter categorises themselves as a fan who has been wronged by the referee's decision; in this context, the fan can be categorised as a Liverpool supporter. Consequently, Manchester City and the referees are positioned as the out-group, as the criticism is directed at both. The commenter identifies themselves as a fan who feels wronged by the referee. The comment clearly demonstrates that they have very

little faith in the referee's decisions; the commenter feels disappointed because the referee was overly favourable towards Manchester City in this match.

The commenter engages in out-group derogation by suggesting that Manchester City received favourable treatment from the referee and dismissing the efforts of Manchester City's players to win the match. Indirectly, this comment draws a comparison between the two groups—their own group, which they claim was wronged by the referee—and the out-group, which they label as corrupt. Through this comparison, the commenter seeks to explain that their group has suffered a loss as a result of the referee's decision.

Datum 18



@andresdfg04: “And that’s what 115 charges FC win because they have always 15 man on their side 💰💰💰💰💰 “

This comment evaluates Manchester City's victory, which the commenter believes was secured through the referee's support. This comment falls under the 'judgement' category within the 'propriety' section, as the commenter's assessment suggests that Manchester City's victory was unfairly obtained—such as the decision not to show Marc Guehi a red card, as mentioned in the post.

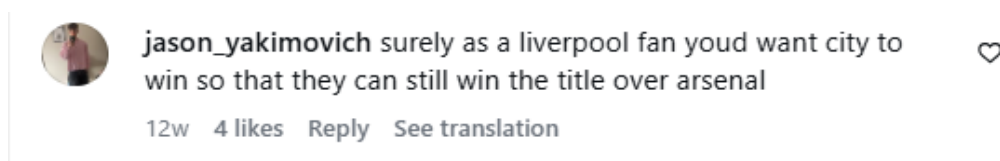
In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the Heteroglossic category of Dialogic contraction, as the commenter expresses their opinion with great certainty and leaves no room for alternative explanations. This is evident in the phrase “And that’s what 115 charges FC win”, which implies that the commenter believes Manchester City's victory was aided by the referee.

In this context, this comment falls into the ‘force’ category because the commenter emphasised their criticism by referring to Manchester City as ‘115 charges FC’, a reference to the 115 charges of financial misconduct recently levelled against Manchester City. Furthermore, the repetition of the emojis “💰💰💰💰💰” which is a symbol of money, but when viewed in the previous context, this refers to bribery committed by Manchester City creates an effect that reinforces the assumption that Manchester City paid the referee to win the match.

This comment categorises the commenter as a fan who believes that Manchester City and the referee colluded to cheat, thereby placing Manchester City and the refereeing team in the out-group. Subsequently, the commenter identifies themselves as a fan who believes that Manchester City are cheating by insulting the club with the term “115 charges fc” and stating that Manchester City play with 15 players, implying that this includes the referee and VAR.

Furthermore, in social comparison, the commenter rebranded the out-group as “115 charges FC” with the aim of belittling the out-group and elevating the commenter’s in-group. They also used the claim “15 men”, implying that Manchester City’s victory was achieved through unfair means. Through this comparison, the commenter constructs a rationale for why the commenter’s group or other teams suffered defeat against Manchester City, based on the assumption that the referees were biased in their favour.

Datum 19



@Jason_yakimovich: “surely as a liverpool fan youd want city to win so that they can still win the title over arsenal”

This comment falls under the “capacity” category, as the commenter evaluates the Liverpool fans’ mindset in accepting the loss and the referee’s decision regarding the foul that occurred. The commenter suggests that, as Liverpool fans, they should support Manchester City in winning this match so that City would have more points than Arsenal.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the “dialogic expansion” category of heteroglossia because the commenter shares their perspective and does not offer a definitive opinion; the commenter simply aims to convince Liverpool fans to accept the loss to Manchester City so that they can win the championship over Arsenal.

In this context, this comment falls under the “force” category, as the commenter intensifies the rivalry between the relevant teams—namely, Liverpool, Manchester City, and Arsenal. The word “surely” serves as an intensifying element to heighten the intensity of the suggestion, which aims to pressure Liverpool fans to accept the loss and the referee’s decision.

Through this comment, the commenter divides fan identities into three groups: Liverpool, Manchester City, and Arsenal fans. In terms of social identification, the commenter attempts to explain the behavioral norms that the in-group of Liverpool fans should follow to accept the situation. The comment gives the impression that the commenter wants to manipulate the emotional side of Liverpool fans by supporting Manchester City to win the match so that Manchester City can earn more points than Arsenal.

The commenter compared which group of Liverpool fans should be prioritized in the title race. The commenter portrayed Arsenal as a marginalized out-group. The commenter advised Liverpool fans not to dwell on the incidents during the match, including Marc Guehi’s foul on Mohamed Salah.

Datum 20

brayden.rn Should have been a red but besides that, this manager just hasn't made a single sub just like against Arsenal, he is ok with a draw and that says a lot, SLOT OUT



12w 1 like Reply See translation

@brayden.rn: “Should have been a red but besides that, this manager just hasn’t made a single sub just like against Arsenal, he is ok with a draw and that says a lot, SLOT OUT”

In terms of attitude, this comment falls under the “capacity” category of judgment because the commenter evaluates the coaching ability of Liverpool manager Arne Slot, as expressed in the phrases “this manager just hasn’t made a single sub” and “he is okay with a draw and that says a lot”; the commenter considers Arne Slot’s coaching ability and the tactics employed to be highly disappointing.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the Heteroglossic category of dialogic contraction, as the commenter strongly objects to the referee’s decision not to issue a red card to Marc Guehi, as seen in the phrase “Should have been a red.” Additionally, the commenter also rejects Arne Slot’s style of play, which the commenter finds unsatisfactory, as expressed in the phrase “he is ok with a draw.”

In this post, the comment falls under the “force” category; the commenter intensifies their critique of Arne Slot’s tactics by using the phrase “that says a lot,” which further demonstrates that the commenter is genuinely expressing their disappointment with Arne Slot. Additionally, the commenter employs “force” through the capitalization of “SLOT OUT,” indicating that the focus of their criticism is directed specifically at Arne Slot.

Based on these comments, the commenter identifies as a Liverpool fan who is disappointed with the referee’s decision and their own coach. The commenter expresses their disappointment with the referee in the first phrase and their disappointment with their own coach in the subsequent phrase. Furthermore, the commenter compares Arne Slot’s current playing style to the previous match against Arsenal, which the commenter considers to be

the same with no improvement. Through this comparison, the commenter highlights just how poor the playing style implemented by Arne Slot is.

Datum 21



its_pms Penalty everyday no way Maguire is a Goalkeeper



15w 215 likes Reply See translation ***

@its_pms: “Penalty everyday no way Maguire is a Goalkeeper

This comment evaluates the referee’s decision not to award a penalty to Arsenal, as the commenter believes the incident constituted handball. This comment falls under the “propriety” category of judgment, as the commenter critiques the referee’s failure to correctly assess a clear foul, as evidenced by the phrase “penalty everyday.”

Furthermore, in terms of engagement, this comment falls under the Heteroglossic category of dialogic contraction; the commenter rejects any other interpretation regarding Maguire’s handball, and the phrase “penalty everyday” demonstrates that the commenter believes the incident should have resulted in a penalty for Arsenal.

In this analysis, this comment falls under the “force” category, as evidenced by the phrase “penalty everyday,” which intensifies the speaker’s assertion that the incident should have resulted in a penalty. Additionally, the sarcastic remark directed at Harry Maguire—“no way Maguire is a goalkeeper”—sharpens the focus of the criticism toward the referee for not awarding Arsenal a penalty after the ball struck Maguire’s hand following an Arsenal player’s shot.

These comments construct meaning and divide the commenter into an “in-group” of fans who view the incident as a penalty and an “out-group” of fans who support the referee’s decision or are Manchester United supporters. The commenter identifies as a fan who views the incident as a penalty through their opinion, which appears very confident in describing the incident as a clear handball and a penalty for Arsenal.

The commentator compared the legal use of hands to block a shot (a goalkeeper's save) with Maguire's action, which the commentator claimed was a deliberate deflection of the ball—a task that should have been the goalkeeper's responsibility. The commentator sarcastically referred to Maguire as a goalkeeper because Harry Maguire's hand successfully deflected the ball from an Arsenal player's shot. Through this comparison, the commentator formed the belief that the referee failed to call a foul because it was clear that Maguire deflected the ball with his hand.

Datum 22



j.ogiii Its clearly penalties, we're robbed from ref



15w 2 likes Reply See translation

@j.ogii: “Its clearly penalties, we’re robbed from ref”

This comment falls under the category of “Judgment of Propriety” because the commenter evaluates the referee's fairness and appropriateness in officiating this match. Through the phrase “we’re robbed by the ref,” the commenter feels that the referee acted unfairly toward their team. In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction, as the commenter's statement closes off space for others' opinions—for instance, by using the phrase “It’s clearly penalties,” the commenter rejects alternative viewpoints.

In terms of graduation, the comment falls under the “force” category, as the commenter intensifies the emotional criticism directed at the referee. Through the use of words like “clearly” and “robbed,” the commenter emphasizes and explains the referee's mistake in not awarding a penalty to Arsenal.

Based on these comments, the social categories that emerge are the commenters as the in-group—Arsenal fans who felt wronged in this match—and the referee as the out-group. The commenters identify their social identity as Arsenal fans by expressing their

disappointment with the referee. They then compare their expectations of the referee's decisions with what actually happened, thereby forming the perception that the referee officiated the match unfairly.

Datum 23



quinlanbritton From sliding ??? Bro where must he put his hand then without catching himself



15w 789 likes Reply See translation ...

@quinlanbritton: “from sliding ??? Bro where must he put his hand then without catching himself”

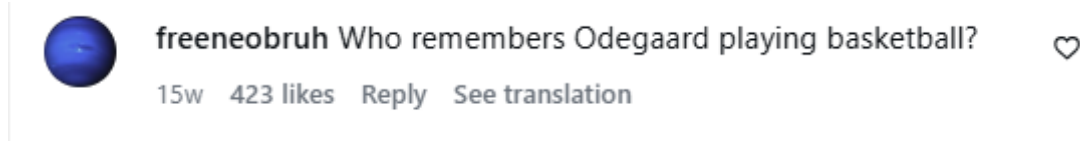
This comment evaluates a fan's comment that the referee's decision was wrong for not awarding a penalty to Arsenal. This comment falls under the “Judgment” category of “Propriety.” Through the phrase “Bro, where else is he supposed to put his hand without catching himself?” the commenter aims to explain that the defender's hand was in a natural position, as the swing of his arm was considered normal—intended to maintain balance while falling. This is intended to evaluate other fans who view this incident as a handball.

In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the category of heteroglossic dialogic contraction because it aims to counter another argument with a question whose answer is already certain. In other words, the comment essentially emphasizes that the defender had no other option in that situation besides supporting his body with his arms outstretched, which happened to make contact with the ball kicked by the Arsenal player.

In terms of graduation, the commenter emphasizes their question regarding fans who believe the incident should have resulted in a penalty. The commenter underscores this by repeatedly using the punctuation “???” to emphasize their question. This conveys an implicit meaning akin to saying, “Are you sure this was a handball?”

Through this comment, the commenter categorizes themselves as a fan who agrees with the referee's decision and views other fans demanding a penalty for the incident as an out-group. The commenter then identifies themselves as part of the in-group by posing a question that also defends what happened to Harry Maguire. Implicitly, the comment compares the player's arm-spreading motion as he fell with the unrealistic expectations of opposing fans. Through this, the commenter demonstrates that their opinion is well-founded.

Datum 24



@freeneobruh: “Who remembers odegaard playing basketball?”

In terms of attitude, this comment falls under the “reaction” category of appreciation because the use of the phrase “who remembers...” indicates that the commenter is responding to the Harry Maguire incident by referencing a similar event—the incident involving Odegaard several years ago. In terms of engagement, this comment falls under the Heteroglossic category, specifically the “dialogic contraction” subcategory, as the commenter counters fans who view this incident as a foul and a penalty by citing the Odegaard case, which the commenter deems more severe than this incident.

In terms of graduation, this comment falls into the “force” category, with the metaphorical phrasing “Odegaard playing basketball,” which indicates an escalation in the commenter’s evaluation of other fans who view this incident as a foul by comparing it to a similar incident involving Martin Odegaard.

In terms of social categorization, commenters implicitly divided the groups in this discussion into two categories: fans who supported the referee’s decision and fans who rejected it. Commenters established their identities through counterarguments regarding the same incident—specifically, the one they considered more deserving of a foul (Odegaard’s

handball). Commenters draw a comparison between the two incidents using the sarcastic remark “playing basketball” regarding the Martin Odegaard incident and the Maguire incident. Through this sarcasm, commenters indicate which incident is more deserving of being called a foul and which is not.

Datum 25



footballleyetest Oh please he's falling to the ground . Where is his arm meant to go ? 

15w 4.466 likes Reply See translation

@footballleyetest: “Oh please he’s falling to the ground. Where is his arm meant to go?”

This comment evaluates other fans who view the Harry Maguire incident as a penalty. It falls under the category of propriety, defending Maguire and justifying the referee’s decision not to award a penalty. The phrase “Where is his arm meant to go?” explains that the outward movement of the arm was unavoidable and reflects the player’s instinct to brace his body as he fell. To evaluate the validity of the referee’s decision and refute the claims of other fans who labeled it a penalty.

In terms of engagement, the comment falls under the category of Heteroglossic Dialogic Contraction. The use of the phrase “Where is his arm meant to go?” serves to challenge opposing arguments by highlighting the impossibility of not widening one’s arm position while falling. The comment is then intensified in terms of force through the phrase “oh please,” which reinforces the target of the evaluation—the fans who claim this was a penalty—by sarcastically pleading for them to truly understand the situation Maguire experienced.

Through this comment, the commenter categorizes themselves as a fan who supports the referee's decision, while fans who hold the opposite view are labeled as an "out group." The commenter identifies with defending Maguire and the referee's decision by using sarcasm to explain the Maguire incident in terms of football rules, which demonstrates that it was not a foul and did not warrant a penalty. In the final stage, the commenter compared the natural hand position Maguire used to brace his body with the expectations of fans who claimed the incident was a penalty. Through this comparison, the fan sought to demonstrate that Maguire's hand movement was unavoidable and that the referee's decision not to award a penalty was indeed correct.

B. Discussion

This study aims to investigate how fans react when commenting on posts relating to controversial refereeing decisions in major Premier League matches on the Instagram account @Liveherewego. Specifically, this study is designed to answer two main research questions: (1.) What types of evaluative language, based on Appraisal Theory, do football fans use in their Instagram comments to evaluate controversial referee and VAR decisions in selected English Premier League matches? (2.) How do football fans construct social identity through evaluative language in the comments section of @liveherewego's Instagram posts regarding controversial referee and VAR decisions in selected English Premier League matches

Based on the analysis data, it was found that most English Premier League football fans in posts on @liveherewego regarding controversial highlight matches in the English Premier League expressed negative views on referee and VAR decisions. Fans mostly defended their own team or in-group by commenting on decisions that disadvantaged their team and criticized the other group or out-group by offering counterarguments. Many fans also compared the referee's decisions in these controversial matches to other incidents to

highlight inconsistencies in the referee's decision-making. Through the Appraisal Theory approach (Martin & White), it was found that the evaluative comments used by fans were dominated by the "judgment" category. The 'Judgement' category has gained prominence due to the controversy surrounding referees' decisions, which has led to numerous questions from fans regarding the referees' competence, fairness and consistency in officiating. This has resulted in a large number of comments in the 'Judgement' category which evaluates the referee's competence in managing the match. The comments in the findings were also dominated by the Heteroglossic contraction category because social media football comments are argumentative and fans often reject rival interpretations. Commenters used arguments that rejected the perceptions of other groups or individuals. In most cases, they used force as a means to reinforce their evaluative focus on the referee or the out-group. This is demonstrated by the way fans use intense language, emojis, capitalisation, sarcasm and insults to dramatise perceived injustice. In expressing their evaluations,

linking appraisal theory with fan identity in this discourse illustrates how fans defend the reputation of the club they support through the use of negative judgements, force and out-group comparisons, thereby affirming and reinforcing their fan identity through such evaluations. Conflicts between fans in the Instagram comments section are uniquely reflected in the comments themselves; the use of emojis, sarcasm and outbursts of emotion directly provides a space for fans on social media to express their views intensely. Debates between fans on social media are also intriguing because, with social media access widespread across the globe, fans from all over gather to defend or attack the identities of other fans.

Through Social Identity Theory, many fans explicitly state which group they belong to. However, there are also many fans who do not specifically name the group or club they support; yet, based on their comments, it is still possible to infer which group they support

based on the direction of their evaluations. Fans build their group identity in various ways: some support and defend the group, some express their disappointment, and others compare their group to others to highlight the superiority of their own group.

Similar to the study by Wahyudi & Chusna (2015), football fans offer various types of evaluative comments. However, the evaluations of contestants on ‘X Factor’ take place in a professional setting, whereas football fans’ evaluative comments are made emotionally and directly, thereby revealing the fans’ stance both explicitly and implicitly. This finding is also similar to the study by Yuliyanti (2023), which demonstrated that social media users predominantly employ attitude-based elements when discussing controversial issues; this aligns with the findings of this study, which show that the “judgment” category of attitude is frequently used in evaluating an issue. The dominance of evaluative judgments used by commentators indicates that most football fans primarily evaluate referees’ competence and fairness in officiating. This is similar with the findings of a study (Tran & Ngoc, 2022), which found that evaluative judgments are more frequently used to assess players and referees. In the same discussion, a study Križan (2024) and Subin (2023) argues that evaluative discourse is widely used in football because the sport is experienced emotionally by fans, leading to such evaluations to criticize or praise a player, club, or referee. However, the research conducted focused on the language used by football commentators, which differs from the comments on Instagram in this study; there is a significant use of sarcasm, insults, and harsh criticism, as opinions on Instagram are more unrestricted and expressive.

Based on the findings, it can be demonstrated that Instagram serves as a space for communication and identity formation among fans. Fans employ various strategies in their comments to defend the team they support. Through these comments, football fans contribute to shaping football narratives on social media; this aligns with research conducted by (Newson et al., 2023), which found that football discourse involves diverse linguistic

practices among fans, referees, and audiences across various media contexts. This study demonstrates that Instagram enhances broader fan interaction because fans' evaluations are directly expressed through comments, which indirectly reinforce group perspectives and fan solidarity.

Other findings in this study reveal a range of emotional reactions directed at referees and VAR. Many commenters expressed frustration, disappointment, and a sense of injustice toward referees. English Premier League referees were described as incompetent and inconsistent in making decisions during matches. These findings align with the research by Kural & Özbek (2023), which demonstrated that discussions regarding VAR on social media are dominated by expressions of disappointment and questions regarding the fairness of referees' decision-making. Although this study focuses on computational sentiment analysis, it offers a novel approach to analyzing fan evaluations by examining evaluative comments through the lenses of judgment, engagement, and gradation.

Based on Social Identity Theory, the findings of this study demonstrate that fan identity is constructed through discussions of controversial referee decisions on the field. Fans defend their team by questioning the referee's fairness and disparaging rival teams, opposing fans, and referees with sarcastic remarks and criticism. Previous research findings (Pérez-Sabater & Maguelouk-Moffo, 2020) (Liddelow et al., 2025) and (Koo et al., 2025) indicate that interactions among football fans and within football communities can foster group identity and solidarity, as well as evoke shared emotions among members who collectively experience what they witness during a match.

This study also found that fans intensified their evaluations of referees and VAR through stylistic devices, such as capitalizing words to emphasize their points, repeating words, and using emojis to express disappointment. These strategies were used to reinforce criticism directed at referees and opposing fans. The dominance of intensifiers in these

comments supports research (Tran & Ngoc, 2022) showing that football discourse frequently uses intensifiers to amplify the commenter's emotional stance through their remarks. However, in Instagram comments, the use of intensifiers is sometimes more informal, involving the use of emojis and memes, indicating that digital football discourse differs from the evaluations employed by traditional football commentators.

Overall, this study contributes to the development of a new approach to analyzing football discourse by integrating appraisal theory and social identity theory to explain how evaluative language directed at referees and the construction of fan identity are indirectly linked in online discussions in the comment section of a post. Unlike previous studies, this research delves deeper into fans' evaluations of referees and the indirect formation of identity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

Based on the research, the data in this study is dominated by “judgement,” Because referee controversy naturally invites evaluation of competence, fairness, consistency, and propriety as the comments made by fans are mostly directed at the referees’ competence in officiating matches. Many of them also evaluate the consistency of English Premier League referees in their officiating. The use of “affect” and “appreciation” is very rare, as “affect” is used to evaluate feelings, while “appreciation” is used to evaluate an object. Therefore, these two categories are rarely found. This study also shows that engagement plays a role in constructing arguments within Instagram comments. Fans sometimes reject other viewpoints that fall under the heteroglossic category Because social media football comments are argumentative and fans often reject rival interpretations.. Additionally, graduation is frequently used by commenters in these posts Because fans use intensified language, emojis, capitalization, sarcasm, and insults to dramatize injustice. which is employed to convey the intensity of fans’ emotions.

Furthermore, based on Social Identity Theory, the findings of this study indicate that the formation of fan identity through Instagram is highly diverse. Fans will defend their team if they feel wronged by a referee by posting critical comments and insults directed at the referee or other groups in order to weaken the out-group. Identity formation typically emerges through the commenters’ own statements, such as the use of “as a ... fan,” and by comparing the referee’s decision to previous incidents involving the same type of infraction, with the aim of highlighting the referee’s inconsistency. Through evaluative comments, fans express solidarity, rivalry, and the development of identity through interactions in the comments section. The combined use of appraisal theory and social identity theory can shed

light on how fans use Negative Judgement , Force, out-group comparison results in a discourse of grievance, rivalry, and group defense.

B. Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations have been identified that future researchers may utilize or refine. First, the data was limited to a single league, meaning that the fan comments collected were restricted to fans of the English league. Future researchers may expand the scope of the data by including comments from other leagues or tournaments, thereby identifying patterns in how each league is evaluated. Second, future researchers may analyze this football discourse through other social media platforms, such as X, Facebook, or other social media platforms, to broaden the data scope, ensuring it is not limited to a single social media platform. Furthermore, since this study focuses only on the English Premier League and mostly uses English to evaluate referees, future researchers could build upon this study by examining football discourse in other leagues to identify differences in evaluations across various languages.

In addition, future researchers may wish to incorporate theories such as modality as a tool to aid in the analysis of comments. This is because social media comments often include additional features—such as stickers, photos, or GIFs—which are frequently used to comment on controversial referee decisions on social media. By analyzing comments based on stickers, photos, or GIFs, the scope of the analysis becomes broader and more compelling for further study.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



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APPENDIX

Datum	Match/Incident	Comment	attitude	engagement	graduation	Social Identity Process	Context/interpretation
1	Chelsea vs Tottenham yellow card controversy	“Posted this but not the Reece James on 😂😂😂”	Appreciation	Heteroglossic	Force In evaluation through phrase “the Reece James on”	Fan identity is shaped by the defense of commenters who believe the media is only out to bring Chelsea down.	Commenters are more critical of media outlets that focus only on Enzo's foul rather than Bentancur's
2		“How is that not a red 🤔🤔”	Invoked negative Judgement toward referee decision	Rhetorical contraction	Force through emoji repetition	Identification with anti-decision group	The fan rejects the referee's decision and aligns with those demanding a red card
3.		“dangerous play bro, its a red”	Negative Judgement	Monoglossic	Force	A fans' identity is shaped by the commenter's belief that the referee's decision was wrong.	Commentators are criticizing the referee's decision to issue only a yellow card to Enzo.
4.		“if that's a red then the first half challenge from Bentancur is red as well	Appreciation	Heteroglossic dialogic expansion	force	The commenter's identity is shaped by their defensive comments, in which they draw comparisons to other incidents they consider similar.	Commentators are comparing the two fouls to highlight the inconsistency in the referee's decision.

5.		“Bentancur foul was a RED compared to this men he stepped on james ankle 😂”	Judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	The commenter’s identity is formed through the comparisons they use to highlight which infractions are more serious.	This comment defends Chelsea by arguing that Bentancur’s foul deserved a red card.
6.	Liverpool vs Manchester united Handball controversy	“Oh please 😂😂😂😂😂 never a pen”	Judgement	heteroglossic	force	The commenter’s identity is formed through their evaluation in supporting the referee’s decision and rejecting penalty claims from opposing fans.	This comment rejects the opposing fans’ claim that a penalty should have been awarded for the incident.
7.		“Its epl then its not a penalty but when it comes to laliga really I don’t know 🤔”	Judgement	Heteroglossic	focus	The commenter constructs his identity by comparing the standards of refereeing decisions in the EPL and La Liga.	The commenter compares the standards of the EPL and La Liga in determining fouls.
8.		“We should not only want a penalty every single game, Liverpool must play more creative...”	Judgement	Heteroglossic	force	The commenter identifies himself as a Liverpool fan by criticizing the team’s performance rather than the referees’ decisions.	Rather than evaluating the referee’s decision, the commenter shifts the focus to evaluating the team’s performance.

9.		“hand in natural position, don’t bark trashvarpool”	Judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	The commenter’s identity is formed by defending the referees’ decisions with technical explanations and insulting the out-group.	The commenter defends the referee’s decision and attacks the out-group’s argument.
10.		“Christ I have never seen an arm more out of position...”	Judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	Commentators form an identity as a group that feels the referee’s decisions are detrimental to their team.	Commenters found the hand position unnatural and made snide remarks about the out-group.
11.	Manchester united vs Manchester city, Dalot tackle controversy	“as man utd fan,it’s better to give him red card”	judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed through objective criticism of the in-group.	Commenters believe Dalot deserved a red card.
12.		“That is a Red and this shows the inconsistency of the VAR...”	judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed through criticism of inconsistencies in the referee’s decisions and VAR.	Commenters criticize the VAR for being inconsistent.
13.		“But if it was a Chelsea player indirect red and a 5 game ban”	judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed by comparing the referee’s decisions regarding their team with those regarding other teams.	Chelsea fans believe the referee’s decision against their team was more damaging.

14.		“Red card all day, if it was Caicedo he’d be sent to prison.	judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed by comparing the referee’s decisions regarding players from their team with those regarding players from other teams.	Commenters point out a double standard against Chelsea.
15.		“That costed the game I guess it’s var vs man city this season”	judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	This identity was formed based on the perception that Manchester City has been wronged this season.	Commenters believe the VAR decision disadvantaged Manchester City.
16.	Liverpool vs Manchester city - Guehi foul controversy	“Saliba on the half way line got sent off for this last season...”	Judgement	Monoglossic	Force/Quantification	This identity was formed by commentator’s drawing comparisons to similar incidents to highlight the referees’ inconsistency.	Commenters compare two similar incidents: one involving Saliba and this case.
17.		“Absolute corruption. Ref and VAR could not have done more for city”	Judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	The identity was formed through his disappointment with the referee, whose decisions he believed always favored Manchester City	Comments accuse the referee of favoring Manchester City.

18.		“And that’s what 115 charges FC win because they have always 15 man on their side 💰💰💰 ”	Judgement	Heteroglossic	Force	Their identity is formed by disrespecting Manchester City and attributing their victories to the referee’s help.	The comment takes a dig at Manchester City, accusing them of corrupting the referee and receiving his assistance.
19.		“surely as a Liverpool fan youd want city to win...”	Judgement - capacity	Heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed based on rivalries and the strategies clubs use to compete for titles.	The comment discusses the rivalry and strategies in the title race.
20.		“should have been red but besides that, this manager...”	Judgement - capacity	Heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed through criticism and disappointment with one's own team and coach.	The comments criticized the referee's decision and the Liverpool coach's tactics.
21.	Manchester United vs Arsenal - maguire handball controversy	“penalty everyday no way Maguire is a goalkeeper”	Judgement -propriety	heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed through criticism and sarcasm directed at opposing players and the referee’s decisions	Commentators view the incident as one warranting a penalty
22.		“its clearly penalties, we’re robbed from ref”	Judgement - propriety	Heteroglossic	Force	Identity is formed through their complaints to the	The commentator felt that his team had been

						referee, who feels that his team has been wronged by the referee.	unfairly treated by the referee.
23.		“from sliding??? Bro where most he put his hand then...”	Judgement - propriety	Heteroglossic	Force	The Identity is formed through his defense of Maguire and his justification of the referee’s decision.	The comment defended Maguire's hand position during the incident as natural.
24.		“Who remembers odegaard playing basketball”	Appreciation - reaction	Heteroglossic	Force	The identity was formed through sarcastic comments comparing this incident to the old Odegaard handball incident.	Commenters compared Maguire's incident to Odegaard's earlier handball.
25.		“oh please he’s falling to the ground. Where is his arm meant to go?”	Judgement - propriety	heteroglossic	force	The identity is formed through support for the referee’s decision, based on the natural position of the player’s hands.	The comment defended the referee's decision, citing the natural position of the hands during the fall.

