

EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CLUB NEWSPAPERS IN NIGERIA: GRATIFICATIONS OR MEDIA IMPERIALISM?

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Abstract

This study is aimed at exploring the contents, uses and gratifications of football club newspapers as an emerging phenomenon. The work is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory and the media imperialism theory. Analysis of the contents of nine titles shows that the birth of these newspapers is evidence of an increasing number of Nigerian football fans shifting their support to foreign football clubs. The new media owners are simply responding to the forces of demand and supply with the central objective of meeting an unmet local need for good, professionally organised football. The implication is that even in Nigeria; news of foreign leagues is published by Nigerian citizens to draw readers away from local league, a development which is bound to affect negatively the nations sporting culture. The conclusion is that the fans will continue to patronise these newspapers so long as their needs for good football is not satisfied by any of the existing local newspapers, the obvious cultural implications notwithstanding.

Keywords: Newspaper, football, gratifications, imperialism

Introduction

It is widely believed that change is inevitable. This cannot be truer in any endeavour than the ever-changing communications field. Newspapers, for instance, came into being as a few sheets of printed information, like the *Acta Diurna* which was displayed for the audience to take their turn to read. (Ekwelie, 1985). From that humble beginning to today's broadsheet and tabloids of over hundred pages produced in full colour, every twenty-four hours, the form and content of the newspaper has changed and developed in line with the changes in social, political and technological influences (O'Sullivan, Dutton and Rayner 1994).

Media development in Nigeria began on a 'uses and gratifications' note in 1859 when the first newspaper *Iwe Irohin* was established by a missionary. From offering evangelical

gratifications, it expanded to socio-political gratifications for its audience. Similar religious newspapers followed suit, introducing more items as the need arose. The second generation of newspapers were established to challenge white rule and the British colonial masters. Newspapers like *The Lagos Weekly Record* and *West African Pilot* dug in and held their own until independence was won in 1960. After independence, some of these heroes of anti-colonial journalism began to give way for the advent of papers founded to fulfil other needs for nation building. So, *The Guardian*, *National Concord* and many more were established.

As Nigeria began to seek global influence and recognition in the late seventies and early eighties, youth football became an avenue to express its sovereignty and dignity. The winning of the Nations' cup for the first time

in 1980 drew the attention of international coaches and scouts to Nigeria. This led to the exodus of star players like Stephen Keshi and Peter Rufai for adventure into the world of professional football. With the passage of time, *Complete Sports*, *Sports Souvenir*, *Complete football and Soccer Star*, were born to cater to the interests of a teeming population of football fans and sports lovers.

The coming of DSTV, Eurosports and other sports channels through cable and satellite technology began gradually in the 1990's to shift fans' interest from local league to European leagues. But the existing sports newspapers appeared to be equal to the task of providing them with the needed gratifications. The past two years, 2007 and 2008, have ushered in a new dimension to this phenomenon. The publication of football club newspapers with titles such as *The Blues*, *The Real Madrid Echo* and *The Midweek Arsenal Focus*. These are British and Spanish teams and no Nigerian team has a newspaper or magazine published under its name. It therefore becomes necessary to investigate and explore this emerging phenomenon, by analysing the content of the newspapers and examining the benefits in the context of uses and gratifications as well as globalisation and cultural imperialism.

Theoretical framework

In 1942, Lazarfield and Stanton produced a series of books and studies that paid attention to how audiences used media to organise their lives and experiences. Their works are believed to have laid foundation for the Uses and Gratifications theory. This theory focuses "on the uses to which people put media and the gratifications they seek from that use" (Baran and Davis, 2003:256)

The basic assumptions according to Folarin (1998) and Griffin (2003) are:

- Who uses which content and from which media?
- Under what conditions and for what reasons do they use the media? The scenario according to (Kunczik, 1988), Folarin (1998:65) is:
 1. An individual has some need related to communication.
 2. He or she selects the media that appear likely to satisfy those needs.
 3. He or she selectively consumes the content.
 4. An effect may or may not occur.

This theory is supported with the Fraction of Selection hypothesis proposed by Wilbur Schramm in 1954. The hypothesis states that "people weigh the level of reward (gratification) they expect from a given medium or message against how much effort they must make to secure that reward" (Baran and Davis, 2003:257). In other words, media that are easier to use stand at an advantage over others that require mere efforts, more investments and more concentration. The advantage the Club newspapers may have is that they tap into the sentiments of fans of each club in addition to the low cover prices of #50 and #60. The publishers also find the internet an easy and "free" source.

Media imperialism theory assumes that over concentration of mass media from larger nations on the global scene negatively affects smaller nations causing them to lose their national identities.

In a study of issues and perspectives in sports reporting in Nigeria, Wogu (2004) emphasised the importance of interpretation and indepth analysis by sports writers even if their readers had watched the match in question on television. This, he explains, is an opinion leadership function, a need which should be gratified by any serious newspaper. He provided a list of issues and themes on which sports newspapers and magazines should write

if only they intend to meet the needs of their audience.

Citing Sydney (1990), Wogu stated that stories on the personality and performance of stars often have tremendous impacts on such stars. How these emerging newspapers intend to exert similar influence on team members of the European clubs who do not read their newspapers is difficult to imagine.

In a study of American media coverage of Africa, Ndolo and Megwa (2005) discussed the factors that influence or determine foreign news coverage. They identified hierarchy of nations, cultural affinity, news and information conflicts, economic cooperation among nations as well as economic considerations as major factors. An examination of the content of the emerging newspapers may reveal if any of these is the determining factor for what looks like a new version of Afghanistanism and technological determinism. These new newspapers do not seem to source their stories in any conventional way. In fact, a preliminary examination of some show that they lift stories from online newspapers published in Europe. But Garrison (2000) found that gathering information from online sources could be problematic for the following reasons:

Difficulties in verifying facts

Sites containing unreliable information

Lack of source -credibility. He argues that:

New technologies can add to existing problems or even create new barriers in news gathering. However, journalists have used the telegraph, telephones, short-wave radio, fax machines and other innovative technologies for information gathering... Technologies, of course, have their shortcomings (Garrison 2000:501)

The implication of this is that sourcing sports news solely from the internet may not be the best approach to meet the needs or gratifications of the local fans. This calls for scrutiny and proper editing rather than lifting whole stories without permission or acknowledgement. Anderson (2001) made findings that suggest that sport writers should scrutinize stories from club sources. In a study of major baseball league and sports journalism in America, he concluded that journalists who wanted to gain and maintain professional credibility had to scrutinize their stories and source

In a study on the New World Information Order, Kurfi, (2007) argued that Nigeria has been a mere consumer of information from the media of developed nations, and that the country is affected by the one-way, distorted and planned pattern of information flow masterminded by the western world. The assumption here is that Nigerian readers may be captive or helpless audience of foreign publications. But McQuail (2000:220) identifies a variety of ways in which the recipient nations like Nigeria play a part in deciding what they take out of the foreign news offering available to them. Among them are: They select items they consider relevant to their local audiences and reshape or interpret them to suit their needs and gratify them. He adds that, "Miscellaneous Content such as sporting events, advertising and pictures that have a foreign reference or origin" could be transmitted but insists that the main mechanism of control is not usually policy or law but audience demand for their own media content in their own language.

By audience demand for media content, McQuail introduces a uses and gratifications dimension to media and cultural imperialism. Mbachu (2003) would rather perceive this new development from an economic survival strategy spurned by the internet and embraced

away by the internet, which provides free sources for stories, then the basis for creating the traditional content and revenue streams that make up the newspaper may not be there.

The new entrants on the sports journalism scene may not be sheetfuls of rubbish to the football-crazy fans that read them but it remains to be seen if their birth will strengthen or weaken the demand for “better-written” and “better-researched” Sports dailies and weeklies. In relation to breaking news mentioned by Mbachu, the newspapers under investigation do not report breaking news because they are all weekly newspapers of sometimes questionable regularity. Foreign magazines like America’s *Sports illustrated*, according to Bittner (1989:72) publish several editions to take care of breaking news. He explains that, “The ability to print late-breaking information, the speed of transmission, and the cost-effectiveness are just some of the reasons” they employ satellite transmission.

This is not the case with the emerging club newspapers. It appears that the cost-effectiveness is the only reason they source

almost all their stories from the internet or online newspapers and magazines. One may therefore worry less about cultural imperialism if they deliberately choose to cover European leagues by illegally sourcing information from the World Wide Web on the strength of the expected uses and gratifications to them and their readers. In other words, suggestions of a peculiar kind of “Afghanistanism” might be worth investigating since the publishers have access to local leagues and other sporting events but choose to publish European leagues, clubs and stars for equally “Afghanistic” Nigerian fans of those clubs.

Methodology

The method employed is content analysis conducted in an exploratory manner. Nine issues of the newspapers were purposively selected in the month of September, 2009. A total of 262 news items were examined and analysed in terms of editorial focus and content. To ascertain the uses and gratifications, pages devoted to readers’ feedback were analysed specifically to find out benefit-related issues predominantly discussed by the fans.

Data analysis

Table 1: Editorial Objectives

SN	Newspaper Name	Motto/Editorial Focus
1.	<i>Manchester United For Life</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For those who love Good Football
2.	<i>Barca Newsreel</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The official Camp-Nou Voice in Nigeria for the True Barca fan
3.	<i>The Real Madrid Echo</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only Nigerian voice for the Madridista
4.	<i>Barcelona Focus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Nigerian Weekly voice for the Blaugrana
5.	<i>Midweek Arsenal Focus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field of truth
6.	<i>The Blues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Round Leather Game Weekly
7.	<i>Weekend Arsenal Focus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field of Truth
8.	<i>Gunners Weekly</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For The True Gunners in Nigeria
9.	<i>True Blues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nigeria’s number 1 official

		Chelsea FC Weekly Tabloid
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Table one shows a list of nine weekly newspapers published with the names of five European football clubs. From their mottos stated under the various name plates, we glean and infer what the editorial objectives are. *Manchester United for Life* is published for those who love good football, *Barca Newsreel*, for true Barca fans, *The Real Madrid Echo* the only Nigerian voice for the club, *Barcelona*

Focus, the Nigerian voice for Barcelona F.C., *Midweek Arsenal Focus* and *Weekend Arsenal Focus*, field of truth, *The Blues* no direction except “the round leather game”. A rival title, *True Blues* claims to be Nigeria’s number one official Chelsea tabloid probably because The Blues was in the market before it. The *Gunners Weekly* is for the true Gunners in Nigeria.

Table 2: Teams Represented (Continent, Country and city of Publication)

SN	Team	Country	Continent	City of Publication
1.	Chelsea	Britain	Europe	Ibadan/Lagos
2.	Arsenal	Britain	Europe	Ibadan/Lagos
3.	Barcelona	Spain	Europe	Lagos
4.	Real Madrid	Spain	Europe	Lagos
5.	Manchester United	Britain	Europe	Ibadan

Five teams have their names on the nine newspapers: Chelsea (2), Arsenal (3) Barcelona (2) others one each. Two of the clubs, Real Madrid and Barcelona are Spanish Clubs while the rest are English Clubs. The two Spanish Clubs have “their” newspapers issued from Lagos. Manchester United is

published only in Ibadan though it is sold in Lagos and other cities. The others have titles published under their names in the two cities- Lagos and Ibadan. No Nigerian club is lucky to have a newspaper published for its fans in Nigeria.

Table 3: Editorial Content

SN	Newspaper	No of Staff Listed on Masthead	Opinion/ Editorial	Items with By lines	Sourced from other media	Culled with permission/ Credit
1.	<i>Manchester United For Life</i>	10	0	0	32	0
2.	<i>Barca Newsreel</i>	16	1	0	25	0
3.	<i>The Real Madrid Echo</i>	1	1	0	24	0
4.	<i>Barcelona Focus</i>	1	1	0	29	0
5.	<i>Midweek Arsenal Focus</i>	10	1	2	41	0
6.	<i>The Blues</i>	8	1	0	33	0
7.	<i>Weekend Arsenal Focus</i>	10	1	4	31	0

8.	<i>True Blues</i>	1	1	0	36	0
9.	<i>Gunners Weekly</i>	1	1	0	26	0

The data indicate that over 98% of the items in the newspapers are lifted from European newspapers through the internet while an insignificant number is (usually news about national team) are locally sourced stories. Even the locally sourced stories are often without bylines. Though the *Manchester United for Life* newspaper claims to have 10 journalists on its masthead, there was no opinion article for the month of September. All the average of 32 stories published weekly were sourced from news media. There was no credit for the 27 photographs neither was there any indication of permission for the other stories lifted from foreign media.

For *Barca Newsreel*, the story is not different. Staff list shows 16 names. The only opinion article that appears from week to week is

“Editor’s Pen” which is like a keynote introduction. About 25 items published weekly were sourced from other media. *The Real Madrid Echo*, *Barcelona Focus*, *Gunners Weekly* and *True Blues* are published by one organisation and edited by the same person. The same adverts run on all titles in the same position each week. There are no stories with by line. All stories are lifted from foreign media without any indication of credit or permission.

Midweek Arsenal Focus, *Weekend Arsenal Focus* and *The Blues* look a little more professional in their approach. Each has a page for fans’ reaction and opinion. But they also lift almost all their stories from foreign media and give no credit or indication of permission to

Table 4: Publication Data

SN	Newspaper	Use of Colours	Format/ Size	No of Adverts (Average)	No of pictures (Average)	Length (Pages)	Cover price #
1.	<i>Manchester United For Life</i>	Cover /Centre (4)	Tabloid	0	27	8 Pages	#50
2.	<i>Barca Newsreel</i>	Covers (2)	Tabloid	6	23	8 Pages	#60
3.	<i>The Real Madrid Echo</i>	Covers (2)	Tabloid	2	18	8 Pages	#60
4.	<i>Barcelona Focus</i>	Covers (2)	Tabloid	3	18	8 Pages	#60
5.	<i>Midweek Arsenal Focus</i>	Covers (2)	Tabloid	13	26	8 Pages	#50
6.	<i>The Blues</i>	Covers (2)	Tabloid	3	59	8 Pages	#50
7.	<i>Weekend Arsenal Focus</i>	8 Pages	Tabloid	0	30	8 Pages	#50
8.	<i>True Blues</i>	Covers (2)	Tabloid	6	17	8 Pages	#60

9.	<i>Gunners Weekly</i>	Covers (2)	Tabloid	7	17	8 Pages	#60
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Only *Weekend Arsenal Focus* publishes eight pages of colour. *Manchester United for Life* publishes four colour pages and four black and white pages. The rest publish only the front and back cover pages in colour. They are all 8-page publications sold for either #50 or #60. The *Midweek Arsenal Focus* and the four published by a single publisher (*Barcelona Focus*, *Barca Newsreel*, *Gunners Weekly* and *True Blues*) seemed to have steady advertisement patronage during the month under review.

Discussion of findings

What are the editorial objectives of the newspapers?

From the 262 stories and the mottos of the newspapers analysed, the editorial objective is to provide information on the various football clubs to their Nigerian fans. They also provide a platform for the fans to express their views in a manner that makes one wonder what the home fans of the clubs would be doing to support the clubs. This is because the newspapers are not read by the members of the clubs neither do the Nigerian fans have the opportunity of supporting them by either cheering them up at the venue of matches or by buying match tickets.

Of the 262 items, only six were published with by lines and none gave indication of credit or permission from the publications from which the stories were culled. (The legal implications could be great and damaging). Only the six stories with by lines were locally sourced stories. The rest, from the style of writing and the lack of local angle were lifted from foreign press, sometimes with an introductory paragraph and a reduction in length. The quality of the photographs indicates that they

were also copied from foreign or local sports dailies.

What items make up the editorial contents of the newspapers?

The newspapers offer similar items to their readers. The regular items include:

1. League Tables
2. Match Fixtures
3. News of Players' Transfer
4. Comments from Coaches
5. Analysis of Match results
6. Predictions of Match outcomes
7. Players' Profiles
8. Feedback pages for fans
9. Generous Use of photographs
10. Cartoon (By Weekend Arsenal Focus)
11. Crossword Puzzle (Weekend Arsenal Focus)
12. A regular column (Weekend Arsenal Focus)

How do the newspapers source their stories?

Over 98% of the stories are not original. They are copied from other newspapers and from the internet. The fact that these stories appear without by line brings to question the claim that some have staff strength of 10 or 16 reporters and editors. The editing errors and the occasional appearance of betraying words and statements indicate that they are not written by the newspaper staff. The fact that one editor writes, edits and produces four of these newspapers on a weekly basis is additional indication of lack of originality.

Predominant Gratifications Derived by Fans

1. News Of Match Fixtures
2. News About Players And Teams
3. Match Analysis
4. Coaches And Transfers

What are the implications within the frameworks of Uses and Gratifications and media imperialism Theories?

Nigeria is a football-loving nation. From the 1960s up to early 1990s, football matches enjoyed large turnouts of fans at the physical venues. But in the past ten years, the local league and other matches have continued to face dwindling patronage largely due to dwindling disposable income, insecurity and lack of satisfaction with the poor administration of the game in Nigeria. Fans of local clubs are dissatisfied with the performance of local clubs and have since switched their support to clubs they can only watch on cable television.

Their need for entertainment is no longer met by watching the Nigerian clubs on tv or by reading about them in the other sport dailies and weeklies. They find gratification in watching the Spanish and English Clubs every week. Many who do not have access to pay television patronise commercial DSTV centres in the cities at costs ranging from #50 to #400 depending on demand and supply. On the part of publishers, they are responding to an obvious need though apparently in a crude way. The manner in which they source their stories leaves much to be desired.

The Media imperialism theory, according to Boyd-Barrett cited by White (2001:2) assumes a process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution, or content of media in any country are singly or together subject to substantial pressures from the media interest of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influences by the country so affected”.

From the foregoing conceptual clarifications, and the data reported in this study, it is obvious that the availability of *Eurosport*, *CNN*, *Goal.com* and numerous other channels

and programmes distributed from Europe and America through satellite, cable TV and the internet currently affect sport journalism in Nigeria in the following ways:

1. **Ownership:** They have forced some media owners (*Sports Souvenir i.e*) out of business and have inadvertently created an army of quack if unprofessional media owners who do nothing but download and print sport information for local fans of European clubs, who became fans by watching the above channels.
2. **Structure:** The structure of Nigeria sport newspaper industry is increasingly being altered with bottom-heavy structure in favour of poorly produced and hardly edited eight-page weekly newspapers with doubtful advertisement support.
3. **Content:** The content of these newspapers (over 90% European League) is disturbing because the development leaves Nigeria “without proportionate reciprocation of influence”. Except something is done to reverse the trend, time will come when more sport lovers in Nigeria will be drawn to these papers thereby “making Nigeria subsidizing to the media products of these European nations.

Some critics argue that government subsidies ensure strong local productions in affected countries. But there is no such subsidy to newspapers or even television stations in Nigeria.

This notwithstanding, the emergence of these newspapers surely signifies the beginning of a new culture of media imperialism which is already drawing fans away from the local league thereby making the local league all the

more unviable. The uses and gratifications derived by the audience can be offered by the existing sports pages of more established newspapers if the ubiquitous foreign sport channels are censored or banned outright.

Conclusion

The emergence of football club newspapers can be said to be a response to a need not met by the existing media. The fact that some of these papers have continued in business for about two years, even with their poor editorial and production qualities is evidence that there is demand for them. Demand, on the other hand, is evidence of continued gratification derived by the readers. It must be noted also that the gratification goes beyond newspaper output but borders on the quality of football played in the country.

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Recommendations

In light of the foregoing, it is recommended that a longitudinal study of this emergent phenomenon be conducted in the near future in search of clearer indications of the factors motivating the establishment of the papers and their performance in the market place of ideas.

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