



# Local Versus Foreign: How Audience Preference and Media Coverage Shape Soccer in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study juxtaposes foreign and domestic soccer narratives in the media to determine the level of influence each exerts on Nigerian fans. Respondents from four stadiums in Nigeria responded to questionnaire items while soccer administrators and sports media practitioners answered in-depth interview questions on this juxtaposition and the criterion of influence. Findings show the dominance of foreign content; jointly influenced by both the media and audience. Foreign soccer stories with a mean score of 4.63 featured prominently on the cover pages of sports newspapers compared to 3.29 for local stories while most fans (88.9%; n=1878) preferred foreign content. Results also show that commercial considerations influenced the agenda setting credential of sports media practitioners. Recommendations on how domestic soccer could attract more followership in Nigeria were made.

**Keywords:** Audience, preference, media coverage, domestic soccer, foreign soccer, gate-keeping, agenda setting, Nigeria.

## Introduction

The prevalence of foreign content in the Nigerian media space is an ongoing discourse among scholars in Nigeria especially within the context of cultural imperialism. Akinfeleye and Amobi (2011) assert that the media are potent social systems that transmit cultural heritage from one generation to the next. Unimpressively, however, the media in Nigeria have been accused of undermining this social responsibility performance by allowing the dominance of foreign content. The perceived neglect of traditional media functions by journalists has prompted Akinfeleye (2003) to question whether Nigerian reporters operate as fourth estate of the realm or wreck!

In the 1960s and 70s, media scholars and social scientists believed that the media had the power to sway huge audiences. But as of late, the situation has become complex, following the phenomenon known as *media convergence* wherein both the media and their audiences are in the same marketplace of information deluge where supply exceeds demand. To understand the highly complex processes through which media effect takes place, researchers usually isolate elements in the communication process: communicator, channel and message in order to properly

appraise the impact the media actually generate.

The mechanistic perspective of media effect sees the audience members as passive and reactive; focuses on short-term, immediate and measurable changes in thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors and assumes a direct influence on the audiences. Research in some climes, including that of Nigeria, has shown that the audience is not always a docile group of people that the media could manipulate at will (Klapper, 1960). Nevertheless, the hypodermic needle hypothesis that media influence is immediate and heavily impacting on the audience – comparable to what happens when a soldier fires a bullet on an attacker is still popular. While this is so in certain areas of mass communication such as advertising and propaganda, there are not enough studies to confirm the extent of such direct media impact on the sports audience in Nigeria. In this study, media influence is operationalized as the power of the media to make the audience behave in a particular way while media impact describes a cause-effect relationship with the audience with a very few intervening variables (Akinfeleye, 2003; Morah & Omojola, 2014; 2011; Folayan, 2016; Odiboh, et al. 2017).

The Nigerian sport media has played a prominent role in nurturing and promoting Nigerian soccer. Apart from reporting the exploits of teams and players, it has also been the major custodian of the sport's history. In the 1960s and 1970s in Nigeria, foreign club soccer was largely unknown to Nigerian fans. Local clubs such as ICC FC, Stationery Stories FC, Mighty Jets FC, Rangers International FC and the national team - The Green Eagles - (as they were known then) drew spectators that filled stadiums to the brim. Support for local club sides and the national team was like religion; the passion was high. But from the 1980s when media technology advanced rapidly, fans gained more access to modern mass media – TV, radio, newspapers, and now the Internet. Contents on foreign soccer have since gained popularity. Today, it appears local soccer has been pushed to the background as the Nigerian media face the accusation of killing domestic football (Izamoje, 2018).

As of January 2017, there were three dominant national daily sports newspapers in circulation in Nigeria - *Complete Sports*, *Sporting Sun* and *Sporting Life*. Quite a few exist as weekly newspapers dedicated to reporting specific foreign club-sides such as Manchester United and FC Barcelona. On radio, *Brila FM* has four sports radio stations spread across the country. On television,

*DSTV-SuperSport* has several sports channels and it has been joined on the pay-tv segment by *StarTimes* sports channels and *KweseSport*. On the internet, the number of Nigerian websites and blogs (Okorie, N., Loto, G. & Omojola, O. 2018) dedicated to sports is growing every day.

### **Research Questions**

This article investigates how media coverage of soccer has affected audience preference for the sport. The following are the research questions:

- To what extent does media coverage influence audience preference for domestic and foreign soccer?
- To what extent does audience preference influence media coverage of domestic and foreign soccer?
- What influence does media type (print, broadcast or online) have on audience preference for domestic or foreign football?
- How do soccer managers and media practitioners perceive the influence of the media on audience preference for domestic and foreign soccer?

### **Literature Review**

Media coverage refers primarily to the contents of the mass media. More broadly, it is a term used to describe the attention journalists give to particular subjects or issues

in the media. Thus, a newspaper may be described as giving more coverage to football than basketball. Two types of media coverage are often found in the media literature: *Placed media coverage* which is content published by media users such as a public relations firm or individuals hired for the purpose; and *earned media coverage* which is content produced by journalists or a free contribution submitted by members of the public that the mass media outlet may accept to publish (endvawnow.org, 2017).

Placed media coverage often comes in form of advertisements, opinion pieces (op-eds), pitched interviews, editorials, press releases, and media information kits. In most cases, this type of coverage is paid for. On the other hand, earned media coverage is usually free and is published by journalists using their professional judgement. However, publicists do influence such professional judgement through various methods such as getting reporters and editors interested in a particular subject, giving journalists fresh information that the media audience would value and adding a 'spin' to issues in a manner that could make journalists report the story.

Media coverage may be measured in terms of volume (length of the report on air or in print), prominence (the positioning of the item relative to other published

items) and frequency (the number of times the particular item or subject-matter is published (covered). Media coverage of an issue may also be positive or negative in terms of the impression it has or creates on the audience.

The Agenda Setting Theory has excellent expository constructs that explain how journalists impact media audience in the process of selecting stories for publication. The theory states that the mass media may not be so effective in telling its audience what to *think*, but the mass media is very effective in telling its audience what to *think about*. Although various independent scholars have developed variations of the theory, Maxwell McCombs and Bernard Shaw (1993) that actually coined the term 'agenda setting' and did most of the pioneering research on the subject-matter. Agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two basic assumptions of the theory are:

- The press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it;
- Media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues.

For example, in sports journalism, by placing stories about foreign soccer clubs and foreign soccer on their front pages and making

dominant broadcast items, journalists wittingly or unwittingly tell their audiences that foreign football soccer and players are more important and these audiences see it as so.

Since 1972 when Maxwell McCombs and Bernard Shaw published their first series of articles on Agenda Setting in the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, hundreds of studies have been carried out and various concepts and meta-theories developed. Rogers and Dearing (1993) have identified three types of agenda setting:

- Public agenda setting, in which the public agenda is the dependent variable (the traditional hypothesis).
- Media agenda setting, in which the media agenda is treated as the dependent variable (agenda building).
- Policy agenda setting, in which elite policy makers' agenda are treated as the dependent variable (political agenda setting).

Cohen (1963) introduced a new dimension to the debate with the assertion that the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. In the mid-1960s, a small group of journalism researchers at the University of California in Los Angeles, led by Maxwell

McCombs, began to notice that whenever a news story that conceivably could have been a major one was played down, its impact on the public seemed to significantly dissipate. They, therefore, began a series of studies to establish an epistemological basis in this regard (Lowery & De Fleur, 1988). McCombs and his team were able to define the concept of agenda setting with a set of parameters. In spite of the variations and perspectives by critics, the taxonomy created from these studies remains the reference point in explicating and applying the theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Blair (1988) and Pechmann (2001) have also conceptualized *media scheduling* as an important schema in media coverage. They define media scheduling as how often individuals are exposed to information within a given time frame (frequency and repetition effects). Pechmann and Entman (1989), in their report from several studies on this, suggest that three quality exposures to a communication are probably sufficient for a message to have its effect but noted that it may take many more exposure opportunities to produce the effect of three quality exposures. This is because potential message recipients may choose not to attend to the message at some time or may be exposed only to a portion of the entire message at

some other time. But when the message is repeated quite often, its chances of making an impact on the recipients are increased.

Lewin's theory on gatekeeping also illustrates the powerful influence of the media editor (Lewin, 1951). Lewin conceived the news flow along a channel consisting of several gates controlled by gatekeepers each of whom would make a decision as to whether the news items should continue through the channel.

Gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or by 'gatekeepers'. In the latter case, an individual or group is 'in power' to make decisions of 'in' and 'out'. Understanding the functions of the gates becomes equivalent then to understanding the factors which determine the decisions of the gatekeepers and changing the social process means influencing or replacing the gatekeeper. The first diagnostic task in such cases is that of finding the actual gatekeeper. (Lewin, cited by Ogunade, 1988:85)

The process of the gatekeeping model involves the following:

- Information moves step by step through the channels. The number of channels varies and the amount of time spent in each channel can vary.

- Information must pass through a "gate" to move from one channel to the next.
- Forces govern the channels. There may be opposing psychological forces causing conflict, which create resistance to movement through the channel.
- There may be several channels that lead to the same end-result.
- Different actors may control the channels that lead to the same end result.

The gate-keeping concept disregards or downplays the interest of the reader or viewer. While emphasizing the enormous powers of the editor or series of editors at the gates of the news flow, the theory does not help much in explaining what informs their choices, which in actual practice often goes beyond professional rules of news or story selection. For example, influential publishers and big advertisers sometimes do the gate-keeping (directly or indirectly) by telling the editors what to publish. Yet, the theory is very helpful – at least in suggesting to us that, largely, it is what the gatekeeper *thinks* the reader wants to read, view or hear that eventually gets published or broadcast.

In his review of the evolution of agenda setting research, McCombs

(1993) has noted that the fruitfulness of the agenda-setting metaphor is documented in three features:

- the steady historical growth of its literature,
- its ability to integrate a number of communication research subfields under a single theoretical umbrella as it has moved through four phases of expansion and
- a continuing ability to generate new research problems across a variety of communication settings in the marketplace of ideas.

McCombs himself has been at the forefront of the expansion of the theory and growth of its literature. In 2005, he espoused further that there were five phases of agenda setting which include basic agenda-setting effects, attribute agenda-setting effects, contingent conditions for agenda-setting effects, sources of media agenda and consequences of agenda-setting effects. He noted, however, that in its evolution through the five stages, agenda-setting theory has incorporated or converged with a variety of other established communication concepts and theories. Incorporated concepts include status conferral, stereotyping, image building and gate keeping. Theoretical

complements to agenda-setting include cultivation analysis and the spiral of silence. "Attribute agenda-setting links the theory with framing" (McCombs, 2005, p. 546).

Shoemaker and colleagues studied the forces in news gatekeeping in relation to coverage of congressional bills in the United States. According to Shoemaker and Reese (1991), they had two hypotheses:

- the routine gatekeeping force of assessing a bill's newsworthiness was related to how prominently a bill was covered, And 2)
- the individual journalist characteristics (education, political ideology, work experience, ethnicity, gender, voting behavior) were related to how prominently a bill was covered.

They also predicted that the newsworthiness of a bill would be more important than journalists' personal characteristics. Surveying both journalists (for their personal characteristics) and editors (for evaluating newsworthiness), they found that only newsworthiness had a significant effect on the amount of coverage given to a bill. Thus, their first hypothesis was supported as well as the idea that newsworthiness would be more important than

personal characteristics. (Stacks & Salwen, 2009).

As more scholars published articles on agenda-setting theories it became evident that the process involves not only active role of media organizations, but also participation of the public as well as policymakers. The difference between agenda-setting and agenda-building is based on the dominant role of media or public. Thus 'setting' an agenda refers to the effect of the media agenda on society, caused by the transfer of the media agenda to the public agenda, while 'building' an agenda includes some degree of reciprocity between the mass media and society where both media and public agendas influence public policy (Rogers, Dearing & Bregman, 1993).

The agenda-building perspective ascribes importance not only to mass media and policymakers, but also to social process, to mutually interdependent relation between the concerns generated in social environment and the vitality of governmental process. Many concepts have been developed to explain the various somewhat different meta-theoretical assumptions. They are explained below.

### ***Agenda melding***

This focuses on the personal agendas of the individual vis-à-vis their community and group

affiliations. This means that individuals join groups and blend their agendas with the agendas of the group. The groups and communities represent a collected agenda of issues and one joins a group by adopting an agenda. On the other hand, agenda setting defines groups as collections of people based on some shared values, opinions or attitudes that individuals have. This is different from traditional agenda setting because individuals join groups in order to avoid social dissonance and isolation. Therefore, in the past in order to belong, people would learn and adopt the agenda of the group. Now with the ease of access to media, people form their own agendas and then find groups that have similar agendas that they agree with. Advances in technology have made agenda melding easy for people to develop because there is a wide range of groups and individual agendas. The Internet makes it possible for people around the globe to find others with similar agendas and collaborate with them. In the past agenda setting was limited to general topics and it was geographically bound because travel was limited.

### ***Accessibility***

Accessibility can be defined as how much or how recently a person has been exposed to certain issues. As individuals try to make less cognitive effort in forming social



judgements, they are more likely to rely on the information that is easily accessible. This leads to a greater probability that more accessible information will be used when people make judgments on certain issues.

### ***Second Level Agenda Setting***

Agenda-setting research at the second level deals with the influence of *attribute* salience, whereas the first level agenda-setting illustrates the influence of *issue* salience. The focus at the first level agenda-setting which emphasizes media's role in telling us "what to think about" is shifted to media's function of telling us "how to think about it" at the second level agenda-setting. This second level considers how the agenda of attributes affects public opinion. Certain attribute agendas in the news with low psychological distance, drove compelling arguments for the salience of public agenda. The second-level agenda-setting differs from traditional agenda-setting in that it focuses on attribute salience, and public's attribute agenda is regarded as one of the important variables.

### ***Third Level Agenda Setting***

The most recent agenda-setting researches explore the extent to which the news media can transfer the salience of relationships among a set of elements to the public. The network agenda setting model

shows that the news media can bundle sets of objects or attributes and make these bundles of elements salient in the public's mind simultaneously. In other words, elements in people's mind are not linear as traditional approaches indicate. Instead, they are interconnected with each other to make a network-like structure in one's mind; and if the news media always mention two elements together, the audience will perceive these two elements as interconnected.

### ***Framing***

Framing focuses on the applicability of individual's pre-existing cognitive schema, which is different from agenda-setting and priming. Framing is the process of selecting certain aspects of an issue to gain people's attention and to lead them to a particular line of interpretation. Also, the media's selective uses of certain frames can affect the way the audience thinks about the issue. Both framing and agenda setting seem to examine which attributes or aspects of an issue are emphasized in the media. Some scholars see framing as an extension of agenda-setting (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009).

The advent of the Internet and social media has elicited a variety of opinions concerning agenda-setting effects online. Some have claimed that the power of traditional media has been weakened. Others think

that the agenda-setting process and its role have continued on the Internet, specifically on electronic bulletin boards. Traditional media such as newspapers and broadcast television are ‘vertical media’ in which authority, power and influence come from the top and flow down to the public. Nowadays vertical media are undergoing a rapid decline with the rise of horizontal media – the New Media that enable everyone to become a source of information and influence.

Meraz (2009) says that the limited research about the Internet is limiting the ecological validity of the agenda setting theory. He argues that although blogs and other forms of computer (or mobile) mediated communication appear to be quickly gaining ground at the expense of traditional news media outlets, more research needs to be done to vouch for the universality of the theory. He adds, however, that what is plainly visible is that in the prevailing hyper-competitive environment, traditional newsrooms have embraced newsroom blogs as an alternative vehicle for news delivery in an effort to survive.

McCombs (2005. p.553) observes that as the agenda setting theory evolved, scholars have applied its central notion widely to areas outside of political agendas such as “corporate reputations, professional sports, class room teaching and

religious beliefs.” Specifically, on sports, he notes that “the media agenda is defined by sports news and by broadcasts of actual sports events.” He states further: “Both (agenda setting and professional sports) have been staples of the mass media, even more so with the advent of cable and specialized sports channels. Agenda-setting links this broad media agenda to first and second level agenda-setting effects among the public and with subsequent attitudes and behavior, especially viewing sports on television, becoming a fan and attending sports events.”

A study by Lee, Choi and Lee (2003, cited by Eagleman, 2008), focusing on discussion board users’ coverage of World Cup soccer, observes, however, that agenda setting theory has been applied to the media’s coverage of sports in only a few instances. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the mass media’s coverage of sports to determine what agendas are being set by the media, or what issues in sport the media are telling its consumers to think about.

With regard to how the media agenda is set in sports, a study by Knoppers and Elling (2004, p.60) reveals journalists’ claim that the criteria they use to select stories they report on are “straight forward and simple and they themselves are ‘neutral’ in applying these criteria to

the selection process.” The journalists had asserted that they looked at the athlete or team with the top performance no matter who is performing when questioned about their objectivity in selecting athletes or team to cover. Based on this finding, it would seem that the sports journalists covering MLB (Major League Baseball) would always report on the athletes with the best performance records.

Kischefsky’s (2011) study of how popular American sports broadcasting group ESPN sets the agenda discusses agenda-setting and framing and then examines how the two concepts relate to the presentation of the lead stories on three ESPN outlets in comparison to non-ESPN outlets. While the ESPN outlets made similar decisions to that of the non-ESPN outlets on the priority of story placement, there were enough instances to show that ESPN did frame its stories in a way to draw more viewers. This was done by focusing more attention on teams from larger media markets and by keeping sports, such as NASCAR, in which ESPN has a financial stake in the success of the sport, on the minds of the audience.

Studies conducted on agenda setting and sports in Nigeria are not visible

enough. But a qualitative research by Onwumechili (2009) in which he investigated the meaning of the European football leagues’ domination of the Nigerian football market is quite instructive. Using a frame analysis of two daily sports newspapers, one national daily newspaper and a satellite television sports channel, the study found that the media use a frame of ‘Nigeria as colony’ to report football, thereby interpreting Europe as the center of modern football and Nigeria as periphery.

The researcher summarized the roles that the various media have played in the domination of Nigerian market by European football. According to him, television images from *SuperSport’s* coverage of European leagues create a taste for European football (soccer) among Nigerian fans. That taste creates the impetus for similar coverage of the European leagues in Nigerian newspapers and by Nigerian radio stations. The coverage in the local newspapers began with a focus on specific European clubs that had Nigerian players in their squads but gradually grew into coverage of entire foreign leagues.

While not disputing Onwumechili’s conclusion, Alao (2018) explains some of the influences behind the average Nigerian sport editor’s agenda setting, averring that an

editor takes final decisions on which story to publish based on several factors. In performing this role, he or she operates under several influences. These include: owner-investor interest; pressure group activities; commercial considerations such as advertisers; laws and regulations; social and political institutions and the audience. In the sports journalism sub-field, the two most critical influences are advertisers and the audience.

### **Methods**

The *research design* for this study integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection. The specific methods adopted are content analysis, survey and in-depth interview.

### **Survey**

The study was carried out in four major Nigerian cities where football is very popular: Aba, Kano, Ibadan and Lagos. The choices of Aba, Kano and Ibadan as study locations were informed primarily by the presence of Enyimba International Football Club in Aba, Kano Pillars Football Club in Kano and Shooting Stars Sports Club (otherwise known as “3SC”) in Ibadan. These are three of the most successful and best supported club sides in Nigerian football by virtue of their history and records of achievements. The fourth club side, Mountain of Fire Ministry (MFM) Football Club has a lower pedigree but was

purposely selected because of its location in Lagos.

A breakdown of the census figures shows that the four states selected for this study had the following populations: Abia State 2,881,380; Kano State 9,401,288; Oyo State 5,580,894 and Lagos State 9,113,605 (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2017).

### *Sampling Frame and Sampling Technique*

Non-availability of the official census figures specifically for the cities of Aba, Ibadan and Kano meant that the cities could not be used as frames from which to scientifically draw sample sizes for the survey of football fans for this study. To overcome the problem, the researcher adopted the random stratified sampling technique. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), explain that this technique involves dividing the population into homogenous groups, each group containing subjects with similar characteristics.

In this study, the researcher narrowed sampling to Nigerian soccer fans that actually go to the local stadium to watch domestic football with a logical assumption that they also watch the game, either domestic or foreign, on television. The homogenous characteristics which qualify them as good cases for this study is their love for soccer and their willingness to go out of

their way to pay an entry or gate fee to watch the game. The researcher deliberately took cases from soccer fans that patronized the local stadiums because they are typically passionate and knowledgeable about the game and would provide well informed responses to the questionnaire.

#### *Sample Size*

A sample of 2,000 soccer fans was proportionately taken from those who visited the stadiums on a typical big local match day. Five hundred (500) copies of the questionnaire were distributed in each stadium. A total of 1,878 of the questionnaires were returned completed in the following order: Aba - 560; Kano - 502; Ibadan - 407; and Lagos - 409. The dominant media in spots were selected for the study. Content analysis was conducted on one sport newspaper (*Complete Sports*), one sport radio station (*Brila FM*), one television sport channel (*SuperSport* on DSTV) and one sport website (*completesportsnigeria.com*). In-depth interviews were also conducted with the editor, proprietor, general manager or other relevant official in each media.

#### *Content Analysis*

Data collection for the content analysis of the newspaper selected for the study, *Complete Sports*, was done at the newspaper's library with the help of two research assistants

who were trained on the use of the coded sheets designed by the researcher. Ninety-one editions of *Complete Sports* covering three consecutive months, 1<sup>st</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 were analyzed. The period of coverage was chosen deliberately to be when both the Nigerian and foreign (particularly European) soccer seasons were in session in order to give both the domestic and foreign football content equal chances of being featured in the newspapers.

Content analysis of *Supersport* television and *Brila FM* sports radio were done by analyzing their program schedules downloaded from their respective websites, *supersport.com* and *brilafm.net*. Content analysis of *completesportsnigeria.com* was done by analyzing the website's daily newsletter featuring its top five stories delivered to its over 25,000 subscribers via email every day for the same three-month period, 1<sup>st</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2016.

#### *In-depth Interviews*

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the media officers of the club sides selected for the study to gain further insight about the teams and their supporters. Also, the following sports journalists were interviewed: Dr. Larry Izamoje, executive chairman, *Brila FM* radio; Mr. Felix Awogu, general manager, DSTV-*Supersport* Television; Mr.

Dare Esan, editor, *Complete Sports* newspapers; Mr. Nnamdi Ezekute, editor, *completesportsnigeria.com* website.

**Findings**

**Media coverage as influence on audience preference for domestic and foreign soccer**

Table 1: Preferred match to watch when favorite domestic and favorite foreign club sides are shown simultaneously on television.

Preference	%
Domestic club	11.1
Foreign club	88.9
Total	100.0 (n= 1878)

Majority of the respondents (89%) had preference for their foreign club sides when live football involving their favorite domestic and foreign club sides were shown simultaneously on television while only 11% had preference for their

domestic club side. However, most respondents demonstrated a great deal of patriotism when they had to choose between their favorite club side and their national team as shown in the next table below.

Table 2: Preference between favorite club side and national team

Preference	%
Favorite club	38.3
National team	57.7
Undecided	4.0
Total	100.0 (n= 1878)

Responses on Table 2 show that over half of the respondents had preference for their national team when matches involving their favorite club side (domestic or foreign) were shown on television simultaneously with that of the national team. However, 38% of the respondents still preferred to watch their favorite (domestic or foreign) club side while 4% were undecided. The responses reveal also that the respondents had significant support

for their national team over their favorite domestic or foreign club sides.

**Levels of impact across media types (print, broadcast and online) on audience preferences for domestic and foreign soccer**

The broadcast media (TV and radio) is the platform mostly patronized for soccer content, having 46.8 per cent. Newspapers attract about one-third of the audience who use it more for football content. (31.8).

Table 3: Media platform mostly used for soccer content

Media	%
Television	34.5
Radio	11.3
Newspapers	31.8
Online	19.9
No response	2.4
Total	100.0 (n= 1878)

Responses on Table 3 show that overall, about 35% respondents found television media as their most preferable platform for soccer content. 32% prefer the newspaper platform, 20% online platform while 11% prefer the radio platform. The indication of this is that television media has contributed the most to the soccer fans preference for foreign soccer over domestic soccer followed by newspapers, online media and then radio.

#### *Readership of soccer reports in Sports newspapers*

Data show that more than three-quarters (80%) of the respondents read soccer reports in sport newspapers, 18% do not while 2% offer no response. This sequence suggests that newspapers play an important role as a source of information for soccer fans and that it may be influential in determining the loyalty and attitude of the soccer fans toward their favorite teams either domestic or foreign. When asked to specify their favorite section of the soccer reports in the newspaper, about half (49%) of the respondents selected foreign soccer

reports, one quarter (25%) selected international (i.e. national teams) soccer reports while only 15% selected local soccer reports. The responses correspond with the high number of respondents who expressed a preference to watch matches of their favorite foreign team over their favorite domestic team.

#### *Listenership to soccer reports on radio*

Data confirm that most of the respondents (68%) do listen to soccer reports on radio, 27% do not while 5% offer no response. Furthermore, about 43% of the respondents indicated that their favorite football program on the radio was foreign soccer reports, about a quarter (24%) specified international soccer reports, while less than a quarter (18%) indicated local soccer as their favorite reports on the radio. This is in agreement with their choice of favorite soccer sections in the sports newspaper. It is evidence further of the popularity of foreign soccer reports among Nigerian soccer fans.

#### *Use of Internet for soccer reports*

Data gathered specify that more than half of the respondents (53%) did not read soccer reports on the internet, 41% used the internet for soccer reports while 6% did not offer a response. The data also show that, despite its relatively young age compared to traditional media such as newspaper and radio, internet use as a source of soccer reports was growing among Nigerian fans. This finding might also be associated with the fact that a large number of the respondents were youths and

internet access is readily available on their mobile phones. Therefore, we can deduce that the internet now plays an influential role in information dissemination, loyalty and attitude of the soccer fans toward their favorite team - domestic or foreign. This finding also indicates that the Nigerian soccer fans are dynamic in their choice of media for different types of soccer content and that media types have an influence on the consumption patterns of the fans.

Table 4: Categories of news on cover page of sport newspapers

Categories	$\mu$	$\sigma$	n
Local Soccer stories	3.2955	2.20941	132
Foreign Soccer stories	4.6296	2.10805	135
Stories on Nigerian Footballers Abroad	1.8732	1.01319	71
Other Sports Local Stories	1.0000	.00000	10
Other Sports Foreign Stories	1.0323	.17813	62
Display Adverts	2.0135	1.09160	74
Total	2.9256	2.13679	484

Table 4 shows that foreign soccer stories with a mean score of 4.63 featured prominently on the cover pages of the sport newspapers in Nigeria during the period under consideration. This is closely followed by local football stories ( $\mu=3.30$ ), display adverts ( $\mu=2.01$ ) and stories on Nigerian footballers

abroad ( $\mu=1.87$ ) on the cover page. Also, other sport foreign stories featured is ( $\mu=1.03$ ) while the least feature on the cover is other sports local stories, ( $\mu =1.00$ ). Thus, it can be deduced that foreign and local soccer stories usually feature prominently on the cover page of sport newspapers in Nigeria.



Table 5: Categories of news in inside pages of sport newspapers

Categories	$\mu$	$\sigma$	%
Local soccer stories	8.0147	4.12218	21
Foreign soccer stories	22.4000	7.78172	21
Stories on Nigerian footballers abroad	2.3953	1.42481	13
Other sports local stories	2.3171	1.00466	13
Other sports foreign stories	1.4857	1.22165	5
Display adverts	2.6727	2.18043	17
Classified adverts	5.228	3.08231	9
Total	8.0406	8.85217	100

Results in Table 5 show that foreign football stories with a mean score of 22.40 is the most prominent in the interior pages of the sport newspapers during the period under consideration. However, local football stories ( $\mu=8.02$ ), classified adverts ( $\mu=5.22$ ), stories on

Nigerian footballers abroad ( $\mu=2.40$ ) and other sports local stories ( $\mu=2.32$ ) also featured fairly inside the sport newspapers. The results indicate that foreign soccer stories dominated the inside pages of the sport newspapers during the period under consideration.

Table 6: Categories of photographs

Categories	$\mu$	$\sigma$	%
Local Soccer photographs	5.8880	5.19649	24
Foreign Soccer photographs	28.1556	10.66929	26
Photos on Nigerian Footballers Abroad	2.6711	1.65238	15
Other Sports Local Photos	1.4000	.75394	4
Other Sport Foreign Photos	2.3594	.89739	12
Display Adverts	5.2346	3.58912	16
Classified Adverts	1.2105	.41885	4
Total	10.3192	12.34281	100

As presented in Table 6, photographs on foreign soccer with a total mean score of 28.16 are the major feature of the sport newspapers in Nigeria during the period under consideration. Local soccer photographs ( $\mu=5.89$ ), display adverts ( $\mu=5.24$ ), photos

of Nigerian footballers abroad ( $\mu=2.67$ ), other foreign sports photographs ( $\mu=2.36$ ) and other local sports photographs ( $\mu=1.40$ ) are also visible. Thus, it can be inferred that foreign soccer photographs feature more in Nigerian sports newspapers.

## **How club sides managers and media practitioners perceive the influence of the media on audience preferences for domestic and foreign soccer**

The researcher used the outcome of the in-depth interviews with five leading sports editors/media proprietors to gain more insight into the connection between media influence and audience preferences for domestic and foreign football. The respondents were unanimous about their influences on their readers/listeners/viewers. Although they admitted that their perception of audience preference also influenced them (editors) in choosing and giving prominence to stories, when asked “who influences the other more: sports journalists or the audience?” all of them chose “sports journalists”. One of the editors explained graphically:

“I believe that the Nigerian sports media has promoted foreign football (soccer) to a level that our audience derives huge gratification from preferring foreign football. Most fans want to associate with Arsenal, Chelsea instead of Kwara United or Lobi Stars. The media started it and the audience got hooked. We now have no choice than to sustain the new passion especially because the quality and entertainment value of foreign football is indeed higher and

more attractive to the fans.”  
(Esan, 2018)

While football managers passionately appeal to sports journalists to reduce the attention given to foreign football in order to promote domestic football, the sports journalists see forces of demand and supply in an environment of hype-competition rather than patriotism and social responsibility.

“It has come to the level of economics now. We have to consider the bottom line because we have bills to pick. Advertisers prefer to associate more with foreign club sides because they want to reach the audience where they are. Naturally, we in media also have to do what will help us to stay in business and make profit so we provide the content that the fans and advertisers prefer. However, as professional journalists, we recognize our social responsibilities. We therefore have created several windows to promote local football as well. I can delightfully say that we are getting encouraging results from our audiences in this regard”  
(Izamoje, 2018).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It can be deduced from the findings that media coverage has influenced audience preference in favor of foreign soccer significantly. This alludes to the huge volume of foreign soccer content published

and broadcast in the Nigerian media.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents who expressed fondness for foreign soccer gave reasons for their choices (in order of preference) were the quality of football, quality of players and quality of infrastructure which they rated higher than what is available in domestic soccer. On the other hand, all the media practitioners interviewed claimed that their editorial decisions on domestic and foreign soccer coverage were influenced primarily by the demands of their audience. This suggests that audience preference influences media coverage of domestic and foreign soccer significantly and to a great extent.

This study firmly establishes the flexibility and independence of the audience in making decisions on which football content to consume. It also answers the research question in the affirmative that simultaneous media coverage of domestic and foreign soccer has a significant impact on audience preference. Specific media types impact significantly on audience preference for domestic and foreign soccer.

Furthermore, the demography of the audiences was very much at play in terms of their preferred media for soccer consumption. While television and newspapers were common to all the occupational categories of the respondents as

primary content source, majority of the students and unemployed used the internet as a secondary source whereas most public and private sector workers used radio as the secondary source.

Based on findings to this investigation, the researcher recommends as follow:

1. Rather than label Nigerian media offering predominantly foreign soccer content as “imperialist” or “unpatriotic”, Nigerian communication scholars should accept such media as business concerns motivated by the urge to satisfy their audiences so that they can generate revenue. The media should therefore be cultivated and encouraged to promote domestic football.
2. Managers and publicists of domestic soccer in Nigeria should see the comparatively lower patronage of domestic soccer by Nigerian fans as a challenge and be more creative on how to attract and engage the fans in order to boost match-day attendance as well as followership in the media. The media officers of the club sides interviewed in this study enumerated the efforts each of them has been making to engage the fans. It is recommended that these efforts should be sustained especially

the use of social media which has grown in popularity among Nigerian soccer fans.

3. Managers of domestic soccer should also address the reasons cited by respondents in this study for their lukewarm attitude to domestic football. These include corrupt practices in all areas by officials especially among public servants (Omojola, 2009; 2011), the low quality of organized games, low quality infrastructure and poor refereeing. Improvement in these areas will make the local league more attractive to fans. In particular, poor officiating and poor soccer pitches have been a sore point on soccer for a long time in the country. The Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL) should end the curse by insisting on standards. Incompetent and corrupt officiating should be seriously penalized. Such measures will collectively improve the overall quality of domestic football and attract greater coverage and followership by the media and the audience respectively.
4. Inadequate funding has often been identified as one of the major challenges of domestic soccer in Nigeria. This is because majority of the local football club sides are sponsored by state governments

who run these clubs on shoestring budgets. Club managers should attract private sector funding especially from big multinational corporations operating in Nigeria. The federal government can encourage such sponsorship with incentives such as tax rebates and other preferential considerations. Improved funding will help retain in the Nigerian league more players who presently seek for better contracts abroad, and also attract foreign players to the Nigerian league.

5. Nigerian soccer fans should show greater patriotism in patronizing the domestic league despite its shortcomings. Such patronage will encourage greater corporate participation and attract more funding from sponsors who want their advertising and publicity to reach the huge football fan base. The resultant cash inflow can be used to address the shortcomings in the domestic game to the benefit of all stakeholders.
6. The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) which is the government agency that regulates electronic media content in Nigeria could introduce additional measures to support local content,

specifically domestic football content the way it has done for Nollywood (Daramola, Hamilton, & Omojola, 2014), which has turned out to be one of the world's biggest movie

industries. Such protectionist policies have been used by other countries such as England to attract football fans to the stadium.

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