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Uses and Gratifications of Social Football Viewing Among Viewers in Ilorin Metropolis

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Abstract

The advent of technology amidst the 21st century challenges has made social football viewing a popular phenomenon among people of various age grades in Nigeria. This is generally drawn from the eagerness, enthusiasm, correctness, and agility that those who present football programmes broadcast and run commentary of these foreign football matches increase viewers' love and interest for the round leather game. Thus, this work is geared towards cross-examining the uses and gratification of social football viewing among viewers in Ilorin metropolis, and is hinged on the uses and Gratification theory of the media as justification. The work further adopted the qualitative design through the use of in-depth interview. Findings through responses from the field revealed that social football viewers in Ilorin metropolis love to watch football matches in group even though the viewing centres are not conducive in nature; hence the need to visit social football viewing centres. Also, the motives and gratifications derived from viewing vary; and they include: escape from loneliness, means of entertainment, for fellowship and relationship among others. However, the study concludes that football viewing centres are witnessing increase in terms of patronization and proliferation. The study recommends among others that operators of social football viewing centres in Ilorin and environs should prioritize the welfare of their customers by providing a conducive environment devoid of pollution and poor ventilation.

Keywords: Gratification; Social Football; Viewership; Preference; Ilorin Metropolis.

INTRODUCTION

Football, which is also known as soccer in some parts of the world today, is one of the most well-known sporting activities. Football has gained viewership of people across age grade over the years as a result of technological inventions and innovations in the dissemination of information (Majaro-Majesty, 2008). The media, particularly television as noted earlier, has facilitated and motivated the youths to often leave in a hurry their household duties and educational tasks in order to watch live broadcast of these football matches at home and at the various football viewing centers. Foreign football matches are one of the most viewed football matches by Nigerians. These foreign football matches are usually organized by association of football clubs across Europe (Bleacher, 2011 cited in Kente & Lucas, 2020). There is no gainsaying that football is one of the world's most popular sporting events, one which is passionately loved and enjoyed by Nigerians, and globalization has inevitably resulted in Nigerian football fans being exposed to the activities of foreign clubs which has made them to show solidarity and patronage for these clubs by watching their matches as and when due (Ifeduba, 2011).

As posits by Onuegbu (2011), "Social football viewing centres, specializing in providing pay-view services of football matches have increased tremendously since the beginning of the 21st century when more cable television networks entered into the business with fairly affordable subscription rates. Within Ilorin and its environs, there are more than 300 viewing centres spread across the 4 local government areas that made up the metropolis (Kente & Lucas, 2020). It is not unusual to see people across age grades (young and old), who are viewers of these matches and are proud to be associated as fans of football clubs like Chelsea, Barcelona, Manchester United, Liverpool, Real Madrid, Arsenal, Manchester City, among others.

Viewing centres (commercial points where people watch televised football events for a fee) have sprung up in almost every major residential street to match the increasing football fanaticism among fans. The regular rituals of television spectation in viewing centres and the consequent social bonding and identification with elite European clubs have marked out these set of fans as members of a growing football subculture in the country (Omobowale, 2009; Majaro-Majesty, 2011; Omotosho, 2012). Establishing football viewing centres has also become a lucrative business ventures for many unemployed youths (Ajayi, 2012; Njoku, Agbenyo & Ojotule, 2014; Kente & Lucas, 2020). Due to this positive side effects; bars, clubs, canteens and betting outlets are increasingly providing viewing centre services to complement their services (Tade, 2014).

Also, researches have been carried out on foreign football viewing and viewers behaviour (Ifeduba, 2011; Anyianuka, 2018; Dogari, Apuke & Shadrach 2018; Akinlosotu, Imandojemu & Aina, 2019; and Kente & Lucas, 2020), but this study tends to fill the gap by examining the uses and gratifications of social

football viewing among viewers in Ilorin metropolis. Thus, this work aims at investigating the attitude and experiences of football viewers in social football viewing centres in Ilorin metropolis, with a view to draw inference on whether football viewing is a source of pleasure and escapism as explained by uses and gratification theory of mass media.

Research Objectives

Specifically, the study was guided by the following objectives

i. To study attitudes and behavior of football viewers in social football viewing centres.
ii. To identify the pattern of watching football matches by viewers.
iii. To know viewers' motives for watching social football in viewing centres.
iv. To ascertain the benefits and expectations sought by social football viewers as regards the followership of football matches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Sports

Sports is that which amuses in; diversion, pastime, a particular game or play pursued for diversion, especially an outdoor or athletic game, as baseball, football, track, tennis, swimming, etc. (The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2013, p. 1213). This implies that, sport is an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment. Similarly, Australian Sports Commission says sport is "a human activity capable of achieving a result requiring physical exertion and/or physical skill, which by its nature and organization, is competitive and is generally accepted as being a sport".

Social Football Viewing Centres

Social football viewing centres are places where people pay an admittance fee and are allowed entry for the purpose of viewing football matches on selected satellite television stations. Before now, social football viewing centres are not popular in Nigeria. The few ones were showing. Football, which is also known as soccer in some parts of the world today, is one of the most Nigerian youths have formed part of the global followers of foreign football matches. The national media's specialty at covering and broadcasting the league has been unprecedented. The eagerness, enthusiasm, correctness, and agility that those who present football programmes broadcast and run commentary of these football matches increases viewers' love and interest for the round leather game. The researchers had

observed that social football viewing had in recent times foster a common front in enhancing cultural and ethnic integration, peace, unity, love and harmony. This is because at the viewing centres, one sees the above positive virtues in display.

Empirical Review

Dogari, Apuke and Shadrach (2018) conducted a study on "Comfort or Conflict? Investigating the Attitude and Experiences of European Football Fans in Television Viewing Centres in Nigeria". The study was aimed at investigating the attitude and experiences of European football fans in television viewing centres in Nigeria, with a view to draw inference on whether European football viewing is a source of pleasure and escapism as explained by functional theory of mass media or a source of conflict among fans. The research adopted descriptive qualitative research approach, through the use of participatory observation and in-depth interview. At the end of the study, it was discovered that arguments among fans in viewing centres are often tense and sometimes involve name-calling and other forms of verbal attacks capable of causing unhappiness and physical confrontation. In addition, the study found out that another kind of tribalism or religion is fast emerging among Nigerian youth based on European football club followership and support. The study concluded that European football followership is for leisure, pleasure and entertainment.

Also, Anyianuka (2018) studied fellowship and support for the English premier league (EPL) football in Nigeria with the aim to determine the correlation between football fans exposure to television live matches of EPL and violence. The study tested the Cultivation analysis, which traditionally formed the theoretical framework for researchers on television influence and effects on audiences. Findings from the mixed methods of research employed in the study shows that, fans assume multiple identities as spectators, audiences, consumers, supporters and users. They do not only spend long hours at television viewing centres for live English Premiership matches only, but they form gangs or associations of fans of football clubs.

In the same vein, Akinlosotu, Imandojemu and Aina (2019) carried out a study on "Sports Betting and Nigerian Youths: A Study of Sports Betting in Edo State". The main objective of the study is to examine various sports youths take bet on in Edo State. This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The result revealed that majority of the youths noted that high rate of unemployment, high tendency for risk taking among the youths, increased passion for sports among others are the factors responsible for their involvement in sports betting. It was recommended that the youths do not see the negative social and economic implication of gambling and perhaps that is why the gambling (sports betting) sector is growing at a very high speed in Edo State.

On his part, Ifeduba (2011) conducted a study on the contents, uses and gratifications of nine football club newspapers and found that the birth of football newspapers led to an increased number of football fans shifting their support from local football clubs to foreign football clubs as a result of new media owners responding to the demand of the local need for good, professional and organized football.

However, the various researches above have shown that technological innovation plays an important role in the continuous growth of football viewing centres across the globe, especially in developing countries of which Nigeria is part of. The growth of football viewing centres and the consciousness of people to watch live football matches amidst funfair, excitement, loyalty to a football club and avenue to exchange banters have made social football viewing a popular phenomenon. Also, another trending phenomenon that emanated from social football viewing is online sports betting. This has made social football viewing more popular.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratification Theory

When it comes to user behaviour and motivation, the Uses and Gratification theory has been the most common approach, explaining "why" certain media behaviour occurs. Users are seen as goal-oriented, with rationales for their use (and

non-use) of various media (Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2009). Katz and other scholars believed that the uses and gratifications theory is grounded in the idea that users have certain reasons and motivations for selecting media and intentionally choose a certain message source that best fits their own personal needs. The theory suggests that users have numerous media options to choose from and suggests that the reasons and motivations for selecting a specific media will vary from user to user (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1974). McQuail (1984) proposed the idea of "user taste" when examining the selection of media, which suggests that users choose the media based on personal preferences and motivations and that media are simply a means to achieve an end goal.

Furthermore, the theory focuses on what media users use the media for; and what gratifications they derive from it. Its proponents argued that media users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use, and that they often seek out media sources that best fulfill their needs. The basic assumptions of the theory according to Folarin (1998) are aimed at answering the questions who uses which content and from which media? Under what conditions and for what reasons do they use the media? In relation to this study, football viewers who visit the social football viewing centres watch football matches, and choose whether they want to watch the matches for various reasons. They freely choose whether to watch for just entertainment, for fun sake, to escape from loneliness or boredom, or for the analysis of club strengths and weakness in order to gamble on the outcome of a game. In relation to uses and gratifications, the audience need to watch football matches is no longer met by home viewing or by reading about them through sports sites and dailies, and this partly explains their quest for watching at the viewing centres.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve its set objectives, this study employed qualitative research through the use of in-depth interview. Pritha (2020) defined in-depth interview as the collection and analysis of verbal data (words) that reflect everyday occurrences and

experiences. Similarly, Lisa, (2008) writes that in-depth interviews are interviews in which participants are encouraged and prompted to talk in depth about the topic under investigation without the researcher's use of predetermined, focused, short-answer questions. However, social football viewers in Ilorin metropolis formed the study population of this work.

According to the register obtained from the four local government areas in Ilorin metropolis (Asa, Ilorin East, Ilorin West, & Ilorn South), there are over 345 registered social football viewing centres in Ilorin metropolis. Thus, 8 informants were purposively selected across 4 social football viewing centres in Ilorin metropolis for the interview. The justification for selecting 8 informants was further validated by Muellman, Brand, Jurgens, Gansefort and Zeeb (2021) which emphasized that between 5 and 15 key informants appears to be sufficient in a qualitative study of small population, in order to get rich and useful data. Similarly, Hennink, Kaiser and Marconi (2017) opined that about 8 to 12 interviews are enough to reach data saturation in in-depth interview.

Therefore, the interview guide served as the instrument collecting data from the informants. The data obtained were further analyzed through thematic analysis of interview responses of the informants.

DATA ANALYSIS

The profile of informants that were interviewed is presented in a table below:

Table 1: Profile of the Interviewed Informants

S/N	NAME	LGA	FAVOURITE CLUB	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WATCHING FOOTBALL
1.	Informant 1	Asa	Arsenal	15 years
2.	Informant 2	Asa	Chelsea	12 years
3.	Informant 3	Ilorin South	Arsenal	16 years
4.	Informant 4	Ilorin West	Manchester United	13 years
5.	Informant 5	Ilorin West	Chelsea	12 years
6.	Informant 6	Ilorin East	Manchester United	13 years
7.	Informant 7	Ilorin East	Manchester United	16 years
8.	Informant 8	Ilorin South	Barcelona	11 years

Source: *Fieldwork by Researchers, 2025*

However, analysis of the interview data from the in-depth interviews generated four (4) themes and nine (9) sub-themes which are thematically analysed below:

Theme 1: ***Attitude and behaviour in viewing centres***

Sub-theme I: favourite club and performance

The interview informants who are eight (8) in numbers were of different views as regards performance of their respective clubs in the last three years, while their responses tallies whenever these clubs lose their matches. For instance, Informant 7 maintained that the current performance of his favourite club is not very encouraging and not desirable by every standard for a club with rich history of good performance in the past. Similarly, Informant 1 opined that the performance of his favourite club has not been good in the last few seasons, though the club had been one of the best football clubs in England before now. However, other informants expressed their concerns as regards the performance of their favourite clubs and how they sometimes feel bad when they lose one or two of their matches.

Sub-theme II: Reasons for visiting viewing centres and comfortability

The informants have both divergent and convergent opinions and perspectives for visiting football viewing centres and how comfortable they are. Informant 2 stressed that football viewing centres provides networking opportunities, fun and relaxation as well as exchange of banters among football viewers. Similarly, Informant 7 emphasized that watching football with others at viewing centres brings out the analytical prowess of some of the viewers, as discussions and arguments usually dovetails into certain club history that one may not know before, and it always add to the entertainment. Informant 8 stressed that most of the viewing centres have some local and talented analysts when it comes to issue of leather game. Also, Informant 5 maintained that cost effectiveness, means of socialization, mental and emotional health improvement are the major reasons why he watches football at the viewing centre.

On the aspect of comfortablility, Informant 1 is of the view that he’s very much comfortable watching football in company of others. Informant 2 was of a contrary opinion; as it causes noise pollutions and lack of good ventilation which is not good for he health. Informant 3 in his own view opined that most of the time it is not comfortable, but the fun therein override the pain.

Theme 2: ***Pattern of social football viewing***

Sub-theme I: Frequency of social football viewing

The informants in their views have similar submissions as regards frequency of watching, Informant 3 maintained that he watches every weekend except he’s unavoidably not available, and he watches his favourite club primarily while other clubs including the national team are

secondary. Similarly, Informant 4 said he watches virtually all teams/clubs watchable as occasion demand. Other informants watch football matches very often, especially on weekends; and they only watch their favourite club.

Sub-theme II: Comparison between viewing centre and home viewing

The informants in their views have ambivalent submissions, as regards watching either at viewing centres or home viewing. Most of the informants have different views as regards home viewing of football matches, Informant 2 opined that the crowd helps with the mood and spirit of the game. In his views, Informant 3 stressed that it is better to watch at the viewing centre because there is always standby power supply in case there is power outage, just as Informant 5 corroborated it that "you have people around for different analysis at the viewing centres. Informant 8 emphasized that the viewing centre is better because it takes away boredom while people easily throw banters at one another which is not possible with home viewing, while it also enhances social networking among viewers. In his submission, Informant 4 opined that football viewing at the viewing centres is better than home viewing, because you have advantage of mingling with football enthusiasts, analysts, commentators, who are more gifted when it comes to football world which is not possible to get when watching at home alone.

Theme 3: *Motives for watching in social football viewing centres*

Sub-theme I: Motivation for watching at the viewing centre

The motivation to watch at the viewing centre, according to the informants is as a result of various factors. Informant 7 stressed that it is more economical to watch at viewing centres with an average of less than 2000 naira in a month, than to have to subscribe roughly 11000 naira to cable television monthly. Also, the epileptic power supply in Nigeria generally; is not suitable for home viewing, while the ultimate thing is the need to bond with other fans of one's favourite club. Similarly, Informant 4 said he is motivated to watch at the viewing centre in order to catch fun, mingle with arrays of viewers so as to have their views on various happenings in the round leather game. However, other motives according to Informant 1, 3, 5 & 8 include; hearing different analysis from people of diverse opinion, the crowd and the atmosphere in the viewing centre, and the large number of viewers always present are factors that motivate them to watch football matches at the viewing centres.

Sub-theme II: Feelings if viewership is denied

On the aspect of feelings if certain factors prohibit them from watching, the informant were of the same opinion. However, Informant 7 opined that he do feel uncomfortable when there is no opportunity to watch football in a long while, and that there is a feeling of being alienated from the club and players. Informant 4 posits that the feeling is a psychological

scenario that is difficult to paint, while Informant 3 corroborated that he becomes agitated, anxious and eager to know the outcome of such matches when there is no chance of watching. On the contrary, Informant 5 emphasized that he hardly miss any football matches, especially that of his favourite club.

Theme 4: ***Expectations and benefits derived from social football viewing***

Sub-theme I: Benefits derived from the viewing centres

The informants/participants were of ambivalent submissions as regards benefits derived from football viewing at the viewing centres. Informant 2 stressed that going to the viewing centre makes him to forget any worries or things that might be bothering him. Informant 3 said parts of the benefits include; meeting new friends, social awareness among others. In his submission, Informant 5 maintained that watching at the viewing centres helps to improve mental and emotional health. Also, Informant 7 posits that the benefits include socialization with other viewers, making new friends, networking, avenue to share ideas and learn more, freedom from loneliness and boredom, ease from stress, saving of cost, positive contribution to one's psyche among others.

Sub-theme II: Conduciveness of the viewing centres

On conduciveness of football viewing centres, the informants stressed that majority of them are not actually conducive, but the fun, banters, arguments and atmosphere in the viewing centres make one to forget whether it is conducive or not. However, Informant 8 was of the view that some of the centres do introduce certain rules like prohibition of smoking, among others in order to make the place conducive for viewers.

Sub-theme III: Psychological impact of social football viewing

The informants highlighted various psychological impact social football viewing has contributed to their life style. Informant 2 stressed that it has solve the trauma of loneliness he do experience, while Informant 4 also said has solved some psychological need in terms of loneliness. On the contrary, Informant 3 and 5 posits that social football viewing has impacted on their psyche by keeping the brain healthy and relief from painful experience. However, Informant 7 emphasized that it has impacted positively in terms of socialization, easing of stress and depressing situations, bridging knowledge gap as information are chunned out every time.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

There is no gain saying in the fact that social football viewing is a popular phenomenon in Nigeria. It is mostly common seeing people across age grades watching live football matches of various European football clubs at various points/place known as viewing centres. These viewing centres are springing up across the nooks and crannies of every part of Nigeria in order to cater

for the needs of teeming football lovers who are motivated to watch in group and company of large number of people due to various factors such as avenue to exchange banters, socialization, networking, escape from stress/loneliness, economical among other factors.

However, from the analysis deduced from the interview above, it can be concluded that football viewing centres are witnessing increase in terms of patronization and proliferation. Also, people are motivated to watch at the viewing centres in order to show solidarity for their respective football clubs, while these viewing centres are also considered economical for an average Nigerian. Also, another findings made from the analysis is that they are not conducive in nature but viewers are left with no choice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

However, based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered by the researcher:

i. Operators of social football viewing centres in Ilorin and environs should prioritize the welfare of their customers by providing a conducive environment devoid of pollution and poor ventilation.

ii. Kwara State government should ensure social football viewing centres in Ilorin metropolis and other part of Kwara are duly registered for the sake of planning and gathering statistical data.

iii. Social football viewing centre is a veritable enterprise to empower the youth and create more job opportunities. Government as a matter of necessity should look at this booming enterprise as a means of curbing unemployment by setting up viewing centre business for the unemployed.

iv. Government should endeavour to provide constant electricity supply and other amenities that will make life comfortable for people. Likewise, football viewing centres should not be burdened with taxation and other levies, so that those operating the business will not be discouraged.

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