

Fandom and Dress Association Among Fans of the Mediated European Football in Nigeria

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijdsHMSS.v13.i1.10

Abstract

Football jersey has been described as one of the most iconic symbols of football fandom. This study analyzes the behaviour of fans of the mediated European football in Nigeria in relation to the association with their team's dress. The goal was to explore the connection between a team's dress and the behaviour of the communities of fans of the mediated European football in Nigeria. The study is based on data collected through observation, and semi-structured interview and questionnaire with 320 research participants purposively and conveniently selected from the fandom of the mediated European football in Nigeria. The findings include among others: jersey and other forms of football dress portray fan's identity, affiliation and support to their football team. This study contributes to the understanding of dress as a touch-point that reflects football fan's identity, affiliation, support, commitment, passion and loyalty to their teams.

Keywords: *Dress association; Fandom; Mediated football; Identification; Enclothed cognition*

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Background to the Study

Football jersey has been described as one of the most iconic symbols of football fandom. A series of studies have focused on the effects of dress on the behaviour of the wearer (Adam & Galinsky, 2012; Gino, Norton, & Ariely, 2010; Kouchaki, Gino, & Jami, 2014; Johnson, Yoo, Kim, & Lennon, 2008) particularly analysed behaviours' evoked by dress. Adam and Galinsky (2012) showed that when a wearer attaches symbolic meaning to clothing, it affects his or her behaviour. Baker (2019) noted that football shirt is one of the instances of the close connection between material objects and football fandom. Football fans have been referred to as the 'lifeblood' of football, they identify, connect and support their teams by wearing the team's colours (Coombs & Osborne, 2022). In a study on the consumption and meanings of team licensed merchandise, Apostolopoulou, Papadimitriou, Synowka and Clark (2012) findings pointed to the fact of underlying meanings in team's dress as public-symbolic meanings of connectedness, fan identity and support for the team and private-symbolic meanings of sense of belonging, pride and attachment. Fandom is a form of leisure, popular culture, globally impactful phenomenon (Booth & Kelly, 2013) and a major component of the way the game of football is played, portrayed and presented to the myriad audience globally (Davis, 1984). Popular representations of football fan behaviour portray fandom as an "English disease" due to perceived football hooliganism formerly prevalent in the United Kingdom. Some authors have pointedly identified the fans of football as the most infamous and misrepresented group in the world (Buford, 1990; Vogan, 2012). On his part, Hornby (1992) rooted fans as people "obsessively and uncritically devoted" to their preferred teams. However, fandom can lead to positive results through emotional attachment, belonging or obsession (Trail, Anderson and Fink, 2000).

The language of football is one that is spoken and understood by people of different ethnic/race, religious, gender, social, political and economic backgrounds. Football like other sports is associated with strong feelings, passion, euphoria, ecstasy, emotion, cathexis, excitement and even obsession. Players and fans alike express these emotions in different ways. Followership of football has gone beyond the singing, dancing, chanting and drumming synonymous with supporters' clubs. A multi-dimensional approach to followership has emerged especially in European Football with the English premier league as the most-watched in the world (Premier League Explained, 2019). These are the communities of fans across the globe of the mediated football game. The constitution of the fandom comprises the young and old, male and female, commoners and elites, the rich and poor, and the like.

Nigerians constitute part of the supporters and fans of the mediated European Football leagues. European Football Leagues are the respective football leagues of European countries. The most commonly followed European Football Leagues in Nigeria are; the English (Barclays) Premier League, 'La Liga' (Spanish Premier League), 'Serie A' (Italy), 'Bundesliga' (German), French League and Russian League. Little attention is usually given to other European club sides where any Nigerian footballer plays. Apart from the individual matches of these leagues the best four clubs in each of the European premier leagues compete at the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions' League.

Enthusiastic admiration, allegiance and support for teams in football evoke collective behaviour. Fans express their emotions with joy, happiness, anger or despair. Referred to as the “twelfth man” in football, fandom is viewed as important in the success of any match. By extension, fans of the mediated football games tend to lend support to the teams. Fans of the mediated European football do not watch their favourite teams' matches in person rather; depend on new media technologies that transmit these matches to follow their teams. Kravel and Roksvold (2012) studied the “centrality of the media to contemporary sports fandom,” the role of the new media in facilitating a globalized football fandom. The response to such new media technologies like the cable television, satellite or Internet has seen the growth of the mediated football fans in Nigeria. In this context, social identities are constructed based on one's allegiance, following and support of the teams/players/managers. Club identity is expressed through wearing of jerseys, mufflers, badges, wrist bands, identifying with emblems, symbols and logos, placing of stickers on personal belongings, adoption of the teams colours, identifying and patronizing the products and services of their sponsors and notably, lived experiences.

Roach-Higgins (1992) understanding of dress as “an assemblage of body modifications and supplements to the body” is applicable to this study. The present study operationalized dress as any form of body modification or supplement that football fans employ to identify with their preferred teams. These include jerseys, mufflers, badges, wrist bands, caps, identifying with emblems, symbols and logos, placing of stickers on personal belongings, and adoption of the team's colours. Football fans wear their favourite team's dress to show support and pride for the team as well as for symbolic affiliation. Fans of the mediated football games religiously follow the matches of their respective teams/players/managers. Match days are sacrosanct as football victories are memorable events that exude psychological satisfaction, joy, excitement, happiness and fanfare. Conversely, defeats give rise to intense rivalry and antagonism against the fans of the winning teams or rivals. Fandom identity in Nigeria has gained vast and complex significance and symbolism. One's affiliation to a particular team serves as a pedestal for the affirmation of collective identity. There is a feeling of shared identity against rival identities. Bairner and Shirlow (1999) noted that “supporting particular soccer teams allows these fans to express their opposition to rival identities whilst celebrating their own.”

Alawusa (Nov. 2011) reports an incident where a teenager in Fagge LGA in Kano State slumped and died after his team Manchester United was humiliated by East London rivals, Manchester City in a 6-1 defeat. Again, Ogundeji (Oct. 2011) notes the case of two childhood friends who have become rivals as a result of their passion for Barcelona FC and Real Madrid FC respectively. What is more, an Angolan teenager was reported to have shot his father in a row over a match fixture between Barcelona FC and Real Madrid FC (CNN, Thursday, 8th Dec. 2011). These are some of the contradictions inherent in footballing allegiance. They are the demonstrations of the dialectics of the total complex relations between fans of different teams/players/managers. Also, they provide microcosmic illustrations of the destructive and disintegrational nature of fandom. It is the politics of raging against the supporters of different teams/players/managers.

The social relationships arising from the game of football has aroused interest in sociological research. Studies in football have provided an understanding of its role in the articulation and construction of social identities in many nations (Bradley; 1998, Bairner & Darby; 1999, Burdsey & Chappell; 2003). The Guardian, (March 9, 2011) describes this new politics of identity as a move towards standing against others viewed as different “from people more interested in constructing negative identities, defined by who they are not.” Komakoma (2005), Majaro-Majesty (2010) circumscribe this emergent behaviour by contrasting the construction of identities through the affiliation with European Football aside from primordial sentiments, prejudices and stereotypes in Zambia and Nigeria respectively. The double-edged nature of fandom in football leaves much to be desired. This study analyzed the behaviour of fans of the mediated European football in Nigeria in relation to the association with their team's dress.

The study highlighted the connection of team's dress with the behaviour of the communities of fans of the mediated European football in Nigeria. Thus, the specific research questions are:

- (i) What association does football dress have with fandom of the mediated European Football in Nigeria?
- (ii) What symbolic meanings do fans attach to the dress of their chosen teams of the mediated European football?
- (iii) What effect does wearing a team's dress items have on fan behaviour?
- (iv) What are the positive integrative components of fandom evoked by adornment of a team's colours?

This study covers the communities of fans of the mediated European Football Leagues in Nigeria. The fandom of the European Football Leagues includes among others the English (Barclays) Premier League, Spanish 'La Liga', Italian 'Serie A', and German 'Bundesliga'.

Theoretical Framework

The study employed two social psychology theories: the Social Identity theory of Inter-group behaviour and the Enclothed Cognition framework. Social identity is that aspect of a person's social self that develops from their affiliation to a football team and the cathexis on the club (Tajfel, 1974). The Social Identity theory believes that people develop a social identity based on their group affiliation. An individual has multiple social identities and group identification is basic to individual's maintenance of positive self-esteem. People identify with a group when they share or pursue a common course. The theory asserts that “group membership creates in-group/self-categorization and enhancement in ways that favour the in-group at the expense of the out-group.” Their dedication or allegiance to a football club is strengthened within the community of club's fans. Hirshon (2020) affirms that the social identity theory is appropriate in explaining intergroup relations of different football clubs and their teeming fan population. Fans of various football teams gain unified identity through support and allegiance to their team. The support from fans of the mediated football is portrayed in their dress behaviour towards their team, slogan, mood, opinions, emotions, attachment and identification. Fan identity and affiliation to a team influences their behaviour, dress and how they speak especially, during a game (Chadborn, Plante & Reysen, 2016). Social identity theory explains fan behaviour towards the performance of their teams.

Encloded Cognition framework on its part, asserts that clothes carry a symbolic meaning and the physical act of wearing the clothes. This framework is useful in describing the psychological processes associated with the act of wearing a football teams jersey, wrist band, mufflers, etc and embodying its symbolic meaning. When a fan is adorned in the team's dress or dress cues it influences the fan's psychological process by stimulating abstract concepts through its symbolic meaning. Clothes exert profound behavioural consequences for their wearers.

Methods

The research design adopted for the study is the cross-sectional survey method. This is a type of observational research that collects data from many population subjects at a time to make inferences about the study population. The population subjects were stratified into four groups of the major fandom of the mediated European Football Leagues namely:

- (i) Fans of English Premier League (EPL)
- (ii) Fans of Spanish 'La Liga'
- (iii) Fans of Italian 'Serie A' and
- (iv) Fans of German 'Bundesliga'.

The population of the study comprised the fandom of European Football Leagues in Nigeria. A sample size of three hundred and twenty (320) was selected for the study using the Taro Yamane formular. The purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed in the selection of the online respondents. Data for the study were collected through observation, a semi-structured questionnaire and interview. Methods of data analyses include qualitative discourse and the use of such statistical methods as percentages and frequencies. Data collected were equally presented in tables and through descriptive statistics.

Ethical considerations

The set of rules and regulations that guide social science research were strictly observed. The study ensured that participates voluntarily participated in the research on the basis of informed consent. Other ethical issues such as the protection of the privacy of participates, anonymity, confidentiality, respect for the dignity of participates, protection from harm, avoidance of misleading information, offensive language, and plagiarism were all ensured. We declare that the research received no funding from any source and there are no possible conflicts of interest.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of socio-demographic information of Respondents

Categories	Variables	Frequency	Per (%)
<i>Gender</i>	Male	190	59.4
	Female	130	40.6
<i>Age</i>	18 – 27	110	34.4
	28 - 37	70	21.9
	38 – 47	90	28.1
	48 – 57	40	12.5
	58 and above	10	3.1
<i>Occupation</i>	Public Sector	130	40.6
	Private Sector	40	12.5
	Self Employed	120	37.5
	None	30	9.4
<i>Educational Level</i>	Primary	0	0.00
	Secondary	10	3.1
	Vocational	10	3.1
	Tertiary	270	84.4
	Professional	30	9.4
<i>Religion</i>	Christianity	310	96.9
	Islam	0	0.00
	None	0	0.00
	Others	10	3.1

Source: Field survey, 2023

The table above showed that the sample was made up of 190 male respondents or 59.4% and 130 females representing 40.6%, an indication that more of the respondents were males. The age composition of the respondents showed 34.4%, 21.9%, 28.1%, 12.5%, and 3.1% who were between the age categories of 18-27, 28-37, 38-47, 48-57, and 58 and above respectively. The age composition indicated the highest frequency of respondents who were within the age interval of 18 to 27. Data on educational level portrayed a majority of the respondents at the tertiary level of education with 84.4%, professionals 9.4%, vocational and secondary levels with 3.1% each and none for the primary level. The occupational distribution of the respondents indicated that majority representing 40.6% were engaged in the public sector, 12.5% in the private sector, 37.5% were self-employed, and 9.4% were unemployed. Furthermore, a great majority of the respondents or 96.9% were Christians, no Muslim, no atheist and 3.1% constituting others who professed other religions.

Favourite European League and Team

The responses showed that a great majority preferred the English Premier League with 84.4%, La Liga 25%, Serie A 9.4%, Bundesliga 0.0%, and others 6.3%. Result for favourite team showed that 50 respondents were Arsenal fans, 40 were Barcelona FC fans, 90 were Chelsea, Liverpool were 30, Manchester United fans were 90 and Real Madrid 20 respondents.

Dress Association with Fandom

In order to highlight the association that exists between football dress and fandom the research participants were asked to indicate any of the dress items of their team's colour in their possession. 71.9% of the research participants acknowledged that they had their favourite team's jersey, 12.5% additionally had wrist band, 6.3% had muffler, 6.3% also had cap, 6.3% equally possessed other team's colours dress items while 15.6% had none. For the special thing about their team's dress 50% opted for team identity, 25% indicated that it was a symbol of affiliation, 12.5% said it showed fans attachment to the club, 21.9% said it showed their support, and 21.9% also noted that it signified loyalty. Furthermore, 65.6% of respondents strongly agreed that football jerseys show fans identification and commitment to their team 31.3% agreed, 3.1% strongly disagreed and no respondent disagreed. Data from the interviews further explained the association between football dress and fans.

“Wearing my team's football jersey identifies me as the team's fan, differentiates me from rival fans as well as a symbol of my passion and love for the team” (A Red devil / Manchester United fan).

“It's a special connection between you as a fan and your favourite team. Wearing your team's logo is a thing of pride” (Barca FC fan).

Symbolic Meanings that Fans attached to their Team's Dress

What symbolic meanings do fans attach to the dress of their chosen teams of the mediated European football?

Respondents were asked to give their answers on the respective meanings given to their team's dress items such as jersey, muffler, wrist band and others. The most frequent meanings expressed include fan identity, passion, symbolic, love and support, commitment, sense of belonging, loyalty, attachment, great value, uniqueness, prestige, sense of pride, and very important.

Effect of wearing a Team's Dress on Fan Behaviour

Table 2: Influence of Team Dress on Fan Behaviour during matches

SA	%	A	%	N	%	D	%	SD	%
110	34.4	50	15.6	50	15.6	30	9.4	80	25.

NB: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree).

Source: Field survey, 2023

To adequately establish the connection between football dress and fan behaviour the survey in table 2 inquired if wearing the team's dress influences a fan's behaviour during matches? 25% strongly disagreed, 9.4% disagreed, 15.6% were neutral, 34.4% strongly agreed, 15.6% agreed. Again, research participants were asked how they feel when wearing their team's colours during matches. This was a multiple-choice question. 62.5% felt excited, 43.8% felt happy, 28.1% felt distinguished, 12.5% had a feeling of achievement while 6.3% noted they felt in other ways. Below are the responses of some interviewees on how wearing a teams' dress influences fan behaviour.

I feel emotionally attached to my team whenever I put on the Gunners insignia. It evokes that collective experience and feeling of your personality being tied to your team's aspirations and goals (Arsenal Fan).

Wearing Chelsea's colours inspires me to support them even when we are not getting good results. You just share in the burden and woes of the team while keeping hope alive that someday, they will come back to form (Chelsea Fan).

Positive Integrative Components of Fandom evoked by adornment of team's dress

The survey used the following indicators to measure the positive components of fandom evoked by the adornment of a team's dress. 37.5% noted that it reflects passion, 21.9% chose support, 9.4% said it was symbolic, 12.5% said social connectedness, 9.4% indicated identity and 9.4% also said it shows the fan base. Similarly, to describe the ways through which the fans support their teams 21.9% opted for slogan; adornment of team's colours 59%, 28.1% said it was through their opinions, 18.8% chants, 25% speech and 6.3% other ways.

Discussion

It has been argued that when a wearer attaches symbolic meaning to dress it affects the individual's behaviour (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). The current study sheds light on the connection between fans adornment of a football team's dress and their behaviour. The main findings demonstrated how a person's social self (fan) develops from their affiliation or emotional attachment to a football team and the profound consequences of wearing the team's dress on fan behaviour. To achieve the main aim of the study the researcher examined the association that football dress has with fandom of the mediated European football; the symbolic meanings that fans attach to the dress of their favourite team; the effect of wearing team's dress on fan behaviour, and the positive integrative components of fandom evoked by the adornment of a team's dress.

The data on respondents' favourite European football league showed that 84.4% or majority of the respondents' preference for English Premier League corroborates the Premier League Explained, (2019) that EPL is the most watched league. More so, 81.2% of the respondents were drawn from the fandom of some of the English Premier League clubs while the remaining 18.8% were fans of La Liga (the Spanish Premier League). Being a fan is not just a tag or title but something that is tied to collective identity through support for one's football team (Hills, 2002; Davis, 2015). Regarding the first research question on the association that football dress had with fandom of the mediated European football, the findings showed that the jersey and other forms of football dress portray fan's identity, affiliation and support to their football team. This finding is in line with the views of Derbaix, Decrop and Cabossart (2002), Baker (2019) and Coombs and Osborne (2022). In their study, Derbaix, Decrop and Cabossart (2002) highlighted the identification, distinction and support functions of football dress like scarves and colours as key to understanding fan behaviour. For Baker (2019), football dress is one example of the strong link between material objects (dress) and fandom. Coombs and Osborne (2022) observed that fans wear their team's colours as a way of identifying, supporting and connecting with their teams. The study revealed that majority of the respondents possessed their team's jersey in addition to other dress items like cap, muffler, badge etc. Having

established this fact, the data showed that football dress is special because it gave fans a sense of identity, their symbol of affiliation, attachment, support and loyalty to the team.

With regard to the second research question of the symbolic meanings that fans do attach to the dress of their favourite team we found that fans attach different meanings such as fan identity, passion, symbolic, love and support, commitment, sense of belonging, loyalty, attachment, great value, uniqueness, prestige, sense of pride, and very important. In another study, Hoyer and MacInnis (1997) found that football colours and scarves are symbolic and affective in nature as they are a means of expressing self and feelings to the team. Apostolopoulou et al (2012) identified public-symbolic and private-symbolic meanings attached to football team licensed merchandise such as T-shirts, caps etc by fans. Findings of the study on the effect of wearing a team's dress on fan behaviour revealed that it was an act of inspiration to the fans that brought excitement, ecstasy, euphoria, and feeling of distinction. This is in line with Adam and Galinsky, 2012; Gino et al, 2010; Kouchakiet al, 2014; Johnson et al, 2008 on the effect of dress on the wearer. The study also found that wearing a favourite football team's dress indicates a touch-point of the positive integrative components of fandom such as passion, support, social connectedness, identity, its symbolic nature and fan base of the team.

Conclusion

The place of football dress in fan expression and identification with a team's values and aspirations has seen a growing interest in sports fandom other than traditional fandom research. The centrality of new media technologies in enhancing a global, digital and mediated sport fandom cannot be over-emphasized. In the present work we combined qualitative and quantitative data to examine fan behaviour in relation to their association with football team's dress. This article expands the frontiers of sociological knowledge on dress perspectives and intergroup relations showing how fans of the mediated European football in Nigeria express their identity and support to their favourite teams. This study contributes to the understanding of dress as a touch-point that reflects football fans identity, affiliation, support, commitment, passion and loyalty to their teams. The findings of the study could make way for further study on the relationship between dress association and fandom of digital football. The study could be of value to stakeholders in Nigerian football leagues following their poor visibility and patronage from the teeming football fans in Nigeria.

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