

Exploratory analysis of the role of mediatisation in the growth of transnational football fandoms in Africa

Análise exploratória do modelo de mediatização do futebol no crescimento dos adeptos transnacionais em África

Abstract:

The development of football, together with its attendant fandom, has been synonymous with the development of the media industry. Globalisation has made European football more accessible across Africa, including in rural spaces where fan identities related to the games have emerged. The growth of satellite television and the evolving digital access to football have influenced globalised practices and patterns of fandom among Africans in both rural and urban spaces. This explorative analysis explains the role of mediatisation in cultivating European football fandom across Africa. It builds an analysis of localised forms of transnational fandoms grown out of increased access to European football. Football reflects society and the paper argues that the exponential growing of transnational fandom across the continent mirrors ongoing mediatisation processes affecting all spheres of life in contemporary African societies. It shows that there are distinct, evolving and unique fan cultures based on following European football teams. Additionally transnational football experienced through the tri-cast platforms of television, computers and

mobile phones has negatively affected domestic African leagues almost without exception. The paper utilised a desk research approach to explore how the process mediatisation can explain transnational fandom across Africa. The study calls for continued study of mediatisation and its effect on specific aspects of African society

Keywords: Mediatisation; transnational fandom; globalisation; European football; Africa.

Resumo:

O desenvolvimento do futebol, juntamente com a dinâmica dos adeptos, têm contribuído para o crescimento da indústria dos media. A globalização tornou o futebol europeu mais acessível em toda a África, inclusive no mundo rural, onde surgiram (novas) identidades relacionadas com certas equipas e jogos. O crescimento da televisão por satélite e a evolução do acesso digital ao futebol influenciaram as práticas globalizadas e os padrões dos adeptos africanos, nos espaços rurais e urbanos. Esta análise exploratória explica o papel da mediatização na promoção do futebol europeu em toda a África e os seus

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efeitos entre os adeptos, focando o perfil dos fãs transnacionais que cresceram a partir do aumento do acesso ao futebol europeu. O futebol reflete a sociedade e o artigo argumenta que o crescimento exponencial de adeptos transnacionais em todo o continente africano é reflexo dos processos de mediatização em curso, que afetam todas as esferas da vida nas sociedades africanas contemporâneas. Mostra que existem culturas de adeptos distintas, em evolução e únicas, baseadas no seguimento de equipas de futebol europeias. Além disso, o futebol transnacional experimentado através das plataformas tricast de televisão, computadores e telefones móveis afetou negativamente as ligas domésticas africanas, quase sem exceção. O artigo utilizou uma abordagem de pesquisa documental para explorar como o processo de mediatização pode explicar o conceito de adepto transnacional em toda a África. O artigo apela à continuação do estudo da mediatização e do seu efeito em aspectos específicos da sociedade africana.

Palavras-Chave: Mediatização; adepto transnacional; globalização; futebol europeu; África.

Introduction

The growth of transnational fandom in Africa requires nuanced analysis of how the process of mediatisation and globalisation of European football has led to the development of distinct fan communities across the continent. In this paper we explore how mediatisation can be used to explain the emergence, practices, and experiences of transnational fans in Africa. The role of mediatisation in transnational football fandom in Africa is yet still understudied. The study utilised a desk research approach that sought to analyse the evolution of fans who support European teams. There is a growing body of work focusing on transnational football in Africa which covers different issues and regions across the continent (Akindes, 2011; Chiweshe, 2019; Omobowale, 2009; Olaoluwa & Adejayan, 2011; Waliaula, 2021; Waliaula & Okong'o, 2020). It is important to draw links through this literature and provide a theoretical analysis to this emergent cultural practice. Globalisation which has seen growing connectivity of individuals, groups and institutions across multiple national contexts through media and

communication technology advances has been the prime reason for the emergent patterns of fan identities related to leagues such as the English Premier League (EPL) (Bridgewater, 2017; Giulianotti & Robertson 2004; Ranachan, 2013). The growing transnational fandoms are considerably influencing the nature of European football because of their financial input. Broadcasters who fork out considerable fortunes for television rights are targeting fans across the globe and use EPL football, for instance, as bait for their customer fans who they aim adverts at. Given the sheer numbers at play and the enormous wages players receive scholars have questioned the sustainability of this model (Akpan, 2020; Delaney, 2020; Henderson, 2010).

An example is how transnational fan demands are shaping the starting time of games. Traditionally, the bulk of matches in Europe, and in particular England, used to be played on Saturday afternoon (at 3pm) but with television influence, games can now be played any time and on any day of the week which highlights how commodification and

commercialism (results of corporate capitalism) have swayed the trajectory of the English game across the globe (Ranachan, 2013). It is now the television schedules that determine specific kick-off times of the game as television companies now have the power to decide when, where and how sport competitions should take place. These changes in kick off times are a prime example of mediatisation and are seen to affect transnational fandom in several ways. The paper now proceeds to theorising mediatisation and transnational fandom before discussing their relationship in an African context. The focus on Africa in this paper does not mean that the continent is homogenous space with similar experience. Africa is used as a space that provides a heterogeneous and localized understanding of how different country contexts shape the process of mediatisation and transnational fandom.

Theorising mediatisation and transnational fandom

Transnational football fandom in Africa has in the last two decades

grown exponentially as to warrant serious theorisation. Because transnational fandom revolves around media use, early scholarly enquiry centered on reception studies ostensibly on the link between the media as sporting content providers and fans as audiences. Mediatisation has its roots in observations from scholars such as Asp (1990) who reference a “media twisted society” and Altheide and Snow (1979) who point at the primacy of formal issues over media content as society increasingly aligned to media logics (Hjarvard, 2008). The term was initially used in the study of politics to address how elite politics internationally had become so dependent on the media (Hjarvard, 2008; Stromback, 2008) but has come to appear in other areas including business, education, religion and sport. Mediatisation has both sparked scholarly enthusiasm and stirred serious controversy around its scope and groundedness. It has also been accused of being poorly conceptualised and producing “grand sweeping narratives that obscure more than they reveal” (Skey & Waliaula 2021, p. 2069).

According to Hjarvard (2008, p. 14) mediatisation is “the process through which an institution that is not of the media becomes subject to and incorporated within the media.” Skey et al. (2018, p. 5) further elaborate its scope delimiting it as “best deployed as a means to understand particular social domains and the ways in which institutions and actors orientate their activities towards the media.” The staggering of kick-off times in Europe to accommodate a global fan base is a prime example of how football institution orients their activities towards the global media. The process is however not unidirectional but constituted in a duality of co-causation between the media and other institutions. Media can be seen to accommodate, for instance, sports broadcasting by developing new technical facilities, styles of reporting and accommodating demands of wider political legislation through competition policy, rules of ownership and deregulation of markets (Skey et al., 2018).

The duality perspective is further endorsed by Krotz (2017) who views mediatisation as an ongoing

meta-process explaining how social changes concurrently occur with media changes. Krotz and Hepp (2013, p. 124) stop short of the McLuhanite media deterministic position noting how mediatisation “changes human communication by offering new possibilities of communication which in turn influence how people construe the world.” It must be stated that without advances in information technology, telecommunications and internet, transnational fandom would be difficult to imagine. Streaming services and social networking sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube have used European football as an important connection point with users across the globe. Use of these platforms has progressively gone beyond football to affect other political and socioeconomic issues. In support Hjarvard (2008) sees mediatisation processes as occurring insidiously with the media gradually coming to acquire the status of a social institution. The actions of the global media in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022 is a case in point with many Western media and communication outlets quick

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to join other Western institutions in sanctioning Russia.

Schulz (2004) has offered a more operational exploration of the connection between mediatisation and social change drawing on four ways (extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation) in which the two relate. Modern transnational football is at the heart of these four Schulzian processes. For instance, Skey and Waliaula (2021) have drawn on Schulz's concept of extension to show how space constraints are collapsed by media as football fans in East Africa are increasingly oriented towards leagues, clubs, players, and schedules of European leagues. Further, scholars like Krotz (2017) have directly marshalled mediatisation to other contemporary social processes like globalisation, commercialisation, and individualism. Attempts to sanitise and gentrify football in England in the early 90s were largely aimed at disenfranchising the majority working class whose alcoholism and hooliganism was blamed for various stadium disasters that had killed hundreds of fans (Dixon, 2014; Turner, 2014).

The early 1990s are deemed an important watershed in fan studies for they accelerated the emergence of transnational fandom. Before the 1990s, football fan typologies had mostly attempted to conceptualise the true authentic match attending fan as opposed to the inauthentic synthetic distanced consumer (Davis, 2015; Fillis & Mackay, 2014; Kerr & Emery, 2011). Transnational fans were deemed to fall in the latter category. Giulianotti's (2002) seminal typology navigating from one extreme of the hot supporter to the opposite end of the cool flaneur is a typical example. The cool flaneur is more detached and relies on the media experience to follow football teams. Criticism to such typologies was first offered by Redhead (2003) who decried the death of all typologies of fandom in the 1990s as the media revolution ushered in the 'media fan' or 'post-fan' who ultimately subsumes all other forms of fandom. Post fandom references the gradual collapse of rigid classifications on fans where authenticity and commitment are concerned. There is an acceptance within the authentic movement of the more fluid, liquid

modern consumerist, mediated, and cool fan that cut across time, space, and loyalty boundaries (Bridgewater, 2017; Davis, 2015). This increasingly accommodates the transnational fan who is of interest in this study. African experiences however provide a more localised and contextual experience of such fandoms which intertwine with everyday socio-cultural, economic, and political factors to create a rather unique transnational fandom. Such fans require more grounded theorisation, and this paper explores the role of mediatisation in the growth of these fan cultures.

Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) believe football (and its scattered fans) is an important site for theorisation and empiricism of globalisation processes. Leading European clubs are now committed glocal Transnational Companies (TNCs) aggressively courting post fans worldwide. How these TNCs perceive their global clientele (fan bases) is instructive. There is a growing appetite for legitimating deterritorialised transnational fans who have jointly been called self-invented virtual diasporas (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004), satellite

supporters (Kerr and Emery, 2011), the media/post fan (Davis, 2015). These forms of fandom would not be possible without the processes of globalisation, deregulation, commercialisation, information technology and communications technology which Krotz (2017) has closely aligned to mediatisation. Despite this, other important voices have downplayed the link between fandom and consumption. Best (2013) believes fandom remains altruistic and serious, dismissing consumption-based solidarity as only an issue around a small minority of commercially successful 'global' clubs. This hints at resistance to models of hyper-commodification within football fans. This dimension is most apparent in Africa where the paradox of a continent most madly in love with football is least equipped to adjust to its commodification. This has seen the emergence of cheap counterfeit football artefacts including replica jerseys.

It can be said that mediatisation is still in its conceptual infancy. Debate still rages as to whether it can be employed as a conceptual tool, a theory or as an outright methodology. There

is need for further evidence both empirical and theoretical in its refinement. There is also need to answer questions on its delimitational scope. In this paper it is used to explore the sociology of transnational football fandom. What is at least apparent from the theoretical discussion above is that mediatisation has somewhat levelled the playing field across cultures coming to offer affordances that evolve the identity and behaviour of the transnational football fan in important ways. After examining the methodology, the paper discusses these evolutions using Africa as a case study. This analysis of Africa as a case study avoids romanticising or homogenising the continent but rather accepts the unique regional, national, ethnic, and even age-based differences in the experiences of transnational fandoms.

Methodology

The study utilised a desk research approach that focused on published and grey literature around European football fandom in Africa. This approach provides an exploratory gaze into the emerging subculture

of European football fandom. Miller and Brewer (2003) advocate for desk research approaches in social science research as they believe that documents such as periodicals, reports, articles, photographs, letters, diaries, newspapers, among others have valuable data that can be relied upon. In this study we utilised several online databases including Google Scholar, EBSCOHost and Scopus. It also focused on searching university websites for students' research related to transnational fandom. Beyond published work, the study also utilised grey literature such as newspaper reports, blogs, reports, and websites. The focus was on collecting any stories or information related to European football fandom in African countries. Such an approach allowed for a wider coverage of experiences in different countries and contexts. A total of thirty-six articles were purposively sampled for the study. The articles were selected based on relevance to the topic. Articles were searched on online databases outlined above using key search words that include mediatisation, transnational fandom, globalisation of football and European football in

Africa. There is a growing literature on transnational fandoms in Africa that allows for an exploratory analysis of the nature, patterns and analysis of mediatisation and European football fandoms. The studies are limited in terms of coverage to countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Ghana. This however highlights a wide coverage of all sub regions in Africa and allows for an exploratory analysis of mediatisation and transnational fandoms. The researchers understand the limitations of this approach that include lack of follow up with research participants of the original studies and the inability to verify collected information. In this study we utilised multiple sources to ensure that the themes that emerged out of the data analysis are supported by more than five sources.

Findings and Discussion

Describing transnational fans in Africa

Socialisation in transnational fandom is not linear but part of a

complex interplay of factors. Fans of transnational football in Africa can be divided across age, gender, race, class, and regional lines. The initiation processes, motivations, icons, and routines of fans vary across the continent. A 2015 BBC study of African fans on Twitter following official English Premier League (EPL) club accounts had close to 25 million fans following the top five clubs Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City and Manchester United. There were also regional differences with Arsenal commanding the largest following in North and East Africa, Chelsea superior in West Africa while Southern Africa was dominated by Manchester United (Kwenda, 2015). Bridgewater (2017) notes the increasing prominence of "dual supporters" with fans aligning to more than one club. It requires economic, social, and technological capital to juggle these allegiances. The transnational fan must, in a mediatised world, possess the technological capital required to stay abreast of events. This implies not just possessing the gadgets but skill in using them effectively. It is common for individual fans to negotiate, in

complex ways, dual or multiple allegiances to teams in different European leagues while remaining loyal to a domestic team in their African home territory. Dual allegiance to big teams in one league remains rare.

There are intrinsic and extrinsic influences that converge in the initial recruitment of African transnational fans. Using football as evidence of increasing globalisation Giulianotti and Robertson (2004) examine how ‘universal’ and ‘particular’ processes interface in glocalising fan experiences. Universal processes are extrinsic and of a global nature and are seen to affect fans across the world while processes are intrinsic and emerge organically from subcultures. Intrinsically family and community experiences are influential in recruiting and socializing people into fandom (Fillis & McKay, 2014). There are also aesthetic, ethnic, historical “blood and soil” and instrumental reasons for football fandom and alignment to particular clubs (Kerr & Emery, 2011). Extrinsically there are synthetic mediated forms of initiation in globalised and massified fan neo-tribes (Best, 2013). These are either initiated by or

motivated centrally by the marketing arms of TNC football clubs themselves. Arsenal continues to command the largest following across West Africa by leveraging on their recruitment of popular players hailing from this region like Nwankwo Kanu, Kolo Toure, Emmanuel Adebayor and Pierre Emerick Aubameyang (Kwenda, 2015). Africans also align to transnational teams because of their consistent performances, style of play, coaches or because of collective viewing which fosters an enhanced sense of belonging and connection (Chiweshe, 2011).

Supporting the electronic colonialism thesis, appeal for transnational football teams in Africa is also rooted in frustrations with the various challenges that affect football on the continent. These include poor marketing and packaging, inferior style of play, poor administration, and migration of talent (Alegi, 2010). These challenges continue to affect the quality of football in Africa and more importantly draw fans away to European leagues (Akindes, 2011). African football clubs are especially denied of ticket sales, sponsorships, TV viewers

and basic interest by fans defecting to European satellite transmissions (Delaney, 2020). This however is not universal. The broadcasting of matches in the Kenyan Premier League by Kwese TV has led to increased interest in and growing numbers of fans attending matches in stadiums there. Teams like Kano Pillars in Nigeria also draw large crowds despite competition from European televised football (Akpan, 2020).

Supporter ages in Africa are also seen to align to periods when clubs were particularly successful. Olaoluwa and Adejayan (2011) report how the Igbo in Nigeria rechristened Arsenal striker Thierry Henry as “Igwe” during the first decade of the millennium due to his exceptional performances. Igwe is a title bestowed upon the ruler in this culture hence Henry is deemed to possess exceeding prowess given his ability to score goals and decide matches. Arsenal was a top performing team between the year 2000 and 2010. This would account for the popularity of Chelsea and most recently Manchester City among youthful millennial fans. Many of these populate educational

institutions, from primary to tertiary level, which are important socialization spaces. Middle-aged fans would have started their fandom at a time Manchester United and Arsenal were dominant hence easy to align to. This is still far from conclusive as the cool, detached flaneur fans can easily change allegiance based on various consumption-based dynamics (Giulianotti, 2002). Yet it departs from the European experience where one's geographic origin is a key determinant of choice of club supported. Support for hometown community club is the norm.

Transnational fandom remains a male dominated space. In Africa, where cultural dynamics reign supreme, women find little comfort in sport spectatorship as they face male opposition as to the spaces they are supposed to occupy. Masculinity, religious prohibitions, cultural inhibitions, sexual harassment, and assaults are obstacles that women seeking to venture into sport must circumvent (Fasting et al., 2014; Musangeya & Muchechetere, 2013; Wangari et al., 2017). Men (masculinity) resent women venturing into what they view as

their presumed fields hence they deny women space as fans through ridicule and labelling as 'lesbians', 'whores' or 'husband snatchers' (Chikafa, 2014; Daimon, 2010; Manyonganise 2010). Sport therefore continues to perpetuate the ideology of male superiority and dominance (Messner, 1988). Younger women are however breaking barriers though they remain marginalised. As with LGBT communities they see transnational football as an important frontier where activism on sexist and homophobic issues can be championed especially with popular leagues such as the English Premier Leagues running campaigns against homophobia.

Transnational football is frighteningly popular throughout Africa. Arabic Nordic Africa has traditionally had a strong footballing culture, but this has largely been conservative and inward looking due to state and religious controls (Amara & Henry, 2004). The role of successful icons like Mohamed Salah is important in breaking the cultural barriers and gravitating fans further towards European football. Sub-Saharan Africans are largely divided into Francophone

and Anglophone countries. The EPL remains the preferred league even in Francophone territories (Akindes, 2011). White European immigrants on the continent have traditionally been important in popularising European leagues. For instance, in Mozambique and South Africa missionaries and educationists are credited not just with introducing football but also exposing talented players to European leagues (Alegi, 2010).

Noticeable differences exist between fans from different social classes. The 'liquid' notion of fandom presented by Zygmunt Bauman assumes consumption provides the basis for solidarity between football clubs and global fans in modern times. Domestic satellite subscription, top of the range viewing bars and streaming all remain a preserve for the Upper and Middle class. However, the lower class remain most consumers and have found ways to counter the commercialisation of transnational football through legal and illicit means of counter power (David et al., 2015). These include online streaming through legal and illegal sites, crowdfunding for TV subscription fees and artfully dodging

payment and consumption in monetised viewing sites across the continent.

Intersection of mediatisation and transnational fandom in Africa

Popular Portuguese football coach Jose Mourinho once remarked, “When I go to the press conference before the game, in my mind the game has already started” (Whaling, 2015). The remark succinctly captures the centrality of media in contemporary societal processes. It could be added that even beyond the match football continues to intersect with the media. Players and coaches are compulsorily asked to perform interviews post-match. This overwhelming media blanket also surrounds fans across the world in ways that will be examined in this section. Football revenue be it through commercial merchandising, match attendance or through broadcasting is ultimately bankrolled by fan consumption. Of the three revenue sources media broadcasting is the most lucrative revenue source especially in Europe. The growth of the third revenue source (media)

culminates in football converting into a global international business where teams are no longer just football clubs targeting sporting success but “glamorous content providers” for the media (Delaney, 2020).

The point is the symbiotic relationship between sport and the media is responsible for much of the growth of the European football fandom not only in Africa but even in England itself and across the world (Ranachan, 2013). Rupert Murdoch is deemed responsible for ushering the golden age of sports broadcasting that began when BSkyB became the first company to win rights to broadcast football matches at the inception of the Premier League in 1992. Murdoch viewed the entry of sport, and football, into television programming as the “battering ram” that would drive audiences towards broadcast viewing (Whannel, 2009). Media marketing and advertising has allowed modern European clubs to be classified as transnational corporations as they have driven football diffusion and globalisation thereby cultivating massive and captive fan interest across the world (Giulianotti & Robertson,

2004). What is particularly important in this instance is the role of the media in the passage of European culture to seemingly ‘passive’, ‘gullible’ and ‘docile’ Africans. This is strongly argued by some scholars as cultural and or media imperialism (Akindes, 2011, p. 2187). Our research however seeks to counteract this argument by highlighting the rise of unique and culturally embedded fandom of European football made by up supporters with agency to build their own fan cultures.

Broadcasting of football globally has indeed increased access to the game exponentially (Ranachan, 2013). Sustained technological advancements in television technology, telecommunications, information technology and media deregulation have also afforded new means of reaching broader and dispersed audiences (Akindes, 2011). Leading clubs in Europe’s five biggest national football leagues have accepted that their audience is increasingly satellite and recognize the significance of connecting with them digitally. Canal Sat Horizons is the main supplier of transnational live football in francophone Africa

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while its main competitor DSTV has a strong foothold in Southern Africa. In South Africa DSTV was successful enough to establish its own football team Supersport United which is a staple in the topflight (Alegi, 2010). The rest of this section now proceeds to look at ways in which, according to Hjarvard (2008), football is coming to adopt a ‘media logic.’ These include broadcast scheduling, Disneyisation of broadcasting, punditry, second screening and introduction of electronic technologies. These methods will be further aligned to Schulz’s four processes of mediatisation.

Scheduling broadcast times: The growing influence of financial imperatives can be seen in the continuous staggering of kick-off times to suit TV companies (Delaney, 2020). In Spain and Italy all ten matches are often staggered across the weekend to accommodate not only broadcasters but satellite fans in different time zones. Matches in Italy are rescheduled to kick off at midday to allow for their viewing at prime time in the significant Asian market. As Redhead (2003) has argued acquiescing to the needs of these remote “post media

fans” is mandatory as they provide the finances that are critical for sustaining elite football’s monetised model. These scheduling alterations are argued to be of little inconvenience to African viewers though. A significant temporal advantage Africa has over Asia, the Americas and Australia is that the continent shares a more congruent time zone to Europe (Akindes, 2011). Watching football matches live, as opposed to delayed, is deemed a mark of true fandom, and affords greater cultural capital to the satellite fan. Delayed rerun broadcasts are generally frowned upon. The congruency in time zones has however created immense constraints for domestic football on the continent as fans shun attending Kenyan Premier League matches while opting for televised games. This together with the mass migration of talent to Europe has the effect of destroying the domestic leagues (Akpan, 2020).

Disneyisation: Whannel (2009) attributes the burgeoning popularity of televised football to changes in its content and packaging. The emergence of dedicated channels, magazine formatting of football highlights

programmes and lively commentary styles have revolutionised broadcasting creating content capable of competing with other traditional forms of televised entertainment. The popularity of these condensed viewing forms into a ‘highlights industrial complex’ is also a consequence of viewing audiences’ generally becoming less patient. Attention spans in audiences are gradually decreasing over time. A study by Microsoft revealed that attention span has reduced from twelve to eight seconds since the year 2000 (Liew, 2020). For practical socioeconomic reasons it remains difficult and impractical for most Africans to watch most televised football matches consistently. As a result, even fans who cannot watch entire matches in a single sitting can stay abreast of important events, trivia, and memes via shorter sliced content available on platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These sliced packages are carefully curated to capture flashpoints, key events and controversies which are important for the media in grabbing attention, driving engagement, and entertaining audiences Disney style.

In addition, former Real Madrid President, Ramon Calderon, sees elite football as having evolved because of the influence of money and mediatisation to become show business where the stadia are stages where players become performers (Delaney, 2020). Bryman uses the term ‘Disneyisation’ to capture a series of procedures taken to ensure the satisfaction of consumers and to offer new strategies of selling mediated products. The big football clubs adopt more sophisticated communication and marketing techniques coming to resemble hyperreal Walt Disney show business. Bryman’s four common marketing techniques (Merchandising, Emotional performative labor, Hybrid consumption and Theming) are tailored to warrant increased consumption in audiences (Best, 2013). All four techniques are a common feature not just in elite clubs’ transcontinental marketing campaigns but have also been adopted in African viewing centres hoping to customise the viewing experience and attract more fans. Some bars identify exclusively with Premier League teams as they seek out a niche clientele. Further research

needs to be done on the success of such initiatives across Africa.

Pundits: Disneyisation can extend to capture the role of commentators and pundits who present matches to viewers. Liew (2020) suggests that televised football has amplified the role of the ‘punditocracy.’ In Schulzian (2004) terms pundits offer both an extension to, and amalgamate broadcast transmissions providing not just explanation of events but entertainment:

Today’s pundits must not interpret content only, they must create it. They must drive engagement, stir debate and emotions. TV is now also in direct competition with mobile and short form video. The effect has been to reframe punditry as an event in its own right: a content economy where the goal is not simply to discuss the game’s talking points, but to provide more (Liew, 2020, p. 24).

It becomes clear the role of pundits is not just to ensure audiences understand the game better, but to ensure they enjoy it more, by any means necessary. Celebrity pundits like Roy

Keane, Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher consistently stir controversy with scathing post-match analyses and debate that set an agenda for transnational audiences across the world. However, audiences are increasingly aware of and immune to this sensationalism. In African viewing centres and bars commentators and pundits are drowned out as fans prefer to comment on proceedings themselves. Resident opinion leaders with know-how and accrued capital are instrumental in “localising” the match experience by interpreting it in a vernacularised, bastardised way locals can easily relate to. The banter, schadenfreude, debates, jokes, allusions, metaphors, and nicknames given to players, teams and events transpiring are domesticated in a highly poetic manner (Waliaula, 2021).

Electronic technologies: Electronic technologies shaping televised football include Goal-line technology, Video Assistant Referees (VAR) and incoming 5G technologies. While research exists assessing the impact of these technologies in Europe for match going fans, there has been little evidence put forward to gauge the

technologies’ standing with transnational viewers in Africa (van den Berg & Surujlal, 2020). Goal-line technology and VAR have substituted referees in transferring decision making power to electronic technologies. Whatever goal line technology and VAR’s defects they have generated exponential mileage for the media. They offer evidence of Asp’s “media twisted society” and the general submission of football to a media logic (Hjarvard 2008). With VAR, for instance, the slow-motion frame by frame analysis and replays as decisions are painstakingly arrived at all capture what Bélanger (2000) has called the spectacularisation of sport through mediatisation. On standby to capture the reactions of the main protagonists, meanwhile, is another army of roving cameras. These are ready to capture the embrace and agony of rival fans in the terraces or the animated and theatrical reactions from the coaching staff. Breaks in play also afford cameras the opportunity to roam across the stadium and capture “unsuspecting but nonetheless thrilled spectators” on giant screens (La Liga, 2022). This shows how the media takes an

active role in creating excitement beyond the actual play itself.

What is also clear is that the constant rule changes in sports like football have led to less in-play action and more time for media content like advertising. In football, increasingly less time is being spent with the ball in play. This creates a vacuum which the media conveniently fills with secondary intrusive content in particular adverts both on the television screen contours and the hoardings that populate match venues. During these breaks of play the mind subconsciously transfers to these adverts subliminally. While there is a growing appreciation among fans of the economics surrounding broadcasting and the necessity of advertising, these integral revenue streams nonetheless retain stridently fierce critics (Thomas, 2018). Alcohol and betting brands like Heineken and BetWay feature prominently during football matches raising ethical questions. Addiction and psychological disorders have been attributed to gambling, drug, and alcohol abuse. This is of less concern in Northern Africa where religious doctrine prohibits

alcoholism and gambling. In East Africa however governments in Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya have stepped in to either ban or tighten legislation in gambling (Kaggwa et al., 2022).

Second screening: Mediatized forms of experiencing football matches have evolved ways of watching. This has resulted in changes to how football fans consume live events. Social media networks offer a popular form of second screens. In Africa networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and TikTok are a popular second screen recourse for transnational fans. Second screening serves several purposes for transnational fans. First it can be a resource for useful commentary on first screen proceedings explaining the intricacies and subplots that characterise football matches. Secondly second screens aid in accessing an entire chest of statistical information which is often more intriguing than the matches. Elite performers like Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi are constantly breaking records and these can be easily discovered and shared on second screens. Thirdly they can be used for live betting during matches. Punters

What is also clear is that the constant rule changes in sports like football have led to less in-play action and more time for media content like advertising

can alter their bets, check odds, or track their performance during a match. Fourthly second screens are an avenue to online chatting which is a common occurrence during matches. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter carry heavy traffic volume during football matches. Fifth second screening allows for multitasking with other non-football related activities such as work and study. Lastly second screening can offer an escape from the actual football itself. Binge watchers, analysts, scouts, and journalists are often heavy viewers of football and can endure dull passages in matches by escaping to other screens without losing track of key moments in a match. Commentators and crowd noises can bring them back to the first screen where necessary. Second screening content is offered by media organisations delivering transnational football as well as their competitors who offer an alternative viewing experience. This offers credence to Krotz and Hepp's (2013) view that mediatization transforms communication by offering new angles from which to construe the world. Questions have however been

raised as to the potentially deleterious impact of alternative screens on the first screen. It can be argued alternative screens prop televised football through amalgamation, extension, substitution, and accommodation (Schulz 2004). The sharing of broadcast schedules, results, and videos on WhatsApp, itself a popular source of social capital among tertiary level students in Kenya (Waliaula, 2021), is an example of extension.

Where is European football consumed in Africa?

An important distinction between football in Europe and Africa is that European football has become inextricably reliant on the media-based architecture (sports media complex) for funding while African football clubs still heavily depend on spectatorship and match-day revenue for sustenance (Bridgewater, 2017). This means European football must aggressively market and extend forms of connection with transnational audiences and offer its product in spaces that will now be discussed. Further, a distinction must be made between

consuming and watching. While transnational football can only be watched in spaces that offer electronic means of connection its consumption is more ubiquitous. With increasing mediatisation football is now also consumed in schools, workplaces, public transport, in marketplaces, among strangers and in the sermons and prophecies of men of the cloth.

Pub/Sports Bar: Turner (2014) focuses on spaces and places where football is consumed, noting how sports bars as viewing spaces have become an important topophilic ‘third place’ as significant in life as home and the workplace. In Africa, television is a predominantly urban medium and the one most influenced by international models (Akindes, 2011). The institution (pub) and the customer (patron) have a symbiotic, enduring relationship and both have been forced to evolve by technological advancements (Dixon, 2014). The “Male holy trinity” of beer, football and male bonding is practised in the masculine and exclusionary pubs where phallocentric discourse is normalised. The pub also offers transnational fans the compulsion

of proximity. While unable to visit Stamford Bridge (Chelsea’s stadium in London, England) or Nou Camp (Barcelona’s stadium in Spain) fans in Eldoret Kenya can, together with aligned peers, recreate a carnivalesque localised variety of a metropolitan space they have slim chances of ever visiting (Waliaula, 2021). Bars have always been important in match-day rituals even before the advent of football on television. Bars have always been critical for the collective bonding of fans before matches and for celebrations after matches but now the pub has become the key site where the match is consumed. This shows that electronic viewership and not stadium attendance is now at the centre of football rituals (Ranachan, 2013). In 2010 Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso capital) had over 50 “video clubs” offering collective viewing of EPL matches. These clubs are popular for the sociability they offer with communities of fans able to enjoy matches with fewer inhibitions. Best (2013) remains sceptical about these “neo-tribal” communities and questions their universality arguing that such behaviour is at most

exaggerated and, if applicable, only the preserve of a select few elite clubs with a global reach. As earlier noted by Kwenda (2015) in Africa only five clubs command a considerable following. In Africa the pub is also an arena for the disenfranchised. As in Europe, fans priced out of football stadia by the rising costs of privatised and gentrified football find refuge in viewing spaces that trade viewing of matches for a nominal fee, or even for free. Ironically watching the EPL can be cheaper in Zimbabwe than watching domestic topflight football matches which require three US dollars or its prevailing equivalent for entry. Seeking out and watching the cheaper televised matches (of arguably a higher quality than domestic matches) comes as a form of counter power to market forces ensuring that even transnational football remains a people's game (Bankole et al., 2012).

Online digital spaces: Skey et al., (2018) focus on the impact of digital technologies on different aspects of football including the emergence of new online fan communities; connections social media has generated between clubs, players and journalists

and creative ways in which fans seek to access football related content. Corporate communication wings of global leagues like EPL and La Liga and individual clubs like Real Madrid, Manchester United and Chelsea maintain an online presence on digital platforms like Websites, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook that are customised to appeal to specific niche markets. Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa and Biscaia (2014) utilise the concept of fan engage to analyse how sporting teams utilise various mediums to ensure increased fan economic investment in their teams. There is a dearth of studies focusing on the interaction of club communication and fans in Africa. Stander and de Beer (2016) show that there is greater fan engagement amongst fans who visit the sport club's social media platforms. Beyond these individual accounts of players, journalists and celebrity fans are carefully managed to maximise appeal to fans across the globe. Despite the obvious benefits that include fan engagement and interaction clubs face the challenge of striking the correct balance between pursuits of short-term revenue generation from

fans while simultaneously fostering long term fan loyalty (McCarthy et al. 2014). There is growing popularity of streaming services for generating football related content. Across Africa however, it is illegal streaming sites that have gained popularity as spaces to access football for those without satellite television. A study in 2019 found that African countries, in particular Kenya and Nigeria were part of a 7.1 million global audience that is illegally streaming English football matches, thus costing the league around one million pounds per match (Chege, 2019). Hence for every technological advance made a counter exists that seemingly evens things out. In balancing each other out prevailing power structures on the one hand and agents on the other affirm Krotz's (2017) position that mediation is an ongoing meta-process.

Tertiary Institutions: Market forces have compelled the spaces in and around tertiary institutions to offer viewing spaces and infrastructure that expedite viewing transnational football. Universities in Africa have a long history of participating in football (Exploring Africa, 2022). In the context

of transnational fandom, the halls of residence and bars at these institutions provide a ready-made market for mediated experience of European football. Tertiary students are a ready market because of the urban setting of such institutions, the availability of bandwidth which assists them in accruing knowledge and capital on European football, availability of disposable income, relative independence as young adults and susceptibility to group behaviours which marketers' prey on.

Homes: There remains a significant number of fans who consume football within the confines of their homes. This option provides an analysis into class, gender, and race dimensions of these fandom as upper-class families with access to disposable income can afford the expensive monthly satellite television. Private domestic subscription is also a preserve for marginalised minority groups like women and ethnic minority groups.

Fan practices and behaviors in transnational fandom

Across Africa, transnational fandoms are characterised by regalia,

paraphernalia, superstitions, online conversations and post-match celebrations or inquisitions (Chiweshe, 2019). The buying and selling of European football team jerseys has also led to the emergence of a counterfeit industry which provides cheaper regalia of a poor quality (Chiweshe, 2019). A casual walk down streets in urban Zimbabwe, will reveal a motley display of replicas of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal, Liverpool, and Manchester City. The buying of expensive original replica shirts across Africa is an identifiable symbol of class and team identity. Wearing an original jersey requires a substantial amount of money out of reach for many people who support football clubs. The whole commercial aspect of this fandom is what we have termed fansumerism. The fansumer refers to the growing modern phenomenon of the fan as a consumer of cultural products related to the sports team for instance tickets, memorabilia, and media products (da Silva & Casas, 2017). Consumerist acts serve the purpose of accruing cultural capital for the fan. Related to this is what has been termed 'audacity of fandom'

which relates to extreme forms of fan expression (Olaoluwa & Adejayan, 2010). These can be observed in viewing spaces where fans often perform public acts that are supposed to express their commitment to teams they support. Spectator displays of fandom is just as captivating as the game itself. Fan displays are not just negative, or punctuated with hooligan and violent acts, but provide an enthralling spectacle. Fans 'play' from the pub terrace in various styles of performance and accrue prominence and capital (Kaminju & Ndlovu, 2011).

Effects of fandom are transcendental coming to affect people in social groups in a variety of ways, beyond the match experience. Transnational football fans can be seen to organise themselves in response to events in their sociocultural contexts like weddings, funerals, and holidays. Waliaula (2021) uses the example of the Sunjeel Buddies, a social group brought together through fanship of European football in Eldoret, Kenya to highlight the related social practices that accompany transnational fandom. Sunjeel Buddies were also shown to have:

...purchased replica jerseys and other club merchandise, which they proudly adorned on match days. Like is the case in the conventional sports bar experience, Sunjeel Buddies got to the venue well in advance and engaged in drinking and chatting as they geared up for the spectacle. This was not usual practice with the typical Eldoret fans, who mostly turned up just in time for the matches so that they do not needlessly spend money on drinks. But for the Sunjeel Buddies, the match day was an excuse to party, and in particular, to purchase rounds of drinks, some of which were 'stockpiled' for later consumption (Waliaula, 2021, p. 9).

This shows that these fandoms are intricately linked into already existent and emerging forms of social stratification, belonging and identities. Africans align to transnational teams because of their consistent performances, style of play, coaches or because of collective viewing which fosters an enhanced sense of belonging and connection (Chiweshe, 2011).

Another important aspect of fan behaviours related to transnational fandom is the exponential growth of soccer betting. There has been an increasing correlation between betting and mental health disorder linked to the deregulation of gambling in many countries. African companies like SportPesa have sponsored global football brands like Everton. 27 of the 44 teams in England's top two divisions are sponsored by betting companies (Davies, 2020). Betting on European football has an influence into the entrenched fandom as punters seek more information and become more invested in the teams they support and bet on. Chiweshe (2020) has reflected on the negative aspects of soccer betting in Zimbabwe noting how most African countries are unprepared for the emerging socio-health problems related to gambling addiction. The lax regulation of betting companies across the continent has also seen the operation of illegal gambling companies, some of which are also fueling corruption and match fixing (Osano & Eliseeva, 2021).

Transnational fandom and everyday life in African spaces

Transnational football has managed to fit seamlessly into the everyday life of Africans. With most African economies troubled and formal sector activity either moribund or prohibitive most unemployed people defer to the informal sector to "hustle" a living. Informal economic zones have emerged as spaces where 'football talk' dominates and European fandom is celebrated. In Kenya Waliaula and Okong'o (2020) refer to these open-air low-income brackets as *Jua Kali* economies. Occupations include barbing, butchers, drivers, car washing and mostly vending. These spaces are thriving hotbeds for football discussions, betting, and other forms of interaction. Transnational football broadcasting has also directly created new business opportunities in many African cities for people across this supply chain whose entire livelihood is based on activities located around transnational football viewing centres (Onyebueke, 2015). These include selling cigarettes, airtime recharge cards, merchandising of

replica kits and other club related paraphernalia and betting. Negative effects on African countries include how local games are not attended as much as before, waning interest in local football, poor facilities, poor management, and migration of expert labor, competing time schedules with European leagues, loss of younger fans whose experience is limited mostly to watching hence a whole new generation of transnational TV fans (Akindes, 2011). In the context of Nigeria, Omobowale (2009) argues that the increased exposure to European football has led to a feeling that it is superior to Nigerian football. Across Africa, local leagues are finding it difficult to compete for fan attention with European football, which is superior in marketing, broadcasting and in the level of talent on show (Chiweshe 2019).

Conclusion

This study has shown the emerging patterns and trends in the mediatisation of transnational football fandom in Africa. It has highlighted how transnational fandoms of

European football are increasingly becoming part of everyday life in both urban and rural Africa. The growth of European football fandoms requires analysis in the processes that is fostering this phenomenon which is affecting the growth and consumption of local football across the continent. The paper has highlighted how various aspects of mediatisation have been central to the growth, experiences, and celebration of these transnational fandoms. The paper highlighted the emergent cultural phenomenon of transnational fandom across Africa. It has shown how mediatisation is central to the emergent forms of social identities based on following European football teams. European football fandom has become part of everyday life across the African landscape, and it is important to highlight the nature, evolution, and impacts of these processes. Mediatisation as part of globalisation architecture has ushered in a novel type of electronic fandom defined by a transnational commitment to football clubs thousands of miles away. Media's reach and effects are still dynamic, ever-changing and

need continued scrutiny particularly new media. This study concurs with Shome (2016) who warns that emerging media technologies are not neutral and present unequal material and geopolitical effects on globalised media environments. Transnational football experienced through the tri-cast platforms of television, computers and mobile phones has negatively affected domestic African leagues without exception. The paper concludes whilst mediatisation and consumerism remain integral to satellite fan cultures, there exist authentic, glocalised identities that reflect commitment to supporting these global football clubs within the framework of affordances offered by the extant African milieu. As evidence from the above exploratory analysis suggests, there remains substantial work in aligning mediatisation theory's tenets to this African reality.

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