Original Research Article

Football fans consumption media during Covid-19: The Ghanaian perspective

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Abstract

This study examined the media consumption of Ghanaian football fans during the Covid-19 pandemic as match day attendances were banned. Using surveys developed with Google form, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were employed to gather data from social media platforms (WhatsApp and Facebooks) of two Ghanaian Premier League club's fans (N=305). Based on the results, Ghanaian football fans consumed more sport products on television (46.2%), preferred live matches to recorded matches (M=4.54, S.D.=1.84) and use team apps the most (34.1%). Again, the result of the independent sample t-test showed that highly identified fans frequently consumed more sports products than moderate to lowly identified fans (t=-13.045, p=0.000, M=3.93 S. D=0.76). The findings provide evidence to team managers and football administrators on where to engage fans during pandemics and how to generate revenue based on the media consumption of the fans.

Keywords: Sports fans, media, covid-19, football clubs, and consumption.

INTRODUCTION

In the middle part of the year 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic reached its peak with many deaths, attending live sporting events were cancelled. This resulted in a loss of revenues to many sports organisations that rely on match day attendance and low broadcasting revenues, especially in sub-Saharan African. For example, in Ghana, the government provided funds to support the Ghanaian Premier League (GPL) clubs (Ghana Football Association, 2020). On the other hand, football clubs and other franchises in the major leagues were able to function due to remunerative television agreements (Nauright et al., 2020). As a result of the interim abrogation of live sporting worldwide, numerous sports clubs, minor leagues, and media associations are struggling to find enough content, knowledge and experiences to create engagement prospects for consumers. This unfortunate situation is happening when many people have more free time and have devoted much time to television viewing, web browsing, and streaming for information (Alexander, 2020). Many leagues worldwide have adopted numerous strategies to accumulate enough funds to ensure that they continue to survive and engage fans at the same time.

Fans are considered important in sports marketing because they consume products to increase revenue and income. Engaging them will assist to develop existing pre-pandemic strategies, aims and objectives employed by sports associations (Mastromartino et al., 2020). Apart from match day attendances, fans consumed sports products through many platforms-internet, mobile

phones, newspapers and broadcasts enabling them to track records of their favourite teams and athletes. Numerous broadcasting media including Facebook, YouTube, televisions and radios assist fans to watch live games they were unable to attend. One of the areas that have been researched the most is how sports fans are consuming products using social media platforms. Anagnostopoulos and Chadwick (2015) examined how Twitter can be used to analyse brand attributes among professional sports industries. The study identified all brand attributes of the branding model to be among the tweets. Additionally, other researchers have recommended brands to look online for consumers (Keller, 2009; Yan, 2011). One comparative study by Bruhn et al. (2012) confirmed that social media have a strong image on brands than traditional media (television, newspapers, radios etc.). This study postulated the need for sports managers to integrate social media in their marketing strategies to effectively manage brand images. However, brand awareness can change depending on the particular population being studied. Therefore, it is relevant to examine the media consumption of a particular group to help make appropriate recommendations.

Sports Fan and Media Consumption

Qualman (2009) argued that social media usage affects the way people communicate, make decisions and share information. The use of social media platforms for conversation has become the practice of many people worldwide. Online communication has become the most important avenue for customers to meet, exchange information and circulate brand-related ideas (Hanna et al., 2011). Therefore, social media offer quick interactive and engaging two-way communication avenue resulting in a timely distribution to consumers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). Social media can develop awareness and attitudes among consumers that are relevant to build robust brands (Keller, 2009).

The sports industry has adopted the use of social media to promote branding and get to the audience. Sports fans follow entertainment and access information of teams through the use of virtual sources (Broughton, 2012) and are eager to receive communication from their favourite teams from social media platforms (Ballouli, 2010). The levels of passion and loyalty of sports fans toward their clubs create the need for their involvement in online discussion (Vallerand et al., 2008). Considering this, professional sports marketers use social media in their daily activities (Loakimidis, 2010). With this, sports clubs can monitor or even start a new conversation on issues providing useful information about what the fans are discussing and how often they discuss the clubs (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Numerous reports from sports industries suggested that social media have positive

impacts on the relationship between fans and their clubs and the implications for the club's revenues (Broughton, 2012). A powerful sports brand can make sports fans purchase items which can help to identify them publicly as fans of a team (Richelieu and Pons, 2006). In this regard, brand value of a team will increase when many individuals are identified as fans which further encourage others to be associated with the team. Therefore, social media is viewed as an avenue to promote fan identification and attract others to become fans.

Social media improves fandom and provides opportunities for fans to engage their favourite teams and clubs, which also, allows sports organizations to develop fan affiliations (McCarthy et al., 2014). Using social media make customers become part owners and part makers of brands (as well as club brands) and play a key, empowering part in producing brand status and image (Williams and Chinn, 2010). Nonetheless, most clubs are confronted with challenges of trying to control their brands while simultaneously attempting to develop an engaging contact with the fans within a community. Although views articulated by some "loyal" fans on social media may digress from the management perspectives, clubs that are unable to exhibit some level of control and occupy the fan base may be likely to restraining the chance for improving connections with the fans (McCarthy et al., 2014).

The achievements of professional sport clubs and competitive sports are measured by the number of consumption through traditional broadcasting such as TV viewers, newspapers and radio listeners. Chelladurai (1994) asserted that Inactive sports participants, also called inactive sports consumers, constitute participants' businesses target to gather data about TV viewers' numbers of an exact sports competition or sport. Together with other demographic information, they display an image of market patterns that assist firms to decide on the amount of funds to spend on donations, advertising and sponsorships. Information collected from inactive sports participants in Slovenia in a study entitled "Sports Recreational Activity of Slovenian People" provided a real scenario (Petrovič et al., 1984). Findings from the study revealed that about 60% of the adults in Slovenia do not show up at sports events. The study further revealed that TV broadcasts were monitored by many viewers, both on regular and occasional bases, particularly when major events are shown (44.6% views on regular and 38.5% on occasional bases). Additionally, international competitions involving Slovenians were monitored by many viewers with 25.4% following on TV frequently while 51.4% follow occasionally (Petrovič, et al., 1996).

Mastromartino et al. (2020) describe the sports industry without stadium attendance during the COVID-19 era and recommended that sports experts should rely on prevailing bases to regulate marketing approaches to continue fan and organizational growth through the

pandemic to stabilize things. However, leagues that do not have well established foundations were not advised on how to survive during this period. Additionally, while other studies have identified the use of social media to promote branding and improve communication between fans and sport conglomerates, the Ghanaian fan is yet to be examined. Although, other studies have identified such media among fans especially in the developed world, it has been hypothesised that brand awareness can change depending on the particular population being studied (Bruhn et al., 2012). Therefore, the present study examined the media of sports consumption among fans in developing leagues (Ghana Premier League) since it is one of the less researched areas. The GPL also, relies on match day attendance which requires for other media of consumption to be identified when fans are not attending live matches.

Arguably, the GPL was identified to have heavy dependence on match-day attendances as sponsorship deals are inadequate (Edward, 2013). Considering the Covid-19 pandemic which has created the need for sports fans to use other media sources apart from live attendances, it is relevant to identify which of the platforms the consumers used the most. Therefore, the present study examined the media consumption of Ghanaian football fans during the pandemic because Ghanaian football clubs have relied on match day revenues, and the consumption media of the fans is one of the least researched areas. The study suggested ways sports managers can engage the fans and promote branding. It is hoped that the finding of this study will proposed mechanisms managers can use to generate extra revenue apart from match day attendance. This can assist to support the revenue base and prevent the clubs from administration. Regarding this, the following research questions were answered:
1. What is the media consumption of Ghanaian football fans?
2. How often do Ghanaian football fans consume sports products- live or recorded?
3. How often do Ghanaian football fans consume sports products based on the fan type?
4. Which social media platform do Ghanaian football fans use the most?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study were Ghanaian football fans. The survey link was displayed on Facebook and WhatsApp pages belonging to fans of two premier clubs in Ghana, Kumasi Asante Kotoko and Accra Hearts of Oak from December 2020 to June 2021 to invite them to voluntarily respond to the questionnaire. The two clubs were selected because they have the largest fan base

spread throughout the country (Abdulai, 2019). A purposive sampling technique was deemed appropriate to select the football fans to participate in the study since the researcher wanted to acquire thorough information about the research questions (Buchanan, 2012). Additionally, a snowballing technique was adopted where the participants were informed to share the link with other fans that were not on the platforms. The intent was to reach saturation and to access subjects with the target characteristics (Ghalijaie et al., 2017). Participants were asked to print a copy of informed consent provided online and click next to participate if they are 18 years and above. To ensure confidentiality the participants were informed that the information will be kept on a computer protected by a password. In all 305 fans respondent to the online survey. The table below is the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study (Table 1).

Methodology

A questionnaire was designed with Google Form to measure fandom, live matches, recorded matches and frequencies that fans watch matches. The first part of the questionnaire was items on fandom (fan identification) originally developed by Trail et al. (2003) which reported an alpha of 0.86. Recently, Rocha and Fleury (2017) used the scale to test constraints to Brazilian football matches and reported an alpha of 0.95. The stem to the item reads "Regarding your favourite team please check the number that best describes your opinion. Kindly select from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The next two parts of the questionnaire measured items on whether the fans watch live or recorded football matches. These questions were adapted from Greener (2011) to test college undergraduates. In the adaptation, we introduced live and recorded against the media channels ensuring that those outlets are branded as live and recorded. The earlier scale of the items recorded an alpha of 0.86. The stem to the items states "Kindly select your choice from the following options that relate to how often you consume live football programme in a week. They were preceded by in an average week, how many days do you...... followed by 0 to 7. Frequencies that fan consume football products were adapted from Greener (2011) which reported an alpha of 0.84. The preamble states "How often do you follow football using the following media"? They were measured using a scale of (1) never to (5) very often. The next item was to identify the general source of football information for the participants followed by the medium fans used the most to follow football. Demographic information of the participants was the last part of the questionnaire and asked about part of the country participants live, their age category, level of education, gender and sector of employment as control variables.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants.

Demographic Information of the Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Part of Ghana		
Northern	26	8.5%
Middle	191	62.6%
South	85	27.9%
Missing	3	1.0%
Total	305	100%
Age Category		
18-24	64	21.0%
25-34	115	37.7%
35-44	93	30.5%
45-54	22	7.2%
55-64	11	3.6%
Total	305	100%
Gender		
Female	51	16.7%
Male	254	83.3%
Total	305	100%
Employment		
Private	66	21.2%
Public	55	52.9%
Voluntary	8	2.7%
Unemployed	76	23.2%
Total	305	100%
Level of Education		
Basic	8	2.6%
Secondary	50	16.4%
Bachelors	123	40.3%
Masters	93	30.5%
Other	29	9.5%
Missing	2	0.7%
Total	305	100%

Data Analysis

To test the reliability of the scales and determine internal consistency, Cronbach Alpha was used. To answer the research questions, the characteristics of sports fans were analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were also used to determine the relationship between the variables. An Independent t-test was employed to determine the fan types and the frequency of consumption. Before that, a categorical scale was created where fans whose identity levels were from 1 to 4 were considered as low/moderate fans while fans with 5-7 identity levels were considered as highly identified fans on a 7-point Likert scale.

FINDINGS

The reliability coefficient of the 26 items used in the present study was 0.93. The Cronbach Alpha of the scales were between 0.93-0.80. Vaske et al. (2017) affirmed that alphas within the range of 0.65-0.80 are accepted for studies concerning human participants. Therefore, all the scales were accepted for further analysis (Table 2).

To answer the research question one percentage and frequencies were used (Table 3).

From the table, Ghanaian football fans consumed more sports products on the television followed by online and the radio.

Table 2. Factors, items, descriptive statistics (mean – M and standard deviation – SD), and Cronbach's alpha.

Factors	Items	M	S. D	α
Fan Identification				0.93
	My friends see me as a football fan	5.56	1.20	
	Following football is the most enjoyable form of entertainment	5.53	2.03	
	My life would be less enjoyable if I couldn't follow football	4.68	2.09	
	Being a football fan is very important to me	5.32	1.97	
	I consider myself a football fan	5.63	1.20	
Live				0.89
	Watch live football activities on TV	4.66	2.15	
	Read live football news in newspapers	3.91	2.16	
	Read live football news on the internet (Google, WhatsApp, etc.	5.01	2.11	
	Watch live football matches online (on Youtube, Facebook, etc.)	4.14	2.20	
	Listen to live football matches on the radio	4.86	2.37	
Recorded				0.90
	Watch recorded football activities on TV?	4.54	2.19	
	Read past football news in the newspaper	3.84	2.19	
	Watch recorded football games online (Youtube, Facebook, etc.)	4.29	2.14	
	Read past football news on the internet (Google, WhatsApp, etc.)	4.64	2.22	
	Listen to past football programmes on the radio	4.67	2.27	
Frequency				0.80
	TV	4.11	1.27	
	Radio	3.82	1.31	
	Newspaper	2.61	1.28	
	online	3.87	1.39	

Table 3. Media consumption of Ghanaian Football fans.

Media of Consumption- Ghanaian Football Fans		
Type of Media	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
TV	141	46.2%
Radio	54	17.7%
Online	97	31.8%
Other	9	3.0%
Missing	4	1.3%
Total	305	100%

For research question two, how often do Ghanaian football fans consume sports products live or recorded? The means and standard deviations were compared between the two variables (Table 4).

From the table, it is obvious that Ghanaian football fans preferred live matches to recorded matches.

Research question three, how often do Ghanaian football fans consume sports products based on the fan type was analysed using an independent sample t-test (Table 5).

The results indicate that differences exist between the consumption frequency of highly identified fans and low/moderate identified fans (t=-13.045, p=0.000). Highly identified fans have statistically significant higher means

(M=3.93) than low/moderate identified fans (M=2.41). This means that highly identified fans frequently consumed more sport products than low to moderate identified fans.

Which app do Ghanaian football fans use the most research question four was examined using percentages and frequencies (Table 6).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in the abolition of live attendances to many sporting events. While other leagues in the developed world benefited from broad-

Table 4. Ghanaian Football fans consumption of sport products-live or recorded.

Live vs. Recorded Media Consumption		
	M	**S.D.**
Live	4.54	1.84
Recorded	4.39	1.88

Table 5. Frequency of consumption based on the fan type.

Fans Consumption Frequency					
Fan Type	**M**	**S.D.**	**T**	**Degree of freedom**	**p**
High	3.93	0.76	-13.045	303	0.000
Low/Moderate	2.41	1.08			

Table 6. Ghanaian football fans most used social media platform.

Mostly Used Media		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Teams App	104	34.1%
Facebook	58	19.0%
Twitter	21	6.9%
You tube	29	9.5%
WhatsApp	48	15.7%
Other	35	11.5%
Missing	10	3.3%
Total	305	100%

casting rights, leagues in developing countries relied on the government and other corporate organisations for funding. Regarding this, the current study attempted to identify the media consumption of Ghanaian football fans instead of live attendance at the stadia. The participants of the study were 305 football fans selected via social media Platforms-WhatsApp and Facebook with purposive and snowballing sampling techniques employed to recruit the participants. The result of the study showed that Ghanaian football fans consumed more sport products on TVs than online, radio and other media, on live and recorded matches the fans preferred live to recorded matches and love to use team apps instead of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube and others. Again, highly identified fans frequently consumed sports products than moderate to lowly identified fans.

The achievements of professional sport clubs and competitive sports are measured by the number of consumption through traditional broadcasting such as TV viewers, newspapers and radio listeners. The study supports the findings of Petrovič et al. (1984) who found that about 60% of the adults in Slovenia do not show up at sports events. The study further revealed that TV broadcasts were monitored by many viewers, both on regular and occasional bases, particularly when major events are shown (44.6% views on regular and 38.5% on occasional bases). Additionally, international competitions involving Slovenians were monitored by many viewers with 25.4% following on TV frequently while 51.4% follow occasionally (Petrovič et al. 1996). The Ghanaian football fans prefer to watch TV during the coronavirus pandemic with a percentage of 46.2%. Regarding the current findings, Ghanaian sport managers should negotiate for bumper TV contracts as fans prefer to use this media. Deloitte (2020) argued that money generated from broadcasting rights amounts to 59% of the overall clubs' revenue, which constitutes the biggest source of income for the EPL. TV served as one of the traditional media sports fans consumed products the most. Ghanaian football clubs should get TV stations and make available some of their matches on channels that many people can have access to increase viewership base.

Online was the other important source of media Ghanaian football fans consumed sports products. The online sources comprise; internet and other social media platforms. The sports industry has approved and presently uses social media to promote products and reach the audience. Online communication has become

the most important avenue for customers to meet and exchange information and circulate their brand-related ideas (Hanna et al., 2011). Therefore, social media offer a quick interactive and engaging two-way communication avenue resulting in a timely distribution to consumers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). Social media can develop awareness and attitudes among consumers that are relevant to build robust brands (Keller, 2009).

Ghanaian football fans equally have social media platforms they used to communicate with the teams and can, therefore, make interactions easier by constantly updating such places with current team news and updated matches.

Based on Bruhn et al. (2012) assertion that the use of social media has a strong impact on brand than traditional media, the study examined the media Ghanaian sports fans used the most and found team apps to be the best. Social media improves fandom and provides opportunities for fans to engage their favourite teams and clubs, which also, allows sports organizations to develop fan affiliations (McCarthy et al., 2014). The use of social media makes customers become part owners and part makers of brands (as well as club brands) and play a key, empowering part in producing brand status and image (Williams and Chinn, 2010). Nonetheless, most clubs are confronted with challenges of trying to control their brands while simultaneously attempting to develop an engaging contact with the fans within a community. Although views articulated by some "loyal" fans on social media may digress from the management perspectives, clubs that are unable to exhibit some level of control and occupy the fan base may be liable to restraining the chance for improving relationship connections with the fans (McCarthy et al., 2014). Team apps can serve as a replacement for team newspapers and can provide opportunities for fans to read a lot of information about the teams. The clubs should make such sites interactive and provide opportunities for fans to air their views.

The consumption frequency based on fan type revealed highly identified fans consumed more sport products than moderate to lowly identified fans. The study of fan consumption behaviour using different approaches has helped to define how fans are likely to engage in consuming sports products in the future (Trail et al., 2000; Trail et al., 2003). This is buttressed by the personal identity and social theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) which suggests that people become associated with an organisation if it signifies the qualities they ascribe to their self-image. In this study, social identity comprising important group kinds based on social institutions (fans of teams) are recognized. Considering this, highly identified football fans were found to frequently consumed more football products than lowly/medium identified fans as the teams they support to satisfy their needs. Therefore, club administrators need to improve fan identification with teams to enable low/moderate fans to become highly identified fans and consumed more products of their teams. This can promote branding leading to sponsors' interests. Team managers should constantly engage supporters to promote cordial relationships with the fan base (McCarthy et al., 2014). Wakefield (2016) extolled that fan passion can be used to predict the behaviour of fans by using traditional media (television, radio, news, etc.) and the use of the team's social media channels. This can be possible when clubs have highly identified fans.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several shortfalls including the sample size. 305 of Ghanaian football fans among the whole lot is not encouraging. This means the majority of the fans were not reached and therefore, their perception of the research topic was not identified. Therefore, the study cannot be extrapolated to the entire Ghanaian fan base. Again, the moderate and lowly identified fans should have been examined to determine why they don't frequently consume sports products. Again, posting the questionnaire on social media implies that fans who can read and have access to the internet only took part in the study. This indicates that there may be other football fans who were not reached because either they do not have access to the internet or do not own laptops or android phones. Besides, those who could not read and understand the questionnaire could not take part as well. Despite these challenges, this study is the first to identify the Ghanaian football fans' consumption media and is suggesting to sport managers' ways they can reach and engage their fans during pandemics. Future research should identify and reach many Ghanaian football fans and if possible administer the questionnaire during live matches. Again, control variables such as age, gender and level of education should have been examined to determine which groups are consuming sport products using a particular media.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, broadcasting rights assist to increase the revenue base of GPL clubs. Therefore, sports administrators should negotiate for better TV broadcasting deals as it serves as the medium of consumption for the fans. For this to be possible, there should be effective communication between the fans and the clubs' administrators to assist increase the number of highly identified fans who were found to frequently consume more sport products. Arguably, team apps posed as the most frequently used media ahead of Facebook and other communication tools. Sports administrators should create entertaining contents that

can sustain the interest of the fans using the apps. Likewise, clubs that do not own apps can create and share the most important and relevant information on the sites. Clubs should persistently use surveys to identify the experiences of the fans to improve areas where there are shortfalls and focus on using social media.To conclude, sports fans expect their favorite teams to communicate and engage them directly on social media platforms (Ballouli, 2010).

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