

# FANS-MEDIA FACTORS INFLUENCE ON FOOTBALL CLUBS PERFORMANCE AT THE NIGERIA NATIONAL LEAGUE

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## ABSTRACT

Fans-media interactions have positively impacted European Football leagues and football clubs performance. However, Nigeria football leagues have not been significantly impacted by fans-media relations due to improper handling of social media fans interaction by Nigeria National league football clubs (NNL). This study investigates how fans-media factors influence on football clubs performance at Nigerian National League (NNL). Specifically, it aims to understand how fans engage with these clubs across different social media platforms and to determine the impact of this engagement on club performance. Survey research design was adopted in this study. The study sample comprised of One Thousand One Hundred and Ninety-Nine participants, drawn randomly across five (5) clubs (Gateway united FC, Crown FC, Ekiti United, Vandrezzer FC, and Osun united FC). They were the Football Clubs that participated in NNL for the 2020-2021. Data were collected using Sport Spectator Identification Scale ( $r=0.84$ ). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean percentage and standard deviation and inferential statistics of regression analysis. The study found that YouTube, Facebook and Snapchat are the most significantly social media platforms among NNL football fans during the 2020-2021 NNL football clubs league season. The study also found a significant level of trust in the fans-media relations between the supporters and the NNL football clubs. In addition, there is a significant influence of fans-media composite on performance of the NNL football clubs during the 2020-2021 league season. The study concluded that fans-media factors significantly influence Nigerian National League (NNL) football clubs' performance. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Nigerian National League (NNL) football clubs should prioritise and invest in fans-engagement strategies across various social-media platforms.

**Key Words:** Nigerian National League, Football Clubs, Fan-Media Factors, Social Media, Fan Engagement.

## Introduction

The performance of football clubs, particularly in the Nigerian National League (NNL), encompasses various dimensions such as on-field success, financial stability, fan engagement, and overall club management. Performance is not only about winning matches but also about sustaining a club's reputation, generating revenue, and maintaining a loyal fan base. Ogunleye (2018) and Eze (2019) argue that a football club's performance is a holistic measure that includes competitive success, operational efficiency and the ability to engage with stakeholders, particularly fans and the media. Fan engagement and media coverage, collectively referred to as the "FAN-MEDIA" factor, is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of football club performance in the NNL. Fan engagement refers to the emotional and transactional relationship between the football club and its supporters. This engagement is vital as it drives ticket sales, merchandise purchases, and overall club visibility. Media coverage, on the other hand, amplifies the club's presence beyond the stadium, reaching a wider audience through various platforms such as television, radio, and social media.

Okeke (2020) and Udeh (2021) highlight that fan loyalty and media attention can significantly enhance a club's performance by increasing its marketability and attractiveness to sponsors. When fans are deeply engaged, they are more likely to attend matches, purchase club merchandise, and participate in club activities, which in turn boost the club's financial performance. Similarly, positive media coverage can enhance the club's image, attract new fans, and provide a platform for the club to communicate with its stakeholders effectively. The importance of the FAN-MEDIA factor in the NNL is further underscored by research from Nwosu (2018), who found that clubs with strong fan bases and robust media strategies tend to perform better both on and off the field. Nwosu argues that fan engagement leads to a positive feedback loop where increased fan support drives better performance, which in turn attracts more media attention, further boosting fan engagement. This cycle is crucial for sustaining long-term success in the competitive environment of the NNL.

Moreso, Adebayo (2019) stated that media coverage can significantly influence a club's performance by shaping public perception and enhancing the club's brand value. Media outlets play a pivotal role in amplifying the club's achievements, thus attracting more fans and potential sponsors. Adebayo (2019) further indicates that clubs that invest in media relations and fan engagement strategies tend to outperform those that do not, as these factors contribute to creating a positive and vibrant club culture. Furthermore, Ojo and Adeola (2020) emphasize the role of social media as a modern tool for enhancing fan engagement and media presence. They argue that social media platforms provide an accessible and cost-effective way for clubs to interact with fans, share updates, and build a global fan base. This digital interaction not only strengthens the relationship between the club and its supporters but also provides valuable data that can be used to tailor marketing strategies and improve fan experience, thus positively impacting club performance.

In the Nigerian context, the FAN-MEDIA factors are particularly important due to the passionate nature of football fans and the growing influence of media in sports. Okafor (2019) and Nwachukwu (2020) note that Nigerian football fans are highly invested in clubs, and support can make a significant difference in a club's success. The media, on its part, plays a crucial role in shaping narratives around clubs, influencing public opinion, and driving the popularity of the sport in the country. Adeyemi (2021) suggests that the performance of NNL clubs is often directly linked to the level of fan engagement and media coverage they receive. Clubs with a large and active fan base tend to have more consistent performances, as the support from fans provides a psychological boost to players and creates a formidable home advantage. Adeyemi also notes that media coverage can either positively or negatively impact a club's performance depending on the nature of the coverage, highlighting the need for clubs to actively manage their media relations. The findings of Eze and Nnamdi (2020) further highlight the symbiotic relationship between fans and media in influencing club performance. They argue that while fans drive media content through their engagement and interactions, the media, in turn, amplifies fan voices and promotes club activities. This mutually reinforcing relationship is crucial for building a strong club identity and achieving sustained success.

The advent of the Internet fundamentally altered how people consume information. People with Internet access can quickly browse millions of websites for relevant news and information without having to pay for a newspaper subscription or watch television news. The Internet is also simple to use; all one needs to do is enter a few phrases into a search engine and click the search button to get hundreds of results that might be of interest. The exponential expansion and popularity of the Internet are most likely due to this feature's usability. Thus, staying connected with their preferred football team has become easier for fans with the help of modern communication tools. Football teams are now creating branded content to engage with fans. This process may involve creating promotional videos, participating in Facebook Live sessions, or documenting the behind-the-scenes of events. Many clubs showcase scintillating examples of their work on YouTube. Fan-media interaction has become a popular trend among sports clubs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Fans media interaction have positively impacted Football leagues and football club's performance especially in European football. Nigeria football leagues have not been significantly impacted by fans media relation due to improper handling of social-media fans interaction by Nigeria National League Football Clubs (NNL). NNL football clubs have failed to generate required income through live streaming of their football matches via-social-media. Adequate funds could be generate by NNL football clubs through live matches live streaming or various social-media platforms. However, NNL football clubs have not been generating funds through social-platforms. European football clubs generate large percentage of income for the football clubs and used social-media fans interaction feedbacks as a tool for their football clubs, NNL clubs have failed to use fans social-media interaction as communication avenue for feedback response that can improve their football clubs performance in different competition usually don't update their website and social-media frequently for proper information dissemination among football club and fans which can lead to improvement in football club performance at various competitions.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised and answered in this study

1. What is the ranking of social media outlets used by NNL football clubs' fans?
2. What is the commitment of NNL Football clubs of human resources to manage fan-media during the 2020-2021 league season?

## Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. Sample size consists of one thousand five hundred (1500) respondents. The population for this study comprised five football clubs from Nigerian National League (NNL) during the 2020/2021 league season in South West and their fans. Gateway United FC (Ogun), Crown FC (Oyo), Ekiti United FC (Ekiti), Vandrezzar FC (Lagos) and Osun United FC (Osun). Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993) and a self-developed questionnaire tagged Football Club Fan-Media Operations Assessment Instrument to examine the clubs' fan-media practices and their performance were the instruments used for this study. The descriptive statistics of simple frequencies (f), percentages (%) and mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the respondents. In testing the stated research questions, the inferential statistics and multiple regression analysis were used.

## RESULTS

**Research Question One:** What is the ranking of social media outlets used by NNL football clubs' fans?

Table 1. Spearman Correlation showing the ranking of social media outlets used by NNL football clubs' fans

S/N	Social Media Outlet	Ranking	Correlation	Remark
1	Twitter	4 <sup>th</sup>	0.196*	P < 0.05
2	Facebook	5 <sup>th</sup>	0.112*	P < 0.05
3	Instagram	3 <sup>rd</sup>	0.205*	P < 0.05
4	YouTube	1 <sup>st</sup>	0.498*	P < 0.05
5	Snapchat	2 <sup>nd</sup>	0.264*	P < 0.05

Table 1 present the result of Spearman's Rank correlation analysis showing whether NNL football clubs' fans would not rank any of the social media outlets of: Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram significantly higher than the others for their fan-media relationship during the 2020-2021 league season. Findings above indicate a significant outcome. This outcome implies that YouTube was rank highest with correlation ( $r = 0.498$ ), this was followed by Snapchat with correlation ( $r = 0.264$ ). Similarly, Instagram was rank 3<sup>rd</sup> with correlation ( $r = 0.205$ ), and twitter was rank 4<sup>th</sup> with correlation ( $r = 0.196$ ), while Facebook was rank lowest with correlation ( $r = 0.112$ ). These findings underscore the importance for NNL football clubs to strategically allocate resources and tailor content across various social media platforms based on fan preferences and engagement patterns. While YouTube and Snapchat appear to be particularly influential for fan-media relationships, clubs should not disregard the potential impact of platforms like Instagram and Twitter, while reassessing the effectiveness of Facebook in reaching and engaging with their fan base. Adaptation to evolving social media trends and preferences is essential for maintaining a strong fan base and maximizing fan engagement in the digital age.

**Research Question Two:** What is the commitment of NNL Football clubs human resources to manage fan-media during the 2020-2021 league season?

Table 4.7: Descriptive Analysis on the commitment of NNL Football clubs human resources to manage fan-media during the 2020-2021 league season

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1 .NNL football clubs with dedicated human resources for fan-media relations are more likely to establish and maintain a positive and engaged fan community	.519 (43.1%)	559 (46.6%)	123 (10.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3.33	0.65
2 .Allocating a specialized team to manage fan-media relationships is important for NNL football clubs to effectively handle the diverse demands and expectations of their fan base	.518 (43.2%)	479 (39.9%)	202 (16.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3.26	0.73
3 .Investing in human resources for fan-media relations is unnecessary, as effective communication foster a strong connection between clubs and fans	.354 (29.5%)	483 (40.3%)	204 (17.0%)	158 (13.2%)	2.86	0.99
4 .Having social media specialists within the human resources allocated to fan-media relations is crucial for NNL football clubs to navigate and leverage the evolving landscape of online platforms	.439 (36.6%)	601 (50.1%)	159 (13.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3.23	0.67
5 .Regular training and development programs for the human resources management of fan-media relationships are essential to stay updated with the latest trends and best practices	.445 (37.1%)	672 (56.0%)	41 (3.4%)	41 (3.4%)	3.27	0.69
6 .Allocating minimal resources to fan-media relations is unacceptable for NNL football clubs, as it may lead to missed opportunities for engagement and community building	.163 (13.6%)	510 (42.5%)	444 (37.0%)	82 (6.8%)	2.66	0.88
7 .Having a designated spokesperson or liaison within the human resources team enhances communication and transparency between NNL football clubs and their fan base	.635 (53.0%)	482 (40.2%)	82 (6.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3.46	0.62
8 .Regularly evaluating the performance and effectiveness of the human resources dedicated to fan-media relations is crucial for NNL football clubs to adapt and optimize their strategies	.445 (37.1%)	632 (52.7%)	81 (6.8%)	41 (3.4%)	3.24	0.72

**Criteria Mean =2.50 ; Average Mean = 3.16**

Table 2 present the descriptive statistics showing whether NNL football clubs would commit significant human resources to manage fan-media relations during the 2020-2021 league season. Findings above indicated that NNL football clubs commit significant human resources to manage their fan-media relationship during the 2020-2021 league season. This is because, the criteria mean of 2.50 is lesser than the average mean of 3.16. However, the respondents perceived the commitment of NNL football clubs in terms of human resources to manage their fan-media relationship during the 2020-2021 league season highest on the statement that says “Having a designated spokesperson or liaison within the human resources team enhances communication and transparency between NNL football clubs and their fan base”(Mean = 3.46). This was followed by the statements that says “NNL football clubs with dedicated human resources for fan-media relations are more likely to establish and maintain a positive and engaged fan community” (Mean = 3.33), then by “Allocating a specialized team to manage fan-media relationships is important for NNL football clubs to effectively handle the diverse demands and expectations of their fan base” (Mean = 2.66). However, it was perceived lowest on the statement that says” Allocating minimal resources to fan-media relations is unacceptable for NNL football clubs, as it may lead to missed opportunities for engagement and community building” (Mean = 2.66), then by “Investing in human resources for fan-

media relations is unnecessary, as effective communication foster a strong connection between clubs and fans”(Mean = 2.86). In a nut shell, findings above showed that NNL football clubs committed significant human resources to manage their fan-media relationship during the 2020-2021 league season.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings suggest that fans of NNL (Nigerian National League) football clubs had a distinct preference for certain social media platforms over others when it came to engaging with fan-media content during the 2020-2021 league season. Recent observations suggest that platforms like YouTube and Snapchat wield significant influence in nurturing fan-media relationships. Research by Smith and Jones (2020) found that football clubs experienced a positive correlation between their YouTube presence and fan engagement metrics, indicating the platform's effectiveness in cultivating a loyal fan following. Similarly, Snapchat's real-time and ephemeral nature presents unique opportunities for clubs to connect with fans on a more personal level. The platform's interactive features and behind-the-scenes content provide fans with exclusive glimpses into the inner workings of their favorite clubs, fostering a sense of intimacy and belonging. Johnson and Brown (2021) noted a notable surge in fan interaction and brand affinity among football clubs that actively leveraged Snapchat as part of their social media strategy, however, while YouTube and Snapchat emerge as frontrunners in fan engagement, football clubs must not overlook the potential of platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Instagram's visually-driven interface and Twitter's real-time updates remain integral components of the social media landscape, catering to diverse audience preferences and communication styles. Kantar (2023) report highlighted the continued relevance of Instagram and Twitter in facilitating fan interaction and brand advocacy for sports organizations. Additionally, as Facebook's user demographics shift and organic reach declines, football clubs face the challenge of optimizing their Facebook presence to maintain relevance among specific segments of their fan base. While the platform may no longer be the primary focus for younger audiences, Nielsen Sports' analysis (2020) suggests that Facebook still holds value for engaging older demographics and fostering community engagement within established fan networks. In light of these observations, football clubs, including those in the NNL, must adapt their social media strategies to capitalize on the strengths of each platform while remaining agile in response to evolving trends. By diversifying their content strategy, optimizing platform effectiveness, and embracing emerging technologies, clubs can cultivate a robust fan base and maximize fan engagement in the digital age.

Furthermore, it was gathered that NNL football clubs would not commit significant human resources to manage their fan-media relationship during the 2020-2021 league season. The findings indicated that NNL football clubs allocated substantial human resources to manage their fan-media relationships during the 2020-2021 league season have several implications for both clubs and the broader sports industry. This allocation of resources underscores the strategic importance placed on fan engagement and media communication within football clubs. Findings were in line with the work of Garcia and Rodriguez (2017) who posited that the commitment of significant human resources highlights the recognition by NNL clubs of the critical role played by fan-media relationships in modern sports marketing and branding strategies. Academic research emphasizes the importance of cultivating strong relationships with fans through various media channels to foster loyalty and support (Smith et al., 2020). By dedicating personnel to manage these relationships, clubs aim to ensure consistent and meaningful engagement with their fan base.

Findings was also in agreement with that of Jones and lee (2020) who pointed out that the allocation of resources to fan-media relationships reflects clubs' acknowledgment of the evolving nature of media consumption in the digital age. With the proliferation of social media platforms and digital technologies, fans now have greater access to club-related content and expect more personalized and interactive experiences (Jones & Lee, 2020). By investing in skilled personnel to manage these interactions, clubs can effectively navigate the complexities of the digital landscape and meet the diverse needs and preferences of their fan base.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings from the study it was concluded that NNL football clubs should leverage on social media platforms effectively in fostering fans engagement. The significant preference of fans for specific social media outlets highlights the need for clubs to tailor their communication strategies to meet the preferences of their fan base. By prioritizing platforms where fans are most active and engaged, clubs can maximize the impact of their fan-media relationships. Also, the commitment of significant human resources to manage fan-media relationships demonstrates the strategic importance placed on fan engagement by NNL football clubs. By dedicating personnel and expertise to effectively engage with fans and media outlets, clubs can optimize their communication strategies and maximize the benefits of fan support. Furthermore, building trust is crucial for fostering positive relationships and enhancing fan engagement with the club.

Additionally, the findings suggest a significant influence of the fan-media relationship on both training and competition performances of NNL football clubs.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study.

- i. NNL football clubs should tailor their communication strategies to align with fan preferences on different social media platforms. By understanding which platforms fans prefer for engaging with the club, clubs can allocate resources more effectively and ensure they deliver content that resonates with their audience
- ii. Recognizing the significant commitment of human resources required to manage fan-media relationships, clubs should allocate dedicated personnel and expertise to fan engagement initiatives. By investing in skilled professionals, clubs can optimize their communication strategies and maximize the benefits of fan support.
- iii. Prioritize trust-building efforts with fans and media outlets by maintaining open communication channels, responding promptly to inquiries and feedback, and demonstrating authenticity in their interactions.
- iv. Recognizing the influence of the fan-media relationship on training and competition performances, clubs should integrate fan engagement strategies into their performance management systems. By fostering a supportive and motivating environment through fan support, clubs can enhance player morale and confidence, ultimately improving on-field results.

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