

Construction of Meaning in the Parasocial Interactions of Polca Fandom Members with Polcasan on Social Media X

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Abstract: This study is motivated by the phenomenon of parasocial interaction between members of the POLCA fandom and the digital mascot Polcasan on social media platform X, where fans not only treat Polcasan as an ordinary mascot but also as a figure possessing an identity and social position within the fandom community. The objective of this study is to analyze how POLCA fandom members construct and interpret their parasocial interactions with Polcasan on social media platform X. The study employs a qualitative approach based on the constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four active members of the POLCA fandom and online observations on X, then analyzed using the model by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) as well as Schramm & Hartmann's (2008) Theory of Parasocial Interaction. The results indicate that Polcasan is constructed as a social figure through personification and anthropomorphism, with fans attributing familial identities such as child, grandchild, and younger sibling. The experience of parasocial interaction is interpreted through four aspects: the perception of familiarity, pseudo-communication, emotional closeness, and awareness of a one-way relationship which are not experienced sequentially or uniformly by every informant. Fan engagement in fandom practices manifests through digital interactions, community participation, protective behavior, and consumption. This study concludes that Polcasan functions not only as a mascot but also as a social figure and mediator in the relationship between fans, the fandom community, and TayNew. These findings reinforce the relevance of parasocial interaction theory in explaining fans' relationships with consistently personified non-human characters.

Keywords : Meaning Construction, Parasocial Interaction, Polcasan Fandom, Social Media X, TayNew.

Abstrak : Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh fenomena interaksi parasosial antara anggota fandom POLCA dengan maskot digital Polcasan di media sosial X, di mana penggemar tidak hanya menjadikan Polcasan sebagai maskot biasa, tetapi juga sebagai figur yang memiliki identitas dan posisi sosial dalam komunitas fandom. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis bagaimana anggota fandom POLCA mengonstruksi dan memaknai interaksi parasosial mereka dengan Polcasan di media sosial X. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan paradigma konstruktivisme. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semiterstruktur terhadap empat anggota aktif fandom POLCA dan observasi daring di X, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) serta Teori Interaksi Parasosial Schramm & Hartmann (2008). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Polcasan dikonstruksi sebagai figur sosial melalui personifikasi dan antropomorfisme, dengan penggemar memberikan identitas kekerabatan seperti anak, cucu, dan adik. Pengalaman interaksi parasosial dimaknai melalui empat aspek: persepsi mengenal, komunikasi semu, kedekatan emosional, dan kesadaran hubungan satu arah yang tidak dialami secara berurutan dan seragam oleh setiap informan. Keterlibatan penggemar dalam praktik fandom terwujud melalui interaksi digital, partisipasi komunitas, perilaku protektif, dan konsumsi.

Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Polcasan tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai maskot, tetapi juga sebagai figur sosial dan mediator dalam relasi antara penggemar, komunitas fandom, dan TayNew. Temuan ini memperkuat relevansi teori interaksi parasosial dalam menjelaskan hubungan penggemar dengan karakter non-manusia yang dipersonifikasikan secara konsisten.

Kata Kunci : Fandom, Interaksi Parasosial, Konstruksi Makna, Media Sosial X. Polcasan, TayNew.

PENDAHULUAN

According to data from Indonesiana.id by Tempo, the number of users on the X platform (formerly Twitter) in Indonesia has reached approximately 22.9 million people (Faturahman, 2026). With various features such as tweets, replies, retweets, quote tweets, hashtags, and threads, X has become one of the social media platforms most widely used by fan communities to share information, engage in discussions, and build communities. Fans foster solidarity, group identity, and a communication culture known as “stan culture” on X through fanbase and fan accounts (Savitri, 2025). This development indicates that social media no longer serves merely as a means of disseminating information but has also become a space for fans to build connections and make sense of the figures or characters they follow.

According to Horton & Wohl (1956), the relationship between fans and media figures can give rise to parasocial interaction that is, a sense of closeness felt by fans toward media figures even though the relationship is, in reality, one-sided. Through this interaction, fans feel as though they have a close relationship with the media figure, even though the figure does not know them or interact with them directly. In the era of social media, this illusion of intimacy is further reinforced because digital platforms allow public figures or idols to use carefully crafted, personal messages, creating the impression of a reciprocal relationship between the figure and their fans (Wardani & Kusuma, 2021). Ghaniyy (2025) also explains that communication within the fandom community on X does not occur solely between fans and their idols. Interactions also take place among fans through the exchange of information and ongoing discussions. These interactions strengthen emotional closeness and support the formation of parasocial relationships (Ghaniyy, 2025).

The phenomenon of digital fandom is an intriguing area of study in communication science because it demonstrates that fans do not merely act as media consumers but also as active community members who produce, disseminate, and interpret cultural content (Jenkins, 2006). Interactions within fandom communities can strengthen collective identity, solidarity, and emotional engagement among members. Smutradontri & Gadavanij (2020) explain that the use of language, symbols, and distinctive terminology within fandom communities plays a role in shaping fans' collective identity. The objects of fan engagement in fandom culture on social media are not limited to human figures. Recent research indicates that parasocial relationships can form with various non-human entities, including virtual characters and consistently personified digital influencers (Bang & Han, 2025). Non-human characters can become objects of engagement through the processes of personification and anthropomorphism. Epley et al. (2007) define anthropomorphism as the process of attributing human characteristics, intentions, or traits to nonhuman entities, driven by three main factors: the availability of anthropocentric knowledge, the motivation to understand the behavior of other agents, and the need for social affiliation. Thus, fans are not only attached to human public figures but can also develop deep emotional engagement with non-human characters who are consistently personified through communication practices within the fandom community.

This phenomenon is evident in the POLCA fandom the fan community of Tay Tawan and New Thitipoom (TayNew). Within this fandom, Polcasan serves as a mascot with its own distinct character and identity. Polcasan was introduced at the PEBACA WHAT A CONCERT on March 22,

2025. Its design is a fusion of Tay's favorite animal (the orca) and New's favorite animal (the polar bear) (Chandrawati, 2026). The character is then positioned as the "child" of TayNew; it can speak, calls Tay "Papa" and New "Phor-Phor," and has a cheerful personality like a small child (Asnurida, 2025; Boonlert, 2025). In fandom communication practices, fans also use various terms of endearment such as "baby," "adek," "jeje," "unyai," and "sandut" when referring to Polcasan. The attribution of these traits, identities, and kinship relationships indicates that Polcasan is not merely recognized as a mascot but is also constructed as a social figure within the fandom community.



Figure 1. Polcasan

Research on parasocial interaction still largely focuses on the relationship between fans and human figures, such as K-Pop idols or celebrities. Fitrah & Pribadi (2026) studied the parasocial interactions of NCT Dream fans on the X platform and found that these relationships develop across three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Research by Wardani & Kusuma (2021) also examined the parasocial interactions of BTS fans on Twitter and found that fans exhibited cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses in their interactions with their idols. Meanwhile, research on the Polca fandom by Fauziyyah *et al.* (2025) still focuses on the formation of community identity in general and has not yet examined parasocial interactions with the Polcasan mascot. Research on digital mascots, such as that conducted by Liang *et al.* (2025), has also been conducted primarily from the producer's perspective, such as marketing strategies and character design. Smutradontri & Gadavanij (2020) introduced the concept of "para-kin relationships" emotional bonds in which non-human objects or characters are treated as family members but this concept remains limited to the use of language and symbols within fandom and has not specifically examined how fans build and interpret relationships with digital mascots that actively interact on social media.

Based on the research journals cited above, it is evident that research on parasocial interaction remains centered on human figures, while studies on how fans build and interpret relationships with digital mascots that actively interact on social media are still scarce. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the parasocial interactions of the Polca fandom with Polcasan through naturalistic data on social media platform X and in-depth interviews. Thus, this study is expected to provide insight into how symbolic meaning is collectively constructed through fans' communication practices on social media platform X. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how members of the POLCA fandom construct and interpret their parasocial interactions with the Polcasan mascot on social media platform X. Using a qualitative approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm, this study posits that the meaning of Polcasan is shaped through the experiences, interpretations, and social interactions of fandom members. The research question is: "How do members of the POLCA fandom construct and interpret their parasocial interactions with the Polcasan mascot on social media platform X?" This question will be answered using the Theory of Parasocial Interaction developed by Schramm & Hartmann (2008), which divides parasocial

interaction into three dimensions: cognitive (thoughts and judgments regarding the media figure), affective (feelings and emotions that arise), and conative (behavior directed toward the media figure). This study is expected to provide academic benefits by enriching research on parasocial interaction, meaning construction, and digital fandom culture, as well as practical insights for the entertainment industry, demonstrating that mascots serve not only as promotional tools but also as a means of building emotional bonds and strengthening fan community dynamics.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach based on the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm was chosen because this study focuses on how members of the POLCA fandom construct and interpret their parasocial interaction experiences with Polcasan on social media platform X. The meaning of Polcasan as a mascot, social figure, and object of emotional closeness is understood as a reality shaped through experiences, interpretations, and communication practices within the fandom community. Creswell & Poth (2018) explain that the constructivist paradigm seeks to understand the subjective meanings that individuals construct based on their experiences, interactions, and interpretations of an object or phenomenon (Haryoko et al., 2020).

Four active members of the POLCA fandom were selected as informants using purposive sampling. This technique was used to select informants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives (Haryoko et al., 2020). The informant criteria included: having followed TayNew and Polcasan for at least one year, being active on social media platform X, having interacted with Polcasan content, and being willing to serve as research informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and online observation of Polcasan-related communication activities on social media platform X. The data included posts, comments, replies, terminology, and hashtags relevant to the research focus. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide informants with the flexibility to convey their experiences and perspectives in depth. This approach allows researchers to obtain comprehensive information aligned with the research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Tabel 1. Research Informant Profile

Code	Name (Initial)	Age	Job	Length of Time as a Member of Polca
I-01	Nai	25 years old	Private-Sector Employee	± 2,5 years
I-02	Lia	19 years old	Not Employed	± 1 years
I-03	Zahra	21 years old	Student	± 2 years
I-04	Olivia	19 years old	Student	± 1 years 5 month

Source: Data processed (2026)

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles et al. (2014) model, which consists of three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. During the data condensation stage, the researcher read and selected interview transcripts and observational data to identify information relevant to the research focus. Next, the researcher coded the data to identify emerging meanings and patterns, then grouped related codes into categories and themes. The analysis yielded four themes: the construction of Polcasan as a social figure, the interpretation of parasocial experiences, fan engagement in fandom practices, and the symbolic meaning of Polcasan within the TayNew fandom. These three stages of analysis occurred interactively, allowing

the researcher to conduct repeated interpretations and continually adjust them based on the research data (Miles et al., 2014).

Data validity was tested through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the four informants. Triangulation enhances data credibility by verifying and comparing information from various sources and data collection methods (Mekarisce, 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis of semi-structured interviews with four members of the POLCA fandom and online observations of communication activities regarding Polcasan on social media platform X, this study identified four main themes, namely: (1) the construction of Polcasan as a social figure, (2) the interpretation of parasocial interaction experiences, (3) fan engagement in fandom practices, and (4) the symbolic meaning of Polcasan within the TayNew fandom relationship. These four themes are interrelated and do not necessarily have to be experienced sequentially by all informants in interpreting Polcasan.

The research results indicate that fandom members construct Polcasan through processes of personification and anthropomorphism by attributing human traits, identity, character, and kinship relationships to Polcasan. These constructions are then linked to the emergence of various parasocial experiences, such as the perception of knowing Polcasan, experiences of simulated communication, emotional closeness, and the awareness that the relationship is one-sided. These experiences also manifest in various fandom practices through digital interactions, community participation, support activities, protective behavior, consumption, and the expansion of the fandom. All of these findings collectively shape the interpretation of Polcasan as a social figure and a symbol of emotional relationships within the fandom community.

The Construction of Polcasan as a Social Figure

The first set of findings indicates that Polcasan is not merely interpreted as a mascot representing TayNew. Polcasan is constructed as a social figure through personification and anthropomorphism. This figure possesses a specific identity, character, and social position within the fandom community. This interpretation is evident in the attribution of human traits and the use of kinship terms such as “child,” “grandchild,” “younger sibling,” and “baby,” which appeared consistently in the interviews. One informant stated: “Polcasan is not just a mascot representing the TayNew fandom, but the child of TayNew.” (I-02)

This statement indicates that Polcasan is understood as a figure with social relationships, not merely a visual representation. The attribution of the “child” identity places Polcasan within a familial structure that is collectively understood by the fans. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, meaning is not inherent in the object itself but emerges within and through the process of social interaction that occurs between individuals (Agustya et al., 2023). This means that Polcasan’s status as TayNew’s “child” is not an automatically inherent identity but rather emerges from the ongoing negotiation of meaning within the fandom community. Interactions among fans within digital communities significantly reinforce parasocial experiences, as collective interactions create cognitive and affective social identities that foster emotional attachment to media figures (Kim et al., 2023). These findings align with the research by Smutradontri & Gadavanij (2020), which states that the use of specific language and symbols within a fandom community can strengthen collective identity.

In addition to familial ties, fans also associate the Polcasan character with the personalities of Tay and New. Polcasan is portrayed as an active, talkative, cheerful, spoiled, and careless figure characteristics consistently associated with Tay and New. This character attribution indicates that

fans use their knowledge of Tay and New's traits as a framework for understanding Polcasan's behavior. Observations on X reinforce the findings of this study. Fans consistently use terms of endearment such as "Sandut," "San," "Yaisan," "anak," and "adek" when interacting with Polcasan. In various posts, birthday messages treating Polcasan as a family member can be seen:



Source: X, data processed (2026)

Figure 2. The Use of Kinship Terms

The consistent use of kinship terms indicates that Polcasan's identity is not formed individually. This identity is produced through repeated communicative practices and accepted as a shared meaning within the community. This shared understanding allows all members of the fandom to treat Polcasan as a social figure without needing to redefine the character's position.

These findings are consistent with Epley et al. (2007) regarding anthropomorphism, which is the process of attributing human characteristics to non-human entities. Three main factors influence this tendency: the availability of anthropocentric knowledge, the motivation to understand the behavior of other agents, and the need for social affiliation (Epley et al., 2007). Fans use their knowledge of Tay and New's personalities as a reference to understand Polcasan's character. Thus, how fans perceive Polcasan is influenced by their understanding of Tay and New's true nature.

This study expands upon the research by Liang et al. (2025), which explains that closeness to a mascot is influenced by the attribution of human characteristics through visual design. The findings of this study indicate that this process does not stop at character design. The meaning of Polcasan is continuously negotiated through community interactions on social media, so that the mascot's identity is maintained by fans' communication practices. Thus, the community factor plays a role just as important as character design in shaping anthropomorphism.

Interpretation of Parasocial Interaction Experiences

1. Perception of Familiarity with Polcasan

The first stage of parasocial interaction is marked by the formation of a perception of familiarity with Polcasan. The analysis results show that all informants access Polcasan content almost every day with high frequency, ranging from five to ten times a day. One informant stated: *"Almost every day. I usually see it on X and Instagram. Polcasan often appears because it participates in various GMMTV events."* (I-01)

This repeated exposure allows fans to become increasingly familiar with Polcasan's character, leading to the perception that they know the figure. These findings indicate the formation of a cognitive dimension, as described by Schramm & Hartmann (2008), in which fans develop a perception of familiarity with a media figure through repeated exposure. The informants' knowledge of Polcasan is not limited to superficial aspects. All three informants were able to explain Polcasan's character development in detail. I-01 recounted: *"I first learned about Polcasan when Tay New released an image of the character... At that time, Polcasan was still just an image with a tail. The mascot version debuted during the PEBACA What A Concert event."*

These findings highlight the cognitive dimension of parasocial interaction. The cognitive dimension encompasses attention, knowledge, evaluation, and the formation of perceptions regarding media figures. Fans do not merely view Polcasan content; they also develop a deep understanding of the character. Their knowledge of Tay and New's personalities which they use as a framework for understanding Polcasan indicates a process of evaluation and the construction of a relationship between the persona and the self. Schramm & Hartmann (2008) refer to this as "*comprehension of the persona's actions and activation*," meaning an understanding of the media figure's activities and development. In contrast to Giles (2002), who emphasizes exposure frequency as the primary factor in the formation of parasocial relationships with conventional media figures, the findings of this study reveal a different exposure pattern. Based on the informants' experiences, Polcasan content is not always actively sought out but frequently appears on social media feeds via algorithms and posts from fellow fans.

2. Pseudo-Communication Experiences

Once the perception of familiarity is established, fans develop the illusion of interaction with Polcasan. Fans actively respond to Polcasan's posts through comments, likes, and sharing the content. One informant stated: "*When Polcasan interacts with other mascots, I join in and respond to their interactions. I feel like it's not just exchanging comments with a mascot, but actually chatting directly with little kids.*" (I-02)

This informant's statement illustrates the illusion of interaction that fans experience with Polcasan. This illusion arises because the media figure uses carefully crafted, personal phrases designed to make the audience feel a connection and closeness, as if the interaction were two-way (Wardani & Kusuma, 2021). Schramm & Hartmann (2008) refer to this phenomenon as *paracommunication* the experience of individuals feeling as though they are interacting with a media figure even though the relationship is one-way. Horton & Wohl (1956) described the illusion of interaction with human media figures; however, the findings of this study indicate that a similar experience also arises with digital mascots that are personified through community narratives. In this study, *paracommunication* arises because the characters, language, and narratives constructed allow fans to feel an emotional connection while consuming content. Research on virtual influencers shows that characteristics such as interactivity, authenticity, and friendship built through narratives positively influence social perception and the formation of parasocial relationships (Feng et al., 2025).

Observations on the social media platform X reinforce these findings. When Polcasan posted a message encouraging fans to take care of their health, fans responded with interpersonal greetings:



Source: X, data processed (2026)

Figure 3. Fans' interpersonal responses

The use of the pronoun “you,” the term “adek,” and terms of endearment indicate that fans treat Polcasan as a conversation partner with whom they can communicate directly. This aligns with the research by Wardani & Kusuma (2021), which shows that K-Pop fans on X develop an illusion of interaction through comments and responses to their idols’ posts.

3. Emotional Closeness

This sustained illusion of interaction fosters emotional closeness between fans and Polcasan. Fans are not only cognitively engaged but also experience emotions associated with the figure. Polcasan is perceived as a source of entertainment and an emotional support capable of improving one’s mood. One informant stated: *“When I’m tired or in a bad mood, watching Polcasan’s videos can lift my spirits. Even just hearing her baby’s voice babbling away makes me happy.”* (I-03)

This *statement* indicates that Polcasan is perceived as a figure who provides emotional support. The informant associates the experience of watching Polcasan with an improved mood. This points to the affective function of parasocial relationships (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). This emotional response reflects the affective dimension of parasocial interaction. The affective dimension relates to sympathy, empathy, and emotional engagement with media figures. I-01 recounted a moment when Polcasan “cried” on stage: *“I was moved because Polcasan’s existence stems from TayNew’s long journey in the entertainment industry. As fans, we share in that struggle.”*

I-03 felt the same way: *“During the Polca Fammeeting concert, when Polcasan thanked TayNew and the fans, that moment was a real mix of emotions I was moved, proud just a whole mix of feelings.”*

The informants’ emotional responses to Polcasan reflect the concept of *empathy/counter-empathy* proposed by Schramm & Hartmann (2008). This concept explains the process by which fans share in the emotions they associate with media figures. When Polcasan “cried” on stage, the informants felt empathy and shared in the struggles they had endured. When Polcasan faced criticism, they felt anger and sadness. Research by Wardani & Kusuma (2021) found that fans develop emotional responses to media figures through social media. Unlike the findings of that study, which focused on human public figures, this research demonstrates that similar emotional responses also emerge toward consistently personified digital mascots. These findings are supported by research by Nguyen et al. (2023), which states that parasocial relationships with fictional characters involve dimensions of identification and intense emotional attachment, often driven by the character’s appeal and the desire for a personal connection. Observations on the social media platform X also reveal fans’ emotional responses when Polcasan received hate speech.



Source: X, data processed (2026)

Figure 4. Fans’ emotional responses

I-02 admitted: *“If anyone insults Polcasan, I usually block or report the account right away. I just can’t bear to see Polcasan being treated badly.”* I-03 also shared: *“When Polcasan was*

insulted, I felt really sad why would someone as cute as that be insulted...? When it comes to Polcasan, it's a very sensitive issue for me because she's like my little sister."

These affective responses indicate that Polcasan has deep emotional significance for fans, comparable to real interpersonal relationships. This emotional closeness serves as the foundation for fans to manifest parasocial relationships through various forms of real-world actions.

4. Awareness of a One-Way Relationship

Despite experiencing deep emotional closeness, fans are aware that their relationship with Polcasan is one-sided and imaginary. The analysis results show that all informants are aware that Polcasan is not a real being and can distinguish between reality and fandom activities. One informant stated: *"I don't really think of Polcasan as a child, but rather as a funny and adorable character. I can still distinguish between reality and fangirling activities."* (I-01)

This statement demonstrates the informant's full awareness that Polcasan is a character, not a real being. Schramm & Hartmann (2008) refer to this awareness as the reality aspect of parasocial interaction. Individuals can be aware of the imaginary nature of the relationship without diminishing the satisfaction they derive from it. I-01 also emphasized: *"Personally, I don't feel like Polcasan is interacting with me specifically because he's speaking generally to all his fans."*

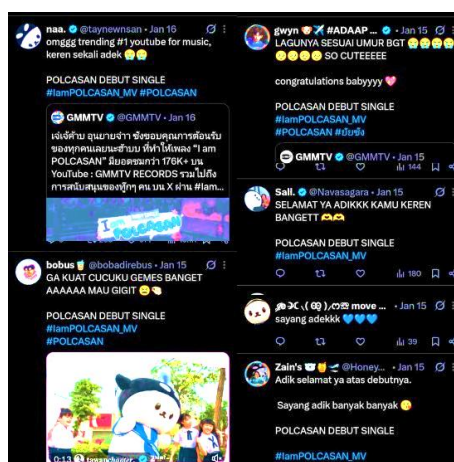
Early research by Horton & Wohl (1956) tended to view parasocial relationships as an illusion that substitutes for real social relationships. The findings of this study indicate that fans possess a mature awareness of the illusory nature of parasocial relationships. This awareness does not diminish the intensity of the relationship. Fans are still able to enjoy parasocial relationships in a balanced way. Research by Fitrah & Pribadi (2026) also shows that X creates an ecosystem that strengthens parasocial closeness through information exposure, *real-time* presence, and coordination of fan activities. The findings of this study reinforce the understanding that parasocial relationships with digital mascots can be intense without diminishing fans' ability to distinguish between reality and media constructs.

Fan Engagement in Fandom Practices

The conative dimension encompasses behaviors directed toward media figures, including verbal and nonverbal communication as well as the desire for direct interaction (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). The study's findings indicate that the emotional closeness formed is manifested in various concrete actions

1. Digital Participation

Digital participation is the most basic and most common form of parasocial relationship manifested by fans. All informants routinely "like," comment on, and share posts about Polcasan. One informant stated: *"I usually post about Polcasan on X. I also comment, 'like,' and share their content."* (I-02)



Source: X, data processed (2026)

Figure 5. Fan participation

Fans do not merely consume Polcasan content. They are also actively uploading, commenting on, liking, and sharing Polcasan-related content. The use of hashtags such as #IamPOLCASAN_MV and #OurPOLCASANTurns2 also constitutes a form of participation in online conversations. This participation reflects the conative dimension of parasocial interaction (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Research by Prameswari & Tanjung (2025) also shows that interaction through comments is one form of fans' conative behavior on social media. Digital participation demonstrates that parasocial relationships are not only internal in nature but are also expressed through actions in the digital space (Prameswari & Tanjung, 2025).

2. Participation in the Community

Fans manifest parasocial relationships through participation in communities. All informants participated in various fandom activities related to Polcasan. One informant stated: *"I've also organized two donation projects in Polcasan's name and raised funds together with other fans."* (I-01).

This participation reflects the conative dimension described by Schramm & Hartmann (2008), namely fan behavior manifested through concrete actions related to media figures. In a participatory culture, fans are not merely consumers of content but also actively create meaningful activities that strengthen community solidarity (Jenkins, 2006). Research by Kim et al. (2023) shows that interactions within digital fan communities enhance mental well-being and a sense of belonging due to emotional and social support from fellow fans and media figures. Additionally, the use of distinctive language, inside jokes, and community symbols functions as social rituals that strengthen a sense of togetherness and collective identity within the fandom (Irvana, 2026).



Source: Social Media, data processed (2026)

Figure 6. The Fandom Polca Indonesia's Fan Community Project

Fan participation is not limited to social media but is also manifested through various community activities, such as *the GLASS INSIDE LIFT PROJECT* at GMMTV, the donation of 60 boxed meals to the homeless, donations for children with cancer, *the LED ADS PROJECT* in Jakarta, and the installation of photo frames in 23 cities across Indonesia. This involvement demonstrates the fans' active role in creating meaningful activities, in line with Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory culture. The findings of this study are supported by Fauziyyah et al. (2025) which states that the Polca fandom possesses a strong community identity through the values of support, creativity, and a sense of belonging toward Tay and New.

3. Consumption Behavior and Support

Consumption behavior also serves as a manifestation of emotional closeness. All informants exhibited consumption behavior related to Polcasan. One informant stated: *"The biggest influence*

is on consumption decisions. When Polcasan becomes a brand ambassador for a product for example, a phone case or a beauty product I become more interested in buying that product.” (I-01)

Parasocial interaction affects not only the emotional realm but also consumer behavior. Schramm & Hartmann (2008) refer to this phenomenon as “*behavioral intentions*” that is, the desire to take actions related to media figures. Some informants purchase merchandise and products endorsed by brand ambassadors as a form of support for those figures.

4. Protective Behavior

Fans also exhibit protective behavior when Polcasan receives negative comments or abuse on social media. I-02 stated: *“If someone insults Polcasan, I usually block or report the account right away. I just can’t bear to see Polcasan being treated badly.”* I-01 added: *“I help provide clarification if there are posts that are considered harmful to Polcasan or TayNew.”*

I-02 responds to abuse with protective actions: blocking and reporting accounts that post insults. I-01 also provides clarification when there are posts that are harmful to Polcasan or TayNew. Observations on X reveal a similar pattern in which fans post defensive responses. These findings align with the Zhong (2025), which states that emotional closeness in parasocial relationships can drive protective behavior.

5. Polcasan as a Gateway to Getting to Know TayNew

The research findings also indicate that for some informants, Polcasan served as a gateway to discovering TayNew. One informant stated: *“I actually got to know Polcasan before I knew about TayNew. After seeing Polcasan, I became curious and started looking into who the ‘parents’ of that mascot were. That’s how I eventually got to know TayNew and started following them.”* (I-04)

Based on the informants’ experiences, Polcasan served as their starting point for getting to know TayNew. Another informant added: *“Before I knew about Polcasan, I didn’t really follow TayNew. After learning about it, I became more interested in checking out TayNew’s activities. So Polcasan helped me get to know TayNew better.”* (I-02)

Observations on social media platform X also revealed a similar pattern, where fans from outside the Thai fandom began to take a liking to Polcasan. One fan wrote:



Source: X, data processed (2026)

Figure 7. Polcasan as a Gateway for Non-fans

I-04 stated that Polcasan served as the starting point for getting to know TayNew. I-02 also acknowledged that Polcasan made them more interested in following TayNew. Findings from observations on X show that fans from outside the Thai fandom are beginning to like Polcasan. These findings align with Baudinette (2022), who demonstrated that mascots or supporting characters can serve as a gateway for audiences to get to know the main characters.

The Symbolic Meaning of Polcasan in the TayNew Fandom

Based on the overall findings, Polcasan possesses symbolic meaning that is formed through processes of communication and interpretation within the fandom community. This meaning is shaped through the assignment of identity, the use of kinship terms, experiences of emotional closeness, community activities, and various forms of fan engagement. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, meaning is not inherent in an object from the outset but emerges through social interaction and negotiation among actors (Agustya et al., 2023).

Polcasan has become a symbol of the emotional bond between TayNew and their fan community. This is evident from the statements of informants who view Polcasan as part of their family. I-03 stated: *“When it comes to Polcasan, it’s really sensitive for me because she’s like my little sister.”* I-02 also shared: *“I love Polcasan so much. It’s hard to put into words, but I really do love Polcasan like my own child.”*

These statements indicate that negative comments about Polcasan are not only viewed as criticism of the mascot but also of the emotional significance that fans have built around it. Research by Bang & Han (2025) and Nguyen et al., (2023) shows that parasocial relationships can form with virtual influencers and fictional characters through identification and intense emotional attachment. These findings align with research showing that Polcasan, as a digital mascot, holds deep emotional significance for fans. Polcasan is understood as a social figure whose meaning is constructed through individual experiences and collective communication practices, and is continually negotiated through fan interactions on the social media platform X. The concept of parasocial interaction proposed by Horton & Wohl (1956) and Schramm & Hartmann (2008) was used to understand fans’ experiences of closeness with personified non-human characters..

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Polcasan is constructed as a social figure through personification and anthropomorphism. Fans assign familial identities such as child, grandchild, and younger sibling to Polcasan. The experience of parasocial interaction is interpreted through perceptions of familiarity, simulated communication, emotional closeness, and awareness of a one-way relationship. These four aspects are not always experienced sequentially and vary among informants, reflecting the diversity of levels of parasocial engagement, which can range from mere entertainment to intense personal feelings (Hartmann et al., 2026). Fan engagement in fandom practices manifests through digital interactions, community participation, protective behaviors, and consumption. These practices are not automatically understood as the result of parasocial interaction but are analyzed based on the meanings informants ascribe to their experiences and actions.

Polcasan is interpreted as a symbol of emotional connection, collective identity, and a gateway to getting to know TayNew. Polcasan functions not only as a mascot but also as a social figure and mediator in the relationship between fans, the fandom community, and TayNew. The results of this study reinforce the relevance of Schramm & Hartmann’s (2008) theory of parasocial interaction in explaining the relationship between fans and consistently personified non-human characters. The meaning of Polcasan is not automatically attached to the mascot itself but is shaped through communication practices, social interactions, and the collective experiences of fans within the TayNew fandom community.

This study has limitations due to the small number of informants (four) and its focus on a single fandom community, meaning the findings cannot be generalized. Future research is recommended to involve a more diverse group of informants and employ other methods, such as surveys or quantitative content analysis, to broaden the understanding of parasocial interactions with non-human characters. Future studies could also compare fans’ experiences with mascots to

those with human figures to gain a broader perspective on the construction of emotional closeness within digital fandom culture.

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