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INFLUENCE OF FAN-MEDIA ON FOOTBALL CLUBS PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Performance is not only about winning matches but also about sustaining a club's reputation, generating revenue, and maintaining a loyal fan base. Fan-media interactions have positively impacted European Football leagues and football clubs' performance. Though, there are lot of research on social media and sport, but it is still unclear how sports brands and organizations can engage their fans successfully and improve club performance. Hence, the study investigated the influence of fan-media on Nigerian National League (NNL) football clubs' performance. It also considered how fans engage with these clubs across different social media platforms. The study adopted survey research design. The study sample comprised of one thousand one hundred and ninety-nine (1199) fans, drawn purposively across five (5) clubs that participated in NNL for the 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 season, Southwest, Nigeria. Data was collected using questionnaire and NNL Club standing points. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean percentage and standard deviation and inferential statistics of simple regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study showed that fans have high level of social media usage for club ($X = 6.05$). Result also showed that clubs do not take advice and suggestions post by fans on social media ($X = 2.27$). In addition, that fan-media have a statistically significant influence on the performance of NNL Football Club ($F_{(1,1198)} = 449.37, p < 0.05$) while it was also found that fan-social media usage have a statistically significant influence on the performance of NNL Football Club ($F_{(1,1198)} = 128.30, p < 0.05$). The study concluded that fan-media and social media usage are player in 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 fan-engagement strategies across various media platforms. They should prioritise transparency in their communication by consistently sharing operational information with fans. This transparency can build trust and loyalty among fans, fostering a positive relation between the clubs and its supporters.

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 clubs reputation, generating revenue, and maintaining a loyal fan base. A football club

can become the favourite club of the sponsor market and can increase its brand awareness through sustainable success in as much as the players are highly motivated towards success by the management structure or the people who manage the academy (Mohammed, 2017)

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.

Social media is important for sports fans and idols (Yoo, 2021). The presence of social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) makes their relationship even closer. Idols use it as a channel to communicate with their fans (Filo et al., 2015). Posts, tweets, or comments published as a branding tool display a positive image, so building closeness with old fans and attracting new fans are significant. Through user-generated content, live streams, and interactive polls, individuals in Delhi NCR can voice their opinions, share insights, and contribute to the narrative surrounding their beloved teams and athletes. This democratization of sports media not only fosters community engagement but also fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie among fans, transcending differences in age, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Besides, a good account management will benefit them by incorporating advertisements and business (Korzynski & Paniagua, 2016). For example, the social media accounts of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo bring fans closer to their idols. There are several reasons and motivations for sports fans to follow their idols on social media. They get fun and friendship, thus they can participate in conveying voices, and share information with other fans (Vimieiro, 2018). fans have new channels of social media to interact with their idols through short message service (SMS), chat, direct messaging (DM), inbox, live streaming, etc. Social media channels have transformed media technology and triggered a shift in digital practices (Sturm, 2020). Previously, media (i.e. television) were seen as semi-participatory as far as fans and idols were concerned. They were regarded as "passive" subjects in this one-way communication. YouTube is the evidence of migration to this new media, coupled with the characteristics of the current younger generation of digital natives (TkalacVercici & Vercic, 2013; Kuyucu, 2019). Furthermore, it can be discerned in fans various activities, their identity, and fandoms located in the media channels that they can reach. Social media is a very useful channel for fans to interact and show their fandom identity. On the other hand, it has disadvantages for fans. Previous research has explained that social media can cause conflict (Matang et al., 2022), both personal and interpersonal. Fans can get addicted, which leads to a conflict with their parents. Another study also emphasizes that conflicts may occur due to negative comment disputes among fans on social media, even racist attacks from fellow football fans (Cleland, 2013; Ilhan et al., 2018). Social media platforms are seen as the ideal place for football clubs to generate revenue, as the potential for reaching as many fans as possible is immense (Kuzma et al. 2014). Thus, The opportunities and benefits of social media have motivated football clubs to invest resources in creating relationships and engagement on social media (Filo et al, 2015). Football clubs use their social media pages in order to provide fans with informative and entertaining content.

Adebayo (2109) 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 is particularly important due to the passionate nature of football fans and the growing influence of media in sports. 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.

Research Questions

- I. What is the level of fan social media usage for NNL?
- II. To what extent do fan believe club use their suggestions on social media to improve club performance?
- III. What is the contribution of fan-media usage to the performance of the NNL football clubs?

Theoretical Review

This study hinged on theory of uses and gratification theory. It is widely used in sports to explain how consumers use social media. The theory explains why people use specific media types and what benefits they get for using that media. It also explores individual's media usage from different perspectives. Users participate actively in the communication process and use media to achieve specific goals. According to the theory, a media user seeks out a media source that best meets the user's needs. Uses and gratifications assume that the user has other options for meeting their needs. The theory supposes that consumers make a conscious decision about media use and look for a particular type of media to meet their social and psychological needs.

Methodology

This study adopted survey research design. The population for this study comprised fans of Nigerian National League (NNL) football teams of the 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 league season in South West.(Gateway United FC (Ogun), Crown FC (Oyo), Ekiti United FC (Ekiti),Vandrezzer FC (Lagos) Osun United FC (Osun). The sample size of this study consists of one thousand one hundred and ninety-nine (1199) respondents. Adapted questionnaire from Wann and Branscombe (1993) was the instrument used for this study.Questionnaire and NNL standing report were used for data collection. The questionnaires were divided into two (2) sections, Section A sought information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents while section B collected data to answer the research questions. The instrument was validated with a reliability of $r=0.88$, having been administered on club fans that not part of the NNL for the year. The descriptive statistics of simple frequencies (f) and percentages (%) were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the respondents contained in section A of the study. In answering the research

questions, mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation were used while the inferential statistics of rank ordering and linear regression analysis were used to test the stated research question

Results

Table 1: Demographic Information

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	843	70.3
Female	356	29.7
Total	1199	100
Age		
20-24 years	800	66.7
25-29 years	119	9.9
30-34 years	76	6.3
Above 34 years	204	17.2
Total	1199	100
Religion		
Christianity	645	53.8
Muslim	554	46.2
Total	1199	100

Table 1 presented the distribution of respondents according to their gender. Based on the analysis, 843(70.3%) of the respondents surveyed were male while 356(29.7%) were female. This indicated that majority of the respondents were male. Also, 800 (86.7%) of the personnel surveyed were between 20 - 24 years of age, 119 (9.9%) were between 25 -29 years of age, and 76 (6.3%) were between 30-34 years of age while 204 (17.2%) were above 34 years of age. This indicated that majority of the respondents were between 20-24 years of age. According to the result, 645(53.8%) were Christian while 554(46.2%) were Muslim. This indicated that majority of the respondents were Christian.

Research Questions One: What is the level of fan social media usage for NNL?

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis showing fan social media usage on Clubs

SN	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Made/shared a post or story about something positive about the club	6.06	.650	High
2	Looked at how many people liked, commented on, shared my content, or followed my club	6.10	1.77	High
3	Read comments to my fan content	5.51	.775	Low
4	Edited and/or deleted my social media content about the club that receive negative comments	6.80	.540	High
5	Played with club photo filtering/photo editing	6.02	.544	High
6	Compared club appearance to others'	4.49	.608	Low
7	Compared my club or experiences to others	6.11	.702	High
8	Reminisced about the past activities of the club	6.01	.611	High
9	Made/shared a post or story about something negative that was personal to the club	6.80	.409	High
10	Made/shared a post or story about something negative that was NOT personal about the club	5.53	.501	Low
11	Commented unsupportively or disliked/"reacted" unsupportively on other club post(s)	6.13	.460	High
12	Sought out content that I morally or ethically disagreed with	6.21	1.08	High
13	Scrolled aimlessly through my feed(s) to find relevant message on the club	6.30	.506	High
14	Looked at other club stories	6.09	.405	High
15	Navigated to others' profiles in my social network (e.g., friends or friends of friends)	5.38	.511	Low
16	Navigated to others' pages who I do not know (e.g., influencers or other famous people)	6.24	.400	High
17	Watched videos such as memes, news content, how-tos/recipes, etc.	5.12	.522	Low
	Total	6.05	0.646	High

Table 2 showed the fans result on the usage of social media for club purpose. The result showed that 12 items constituting 71% of the items were rated above the referenced mean since they were rated above the referenced mean (5.0). The highest mean obtained was 6.80 (Made/shared a post or story about something negative that was personal to the club) while the lowest obtained mean was 4.49 (Compared club appearance to others). The result also showed weighted mean 6.06 which is above the reference mean (5.0), with the weighted mean above the referenced mean, this implies that fans have high level of social media usage for club.

Research Question Two: To what extent do club use fan suggestions on social media to improve club performance?

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis showing club taking suggestions on social media from fan

SN	Statement	Mean	Std
1	When I post on social media concerning my club, they sometimes acknowledge my post	2.11	.655
2	I feelmy club is always anxious to hear from fans from social media	2.30	.498
3	My club uses some of the advice post by fans to improve performance	2.01	.432
4	My club social media feel attached to fans	2.05	.402
5	My club always take down hateful comments from fans	2.12	.502
6	My club sometimes reply to fans comments and acquisition through social media	2.33	.409
7	My club seeks fans opinion on social media on way forward for the club	2.51	.906
8	My club celebrate fans on social media	2.54	.655
9	I feel my club success should be attributed to fan comments on social media concerning the club	2.50	.703
10	My club post recent happening about the club on social media	2.30	.650
		2.27	0.581

Table 3 showed the result club taking suggestions on social media from fan to improve performance. The result showed that only three items, constituting 30% of the items were rated above the referenced mean (2.5). The highest mean obtained was 2.54 My club celebrate fans on social media) while the lowest obtained mean was 2.01 (My club uses some of the advice post by fans to improve performance). The result also showed weighted mean 2.27 which is blow the reference mean (2.5), with the weighted mean below the referenced mean, this implies that fans do not perceive club take advice and suggestions they post on social media.

Research Question Three: What is the influence of fan social media usage on NNL Football Clubs Performance?

Table 4: Influence of fan-social Media usage on NNL Football Club Performance

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	Df	Mean Square (MS)	F-Statistic	p-Value
Regression	1420.11	1	1420.11	128.30	0.00
Residual	114.69	1197	0.66		
Total	2500	1198			

The regression analysis exploring the influence of fan social media usage on NNL Football Club Performance reveals significant findings. The regression sum of squares (SSR) is 1420.11 which accounts for the variation in the clubs performance explained by the independent variable. The total sum of squares (SST) is 2,500, representing the overall variation in the dependent variable. The mean square for regression, calculated as 1420.11, indicates the average amount of variance in performance attributed to the independent variable. This is similar to the mean square for residuals, which is 0.66. The F-statistic, calculated as 128.30, provides a measure of the overall significance of the regression model. With an F-statistic this high and a p-value less than 0.0001, the model is statistically significant. The R-squared value of 0.510 indicates that approximately 51% of the variance in the clubs performance can be explained by the independent variable. This demonstrates a moderate level of explanatory power of the model. The Adjusted R-squared, slightly lower at 0.513, adjusts for the predictor in the model and reinforces the model's validity without over fitting. Hence, the regression analysis shows that fan-social media usage has a statistically significant influence on the performance of NNL Football Club.

Discussion

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 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 league seasons. Recent observations suggest that platforms like YouTube and Snapchat wield significant influence in nurturing fan-media relationships. This underscores the need for clubs in Nigeria National League (NNL) to reassess their social media strategies, ensuring they align with evolving trends and preferences (Brown & Williams, 2019). 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. (Brown & Williams, 2019). noted a notable surge in fan interaction and brand affinity among football clubs that actively leveraged Snapchat as part of their social media strategy.

Additionally, study findings showed that fans have a high level of social media usage for club. It is essential for sports organizations to know and understand their fan bases and to segment different fan groups. To gain effective fan engagement, it is necessary to have accurate data on the fans. (Deloitte, 2021.) Data and knowledge of the fans build the basis of communicating. It is not enough for sports organizations to make assumptions about what the fans want to consume. The organizations need to know exactly who their fans are, and what they want and provide that according to the data. (Global Sports, 2017). This is in line with the work of Williams and Garcia (2020) whose findings highlight the evolving nature of fan-media relationships in the digital age.

With the proliferation of social media platforms and digital technologies, fans now have unprecedented access to information and communication channels. As such, clubs must adapt their media and marketing strategies to meet the changing needs and expectations of fans in this digital landscape. For sports organizations, social media creates new possibilities to communicate and build stronger fan relationships. These possibilities have built social media as one of the main marketing channels to engaging and interacting. (Vale & Fernandes, 2018.) Social media has had a massive role in the shift of sports followers and fans interaction with their favorite teams.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from the study on NNL (Nigerian National League) football clubs' fan-media relationships during the 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 league season, following are the conclusions drawn from the study. The findings underscore the importance of understanding and leveraging social media platforms effectively in fostering fan 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, despite that fan use social media to a high extent for the club, clubs are not really taking into consideration, suggestion by fan on social media on ways to improve club performance.

Recommendations

The study recommended that NNL (Nigerian National League) football clubs is to prioritize and invest in fan engagement strategies across various media platforms. Specifically, clubs should:

1. Recognizing the influence of the fan-media 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.
2. 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.
3. Prioritize transparency in their communication by consistently sharing significant operational information with fans. This transparency builds trust and loyalty among fans, fostering a positive relationship between the club and its supporters.

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