
LEXICAL CHOICES AS AFFECTIVE STANCE: FANS' RESPONSES TO EAJ'S ACTIVISM ON TWITTER

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Abstract

This study examines how fans of the singer and celebrity Eaj (known as Jars) express affective stance through their lexical choices in responses to his humanitarian activism on X (formerly Twitter). When Eaj publicly voiced support for Palestine and Sudan, fans engaged actively through replies and quote tweets, displaying emotional alignment, shared values, and moral support. Using a qualitative discourse analysis approach, the study combines Hyland's (2005) stance model with Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle to identify attitude markers, evaluative language, and relational positioning. Thirty-three fan responses were selected from two threads related to activism, focusing on expressions of admiration, gratitude, empathy, and solidarity. The analysis reveals that fans not only evaluate the issues raised by Eaj but also position themselves as supportive, morally engaged participants, aligning with both Eaj and other users in the discourse. These affective expressions reveal how digital fandom can construct collective emotional meaning and reinforce parasocial bonds in activism contexts. While limited in scope, the study highlights the usefulness of combining interpersonal stance theory with relational stance analysis to understand the emotional meaning-making process in online fandom. The findings contribute to growing discussions on digital fandom discourse, demonstrating how linguistic choices serve as tools for expressing attachment, advocacy, and shared humanitarian concern.

Keywords

Affective Stance, Celebrity Activism, Fandom Discourse, Lexical Choice, Stance taking.



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INTRODUCTION

Fandom, as a collective community of fans oriented toward a favored public figure or idol, has increasingly positioned social media as a central space for interaction and meaning-making (Zhang & Dong, 2025). Through routine engagement with their idol's activities on digital platforms, fandom members employ specific lexical choices to communicate with one another and to express shared emotional orientations (Biri, 2023; Darmawan et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2020; Ulfa & Prianti, 2025; Yang et al., 2024; Zhang & Dong, 2025). Previous studies suggest that social media facilitates the construction and expression of emotional attachment within fandoms, which is linguistically manifested through affective, evaluative, and alignment-oriented lexical choices (Biri, 2023; Darmawan et al., 2025). Within this digital environment, such interactions constitute fandom discourse, through which fans negotiate interpersonal positioning and articulate an affective stance toward their idol (Ulfa & Prianti, 2025; Yang et al., 2024).

Building on the view of fandom discourse as a space where affective stance is linguistically articulated, lexical choices serve as a primary resource for stance-taking, enabling fans to project attitudes and negotiate alignment toward specific discourse objects. In digital environments, this process is often structurally prompted; as noted by Dahaam (2023), social media platforms actively encourage users to display alignment or disalignment, rendering stance-taking a publicly negotiated practice (Kim et al., 2025). From a theoretical standpoint, this interaction reflects Hyland's (2005) framework of interpersonal positioning, where linguistic features function as interactional tools to project a writer's stance while simultaneously securing audience engagement. Within fandom discourse, such engagement is not merely rhetorical but operates as a mechanism through which communal norms and evaluative orientations are continuously reproduced.

In fandom contexts, however, stance-taking is inherently relational since Du Bois & Kärkkäinen (2012) argue that affective displays build intersubjectivity through dialogic resonance, a process in which participants continuously modulate their emotional alignment in response to others. Ultimately, these lexical choices do more than convey individual emotion; in stance, they function as stylistic practices that reinforce collective identity and position fans within the community's social and affective relations (Chen & Zhang, 2024; Pratt, 2025). Through repeated circulation and uptake, such stance markers become indexical of shared values and fandom-specific norms, enabling members to recognize in-group affiliation. Moreover, this relational stance-taking simultaneously delineates boundaries between insiders and outsiders, thereby contributing to the

maintenance of fandom as a socially stratified discursive community.

This relational and identity-forming function of stance-taking is further substantiated by previous studies, which demonstrate that lexical choices as a form of stance-taking within fandom are deeply embedded in complex relational dynamics and community structures. Strong parasocial relationships, built through repetitive content exposure and an intimate communication style, transform the position of fans from mere spectators to their idol's "partners," "relatives," or "friends" (Bennett, 2014; Safwan & Ali, 2025; Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020). Structurally, Zhang and Dong (2025) and Malik and Haidar (2023) affirm that these routine interactions evolve into an organized Community of Practice (CoP) on Twitter (X), where a specific power hierarchy facilitates the systematic coordination of emotional attitudes among members.

On the other hand, some studies within a slightly similar theme emphasize the linguistic dimension and political agency as the primary channel through which fans express their stance in the public sphere as a sociolinguistic styling practice (Pratt, 2025). Fans create new semiotic spaces or "linguistic citizenship" through unique fan talk practices, the use of multimodal resources (emojis and hashtags), and even language mixing (English–Korean) as markers of authenticity and group ideology (Bishara, 2023; Khedun-Burgoine, 2022; Luzon, 2022; Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020). Ultimately, the characteristic language of fandom is deployed as a strategic instrument to "wrap" political agendas in mass mobilization efforts, solidifying the position of fandom as a significant socio-political actor in the digital space (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021; Zhuang et al., 2023).

The present study is situated within a series of digital and offline activist actions undertaken by Eaj (Jae Park or Jaehyung Park), which elicited extensive interactional responses from his fan community, Jars, on platform X. The relevance of this case emerges from Eaj's explicit criticism of the global entertainment industry's silence on humanitarian crises, particularly those concerning Sudan and Palestine (Putra & Zulmi, 2025). This activism extended beyond online spaces; during a live performance at the Prambanan Jazz Festival, eaJ publicly expressed support for Palestine, an act that Jars subsequently amplified through hashtag mobilization and affectively charged narratives on social media (Pribadi, 2023). These sustained interactions provide a linguistically rich context for examining how fans deploy lexical choices to signal alignment with the idol's affective stance in response to idol-led activism.

In this context, the present study examines how fans respond linguistically to idol-led humanitarian activism on Twitter (X). Specifically, this study aims to examine how affective stance

is expressed through fans' lexical choices in replies and quote tweets responding to eaJ's humanitarian activism on Twitter (X). Accordingly, the research question guiding this study is: How do fans express affective stance through lexical choices in their responses to eaJ's humanitarian activism on Twitter (X)? By focusing on lexical realization, this study contributes to stance and fandom studies by foregrounding the micro-linguistic mechanisms through which affective alignment is negotiated in digitally mediated activism. Furthermore, it extends existing research by demonstrating how fandom discourse functions as a site where cultural affiliation and political engagement intersect through language.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design, following the framework proposed by Creswell & Poth (2018). This approach is deliberately chosen to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of digital fan behavior by analyzing qualitative data collected from social media interactions. The research specifically employs a qualitative discourse analysis approach to examine how fans express their affective stance through lexical choices in response to idol-led humanitarian activism on Twitter (X). By adopting this approach, the study views fandom interactions as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1995), where linguistic choices actively contribute to the construction of social reality and collective humanitarian awareness. Accordingly, the method prioritizes interpretive depth to capture how meaning, affect, and alignment are co-constructed in digitally mediated fandom discourse.

The data for this study consists of 33 selected replies and quote tweets posted by the fans of eaJ, known as Jars, collected from the public X platform. The selection of X is justified by its nature as a networked public (Boyd, 2010) and a key site of ambient affiliation where users negotiate shared emotional orientations (Zappavigna, 2011). Data collection was conducted through systematic purposive sampling to identify information-rich cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2022), beginning with relevant X threads where eaJ articulated his humanitarian stance and narrowing the selection to fan responses addressing the humanitarian crises in Sudan and Palestine. This stepwise procedure prioritizes analytical depth over statistical breadth, aligning with Page's (2012) argument that qualitative social media analysis should focus on meaning-making practices rather than representativeness.

The data analysis proceeded through a two-tiered procedure that prioritizes the practical application of Hyland's (2005) and Du Bois's and Kärkkäinen's (2012) frameworks. Initially, lexical items within each response were systematically coded based on Hyland's taxonomy to identify specific affective and evaluative markers such as boosters and attitude markers. Subsequently, these coded linguistic markers were interpreted by mapping them onto Du Bois's stance triangle to analyze the relational dynamics of the discourse. In this stage, each data point was categorized into three core dimensions: the evaluation expressed toward eaJ's activism, the self-positioning enacted by the fan, and the alignment performed by the fan toward the idol. Lastly, the procedure involved data condensation (Miles et al., 2014) to abstract complex data into core findings, ensuring that the analysis captures the sociolinguistic complexity of fandom discourse.

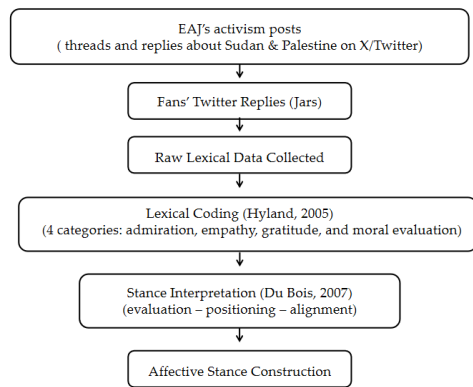


Figure 1. Method Diagram

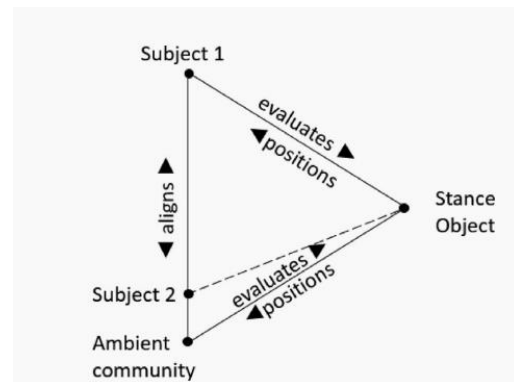


Figure 2. Du Bois's (2007) Stance Triangle

Data for this study were collected from two X (Twitter) threads posted by the artist Eaj (@eaJPark) discussing the Sudan genocide and the Palestine genocide, selected because they generated concentrated fan responses containing clear emotional and evaluative expressions relevant to affective stance. From these two threads, 33 replies and quote tweets were identified and retained after excluding items without stance value, resulting in a purposefully small-scale, qualitative dataset focused specifically on humanitarian activism contexts rather than general fandom discourse. To protect user privacy, all fan accounts were anonymized and labeled as "Jars 1" through "Jars 33", retaining only the public figure's handle, in accordance with ethical guidelines for analyzing publicly accessible digital celebrity discourse.

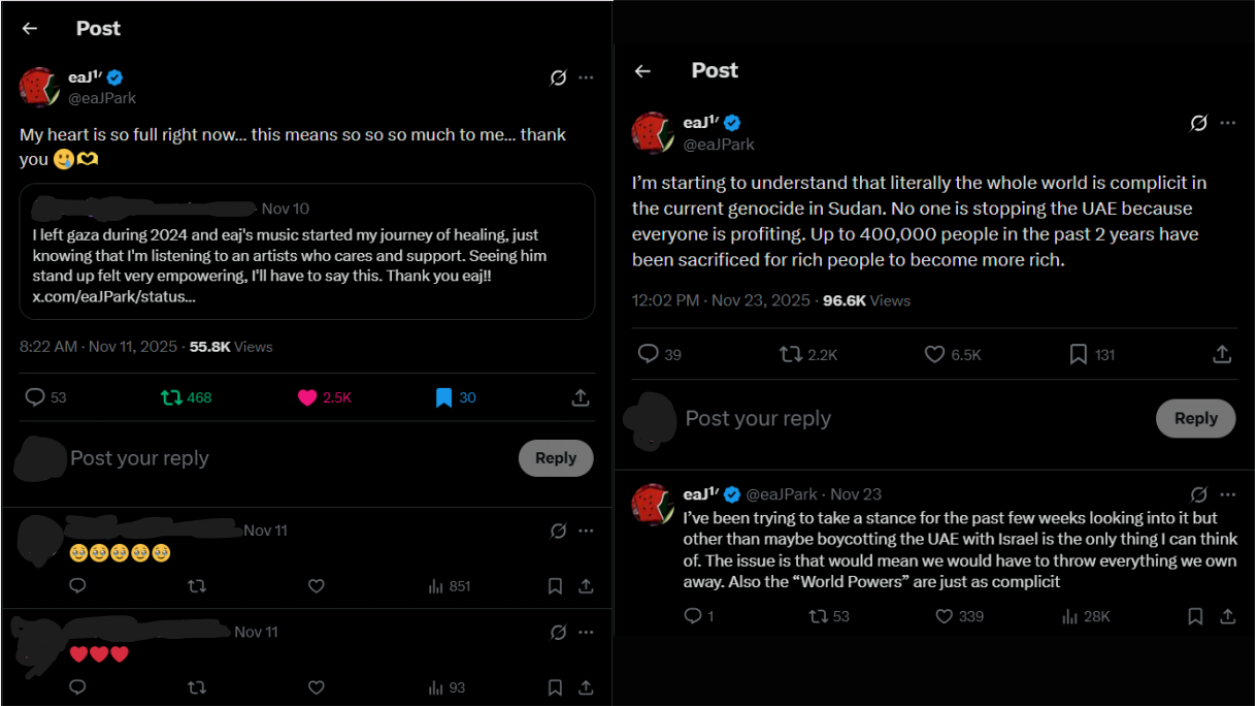


Figure 3. Sudan and Palestine Issue Discourse

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of 33 fan responses reveals three dominant affective stance patterns: evaluative stance, self-positioning, and alignment. These patterns represent the linguistic choices made by Jars in response to eaj’s activism and reflect how affective meaning is negotiated within fandom discourse. Viewed through Hyland’s (2005) interpersonal framework and Du Bois’s stance triangle, these categories illustrate the interplay between evaluation, identity construction, and relational alignment in digitally mediated activist communication. The distribution of these categories is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic Grouping of Affective Stance in Jars’ Replies and Quote Tweets

No	Stance Category	Sub-Theme	Representative Lexical Choices	Description
1	Evaluative Stance	Admiration & Praise	“You’re amazing”, “one of the best people on the planet is you”, “you’re such a good man.”	Fans evaluate Eaj positively with admiration markers.
2	Evaluative Stance	Gratitude	Expressions of thanks directed to Eaj’s activism.	Expressions of thanks directed to Eaj’s activism.
3	Evaluative Stance	Moral Validation	“Thanks for being a human”, “you’re helping others.”	Fans frame Eaj’s actions as ethically meaningful.

4	Evaluative Stance	Agreement		"I agree with you here."	Direct signals of agreement with Eaj's stance.
5	Self-Positioning	Supporter Identity		"As a long-term fan, "I've never been this proud of my idol."	Fans present themselves as loyal supporters.
6	Self-Positioning	Moral Witnessing		"We should keep learning and speaking about it", "I want them growing up safe."	Fans portray themselves as sharing ethical responsibility.
7	Self-Positioning	Affected Identity	Personal	"As a Sudanese fan...", "I left Gaza during 2024..."	Fans connect the stance with the lived experience.
8	Self-Positioning	Emotional Proximity		"I will walk this path with you", implied closeness in Jars involved as the main attention.	Fans position themselves relationally close to Eaj.
9	Alignment	Alignment With Eaj		"Respect king", "proud of you", "keep loud, capt!"	Fans align with Eaj's expressed stance.
10	Alignment	Alignment With the Cause		"Free Palestine", "you're not alone", "Barakallah."	Fans align with humanitarian struggles.
11	Alignment	Mutual Encouragement		"Eat well, laugh a lot", "hope kind messages brighten your day."	Emotional support directed to Eaj.
12	Alignment	Peer Solidarity		"R, please convey my love...", "You deserve so much."	Fans align with other participants (e.g., Palestinian responders).

Source: X (@eaJPark account)

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the 12 sub-themes identified from the data across three stance categories: Evaluative Stance, Self-Positioning, and Alignment. It illustrates how specific lexical choices function as affective resources through which fans evaluate eaJ's humanitarian activism and position themselves socially and morally. Within Evaluative Stance, admiration, gratitude, and moral validation are realized through positive appraisal markers that legitimize eaJ's actions as ethically meaningful. The Self-Positioning category highlights how fans draw on identity labels and personal experiences to claim moral involvement and affective proximity. Overall, the table demonstrates that lexical choices operate not merely as expressions of emotion but as strategic tools for constructing collective stance and community cohesion.

Figure 4. Distribution of Affective Stance Categories

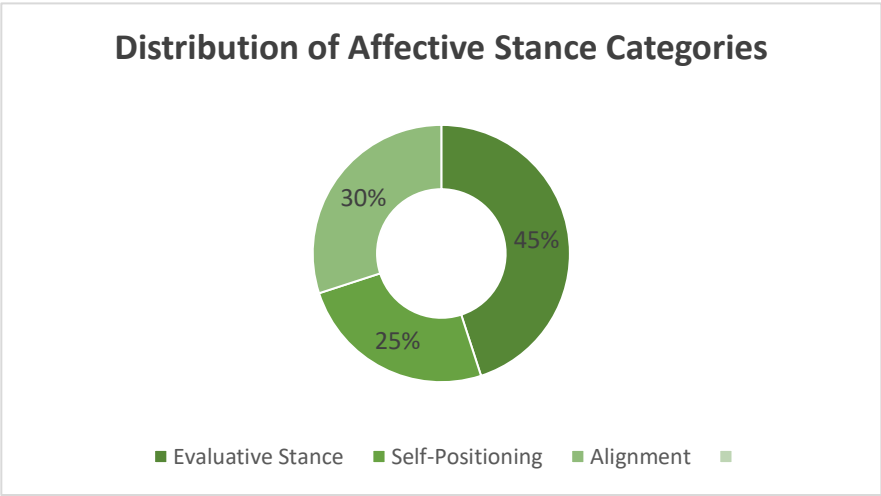


Figure 4 presents a donut chart illustrating the proportions of the three affective stance categories identified in the 33 fan responses. Evaluative Stance is the most dominant category, accounting for 45% of the total data. The second-largest category is Alignment, at 30%, while Self-positioning represents the smallest portion, at 25%. These figures reflect the frequency of lexical choices categorized under each stance type as previously detailed in Table 1. The predominance of evaluative stance suggests that fans primarily engage with idol-led activism through explicit appraisal and moral judgment rather than through self-referential positioning. At the same time, the substantial presence of alignment indicates that affective stance-taking is strongly oriented toward relational solidarity with both the idol and the humanitarian cause.

Discussion

The distribution of affective stance in this study (dominated by Evaluative Stance (45%), followed by Alignment (30%), and Self-positioning (25%)) reveals the complex linguistic mechanisms behind digital fandom activism in 2025. This pattern indicates that affective engagement in fandom discourse is primarily oriented toward collective judgment and value articulation rather than individual self-disclosure. The dominance of evaluative categories (45%) explicitly affirms the evolution of the fan-idol relationship from mere spectatorship to deep parasocial "partnerships" (Bennett, 2014; Safwan & Ali, 2025; Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020). By prioritizing evaluation, Jars demonstrate that their interaction with eaJ is no longer about passive consumption, but about actively involving themselves in defining the moral boundaries of their community.

The high frequency of attitude markers (Hyland, 2005) observed in the data directly validates the theory that fans possess a "moral mandate" to decode and validate an idol's activism (Hopkins, 2022; Numerato, 2016; Valentinsson, 2018). Structurally, this pattern aligns with the arguments of Zhang & Dong (2025) and Malik & Haidar (2023), confirming that Jars operate as an organized Community of Practice (CoP) on platform X. In this space, lexical choices serve as a systematic coordination of emotional attitudes. This process transforms individual emotional evaluations into networked emotions (Biri, 2023; Giaxoglou & Johansson, 2020; Parsons, 2019), allowing personal admiration to coalesce into a legitimate moral movement. Consequently, fandom discourse functions not only as emotional expression but also as a vehicle for collective ethical action.

Furthermore, the significant Alignment (30%) in the data reflects the intersubjective calibration within the Stance Triangle (Du Bois, 2007). Lexical choices such as "with you," "not alone," and the use of multimodal resources like hashtags for Sudan and Palestine support the view that fandom language is a strategic instrument used to "wrap" political agendas in mass mobilization efforts (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021; Zhuang et al., 2023). These affiliative expressions operate as indexical cues that invite collective uptake and reinforce shared moral orientations among fans. This alignment proves that fans are capable of synchronizing their stance not only with the idol but also with broader humanitarian struggles, demonstrating a level of political engagement that transcends typical fan discourse.

This alignment extends beyond mere agreement; it serves as a sociolinguistic styling practice (Pratt, 2025) that conveys group ideology and authenticity. By synchronizing their stance with global humanitarian issues, Jars utilize the mechanisms of platform X to increase visibility, affirming that unique fan talk practices serve as a sophisticated channel for manifesting political agency in the digital public sphere (Khedun-Burgoine, 2022). In this sense, alignment operates as both an affective and strategic resource that amplifies collective voice through platform affordances. Through this practice, fans effectively bridge the gap between their private emotional world and the public political landscape, solidifying their role as socio-political actors who can influence humanitarian discourse.

However, this study presents a significant antithesis when examining Self-positioning (25%), which emerged as the least frequent category. While Smutradontri & Gadavanij (2020) and Pratt (2025) suggest that fandom is a primary site for individual identity construction, this data contradicts the notion that fan activism is inherently self-centered. Jars' responses prioritize the

object of activism and alignment with marginalized groups over their own self-expression. This finding critically challenges the assumption that social media interaction is predominantly about self-presentation. Instead, it indicates that in humanitarian crises, fans' affective stance shifts toward a self-transcending moral practice, where collective solidarity is intentionally prioritized over individual positioning.

In synthesis, the interaction between evaluation, alignment, and positioning in Jars' discourse shows that affective stance is the primary mechanism transforming parasocial devotion into real political agency. The language of fandom has evolved into a highly sophisticated interpersonal positioning tool (Hyland, 2005) that solidifies the role of fans as significant socio-political actors (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021; Zhuang et al., 2023). By prioritizing moral evaluation and alignment over personal status, Jars practice an activism that is both parasocially rooted and politically grounded. Ultimately, this demonstrates that in the digital landscape of 2025, affective stance is a strategic practice that bridges the gap between digital fandom and global humanitarian responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to understand how fans express their affective stance toward eaJ in response to his humanitarian activism on X, focusing on the lexical choices found in replies and quote tweets related to Sudan and Palestine. The analysis reveals that Jars constructs emotional meaning through evaluative language, self-positioning, and alignment, aligning with Hyland's stance markers and Du Bois's stance triangle. These expressions reveal admiration for the artist, shared values, and a sense of emotional solidarity, demonstrating that digital fandom has evolved into a significant socio-political agent where moral support and personal attachment blend through strategic language. In doing so, the study highlights how micro-level lexical choices contribute to the formation of collective moral discourse in digitally mediated activism. Although this study uses a small data set, it offers insight into how an affective stance appears in online activism involving a public figure. The findings demonstrate how fans shape their responses through affection, gratitude, and collective identity, prioritizing humanitarian alignment over individual fan identity. This study demonstrates how linguistic tools can reveal the relational dynamics between fans, the idol, and the causes they endorse together, and it opens up space for further research on the evolution of emotional communication into political agency within digital fandom activism. Future studies may expand this line of inquiry by examining larger datasets, cross-platform interactions, or comparative

fandom contexts to further explore the scalability and variability of affective stance-taking in digital political engagement.

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