

## Sports Journalism Reporting in the Era of Digital Media in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The advancement in technology has created a better way of sports reporting in journalistic engagement, which pave way for brand journalism known as specialised reporting, in which sports is one of the beats. Specialised reporting has become a necessary part of the press because of the need to address the inadequacies presented by straightforward news reports. Society is getting more complex with time so are the people. Mere news stories are no longer adequate to address the yearnings of complex human societies for complex angles to stories. Today, the diversity of media audiences has necessitated a variety of reporting beats which gave birth to what is known as specialised reporting. Within this context, the media have been associated with sports for a long time. The paper articulates that the role of the media has always been vital in boosting any activity of sports. The media have got a focal position, particularly in communication of fresh information, sharing the viewpoint of the masses, and bringing live sports and other activities to the consumer. The fusion of sports and the media, and Television, in particular, has helped propel and transform major events such as the FIFA world cup and the Olympic Games. Based on the opportunities offered by digital technologies, sports reporting has opened an opportunity for many hidden talents to come to the limelight and it has helped in improving infrastructures among other merits. The paper concludes that with the arrival of new actors in the journalistic field, the heavy use of social media and its impact on sports consumption patterns is imperative. The search for new business models for news organisations and the disrupting technology that is being explored and applied as innovation in the sports coverage all require new conceptual approaches to better understand the sports news.*

### Keywords

challenges;  
opportunities;  
reporter; specialized;  
sports; and  
technology



## I. Introduction

Sports has transformed to the state of a big industry with its advertisement incomes, sponsorships, live broadcasts, club products devoted to the fans, club's stock exchange securities, sport materials sold in the stores, match ticket fees paid by the audiences setting their hearts on the club, combines cards and even with the 'special credit cards of the banks for the fans' and it has come off from its amateur spirit and transformed to a professionalized phenomenon. At the present time, an important reason for the sports to become popular is also most of the youngsters who saw that sports yields money and what is more, great amounts of money; choose the sports not only for pleasure but also, as a profession (Aondover et al., 2022a).

Mass media has assumed a big function for the sports to come into prominence and they have become the driving power to have the sports reach large masses of people. Together with works devoted to fast and technological progress encountered in the field of communication, a development related to sports taking place in any place of the world can be transmitted all around the world. With the extensive usage of different communication instruments; distribution and transfer of the information related to sports has gained acceleration (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010).

The \$4.48 billion television agreement that began in 2007 between the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) and four US networks is only one of myriad examples that can be used to illustrate the growing significance of sport communication in the sport industry. The 70% increase in the value of British television rights of English Premier League for the 2016-19 seasons with Sky and BT paying a combined £5.136 billion to show games is another shining example of how sports broadcast have become a lucrative business (Bowman & Cranmer, 2014).

According to Hynes (2015) the EPL is therefore not simply a football competition that entertains and showcases some of the world's best footballers. It is a high-end, commercially intensive industry, which has attracted investment for capital gain on a global scale. Most of the investments in EPL clubs are conscious interventions by global elites whose wealth stems from much broader, unrelated, capitalist enterprises and their focus in owning a football club represents a diversification of their commercial interests born of a unification of the EPL as a 'rich man's playground' with high prestige and cultural kudos among the elite trans-national capitalist class to which they belong. Rupert Murdoch's investment in the media is a shining example of how global media cartel dominates the industry (Aondover et al., 2022b).

The growth in sport communication has been witnessed around the globe. As Grainger and Andrews (2005) observed that given both the broad appeal of global sporting mega-events as well as regional interest in televised coverage of local teams and competitions, it is perhaps hardly surprising that sport has become a central component of the strategies of the global media." In an examination of mediated sport, Bernstein and Blain (2002) noted that sport and the media have become associated to such an extent that it is often difficult to discuss sport in modern society without acknowledging its relationship with media.

Rowe (2007) argues that sports journalism is an increasingly significant feature of the press yet is subject to considerable criticism, as summarized by the familiar jibe that it is the 'toy department of the news media.' While there is an element of cultural snobbery and prejudice in this charge, sports journalism should not be exempted from scrutiny regarding conventional professional criteria within the news arena. Sports communication has become a lucrative business that billions of dollars have been invested into the industry.

While sports communication can be described as any form of communicating meaning, symbol and the activities of athletes, sports journalism is an act of practicing the profession of reporting, writing or broadcasting of sporting events. Sports journalism may be in different forms such as news story, interview, analysis, match fact or commentary.

## II. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Sports Journalism in Nigeria

Sports journalism is a form of writing, reporting or broadcasting of reports on matters pertaining to sporting topics and competitions. There are many different forms of sports journalism, ranging from play-by-play and game recaps to analysis and investigative journalism on important developments in the sport. In Nigeria, despite the abundance of human and material resources, the country is yet to optimize its full potentials in the area of sports. Several factors may be accountable for this state of affairs which may not exclude institutional, management and leadership challenges (Dickson, 2005).

The media at certain instances have also shared part of the spoils for promoting foreign sporting institutions and event rather than giving adequate attention to promoting indigenous sporting event, sport journalism in Nigeria have often be criticised to have tilted more towards covering European event and athletes than local talent promotion. Therefore asking questions of how well sport journalists understand their role to the development of sport in Nigeria in general and Rivers State in particular. Nevertheless, the media have a long history of significant contribution to sports development. Long before Super Sports, the satellite based sports TV channel, Fabio Lanipekun had led a generation of Nigerians that include the late Yinka Craig, Hamed Adio, Waheed Olagunju, Rotimi Bisiriyu, Charles Ojugbana and others to pioneer sports broadcast journalism in Africa (Sho-silva, 1984).

The versatile radio broadcasters like Ernest Okonkwo, Ishola Folorunsho and others cannot be easily forgotten, their football commentary made many to stay glued to their radio, thereby encouraging many corporate bodies to fund sports. The magical moments in our football, including the many years of frustrating efforts to qualify for the FIFA world cup, would not have been so memorable without these incredibly talented broadcasters, whose exploits on radio contributed in many ways inspiring young Nigerians to play sport (Osagie, 1987).

The newspapers were not left behind. The Daily Times, Nigerian Tribune, New Nigerian and others devoted many pages to the coverage of sports and because of this extensive coverage of sporting events, sponsors provided funds needed for sports development. It would be recalled that at a point in Nigeria, volleyball actually rivaled football for sponsors because the head of the Volleyball Federation then, Eddie Aderinokun used the media to make the game so popular that sponsors were running after the federation (Abdullahi, 2013).

In fact, virtually all the sports had sponsors back then. Athletics enjoyed the support of Mobil, UNIC Insurance, Folawiyo Nigeria Limited, Nestle, Nigeria Breweries; while Table Tennis had Cadbury, Lever Brothers, Nigeria Breweries, Coscharis, and of course, Chief Molade Okoya Thomas who had sponsored the Asoju Oba Championship in the last 44 years, to mention but a few. In the area of ensuring good governance and ethics, the sporting press ensured that officials were constantly on their toes and did what was best for the nation's sports. Perhaps, because of the media's watchdog role, sports administration was so good that the whole of Africa looked up to Nigeria for lessons in sports administration (Aondover et al., 2023).

Media have also contributed to unearthing new talents, in more direct ways outside their mandates. Perhaps the most remarkable in the history of sport in Nigeria was the discovery of Sunday Oliseh by Mumuni Alao, an illustrious media practitioner. In the build up to the 1994 Africa Nations Cup and USA 1994 FIFA World Cup, Nigeria was sorely in need of a defensive midfielder. The then national team coach, Clemence Westerhoff had searched far and near without success. Then Alao, on a trip to Belgium, saw Oliseh playing

and interviewed him. Upon returning to Nigerian, in his column in Complete Football (1994), Alao wrote the famous article, “Westerhoff, here is your destroyer.” The Dutch acted immediately and Oliseh was invited into the national team. His contribution to Nigeria’s victory at Africa Nations Cup in 1994, performance at USA 94 FIFA World Cup and our winning the soccer gold medal at Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games is now the stuff of legend. Some media houses in Nigeria have also participated actively in direct sports development. Channels TV, a medium owned by John Momoh has emulated its counterparts in Europe by taking its contribution to sports development beyond informing, educating and entertaining. Channels TV sponsors a grassroots football tournament on Children’s Day in Lagos. Young footballers train and look forward to this championship yearly. Channels TV also contributes to the participation of children with Down- syndrome in the Special Olympics. Africa Independent Television (AIT) has also organized an annual U-17 Championship in memory of Late Ladi Lawal and the list continues to grow, the number of media houses making contribution to the overall development of sport in Nigeria (Kurfi et al., 2021).

## **2.2 Sports and the Media- A Symbiotic Process**

At the beginning of this paper, it was established that the media and sports are mutually dependent on one another. Many scholars have shared their knowledge on how both cannot do without each other and this section would at length establish this fact. According to Burton (2010, p.269), “sport and media now have a symbiotic relationship in which sport is a staple of media content (and income), and the media are essential to the finances and promotion of sports....” The explanation here establishes the fact that their mutual dependency lie in promotion versus income. As the media promote sports, sports on the other hand, generate income for the media. Also, Bernstein and Blain (2002) noted that sport and the media have become associated to such an extent that it is often difficult to discuss sport in modern society without acknowledging its relationship with the media.

Sports and the media, according to Coakley (2009, p.394) “are interconnected parts of our lives. Sports provide valuable media content and many sports depend on the media for publicity and revenues. His view of their relatedness differs from Burton’s view which sees sport and media as having a symbiotic relationship in which sport is a staple of media content and the media are essential to the finances and promotion of sport. Coakley’s view focuses more on news value vs. publicity and revenue as sporting events serve as news to the media while the publications of such events help in generating revenue (like media helping in sell of tickets) and creating awareness.

Rose (2004) gave his views on the relationship between sports and the media. His first point supported Coakley’s view, according to his view, sports and the media have coexisted since the advent of newspapers, onto radio and through into television. However it was the growth of television as a significant cultural form during the 1960’s that put the relationship between sport and the media on the public agenda. Television increased the influence upon sport because of its accessibility to the mass population. Suddenly instead of watching games from the stadium, you could watch from the comfort of your own home, for a fee of course. So to the media sport is relatively low cost, high appeal programming. In return sport receives funding, advertisement and coverage of its big events and major stars, in turn impacting upon the popularity of the sport.

Sport's relationship with the media has many positive aspects. These include the mass media’s ability to reach the general public and introduce them into the game. The quality of printed sports reporting is comparable to that of audiovisual media outlets, particularly with regards to its intermittency. Also, the media have played a strong role in defining sports and

conferring status to the stars of the game and in return generate revenue for themselves. The modern press, obsessed by the cult of personality and eager to play to its demands in order to sell more papers has helped to forge a culture in which footballers have been transformed into minideities. Leaving aside the David Beckham phenomenon, the profiles of a host of lesser players is exaggerated through, the media (Greenslade, 2003).

The media have come to play a significant role in the constant reformulation of the term 'sport'. Our every sense of the meaning of the category sport has been shaped by the emergence of the sporting press. So the media's biggest impact on the sporting world actually determines what constitutes sport? It has come to almost be recognized that an activity is only a sport if it receives newspaper coverage. Media coverage of an event can make or break it. If a medium covered more Women's football, would it increase in popularity? Sports on television can help viewers get a 'taste' for them and perhaps inspire them to experience the live event. The media can determine what or who you watch; it can alter your perception of a player or team. The media's level of influence upon sport is unimaginable (Rose, 2004). From the ongoing, it is clear that the relationship between media and sports cannot be underestimated as both depend on each other for survival.

### **2.3 The Impact of Globalization on Sports' Reporting in Africa**

The concept of globalization has been a controversial issue among scholars. While some scholars view it as the hope for a better and friendlier world where people relate and benefit from each other; other scholars, especially scholars from the third world countries believe it to be, according to Eregare and Afolabi (2009), "another form of recolonization." Theories like 'dependency theory' by Komakoma (2005) were established to illustrate the limitations of the concept of globalization. The theory assumes that "western cultural values such as consumerism and individualism, expressed implicitly in the media, were being exported with the objective of altering third world cultural milieus." He pointed out that development could not have been said to have occurred, when it revolved round the third world countries imitating the western culture by the aid of the media (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

Thus, the media are taken to be central to the process of globalization. Komakoma (2005) observed that another theory that emanated from the controversial concept of globalization is the 'Cultural/Media Imperialism.' The Media Imperialism thesis has been described as, "the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or context of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of other countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected", Boyd-Barrett (1977) also explained that when a single company or corporation controls all the media in a country or countries, standardizing and commercializing products of one culture for the media consumption of another, media imperialism is in operation.

Komakoma noted that according to one of the most prolific writers of the Media Imperialism thesis Herbert Schiller, "media imperialism develops in a world system within which the single market and the terms and character of production are determined in the core of the market, and radiated outward to the periphery." Schiller's argument centers on when some individuals (the core) are in control of the market and determine how others (the periphery) should operate. A country with such economy, according to the economist is called 'a capitalist state'. Here, marginalization and exploitation of the periphery by the core is the order of day. Onwumechili (2009) noted that the expansion of capitalist market forced ownership changes in Nigeria as was in the case in most of Africa.

Hence, development of Africa media in terms of producing local contents is hindered which according to Omoera and Ibagere (2010) is caused by a strong connection between the consumptive social attitude and the globalization agenda which continuously buys up the economy of the producing nation and slows down the economic, industrial and technological growth of the consuming nation.

#### **2.4 The Nexus that Exist between the Media and Sports**

Mass media and sport have long been associated. The role of mass media has always been vital in boosting any activity of sport. Media has got a focal position, particularly in communication of the fresh information, shaping the viewpoint of the masses, and bringing live sports and the like other activities to the consumer at his/her convenience. In the present era, close interaction between the media and sport is indispensable. Both feed one another; sport needs publicity and mass approach to the majority of the population, which media do, whereas media feeds on the sports news provided by the different activities of sport. Formerly print and electronic media, mainly consisting of newspapers, magazines, and TV coverage, were the chief sources of media for the dispersal of information. But with the explosion of IT technology and with the advent of the internet, the horizon of the media has significantly widened. Examining the available literature, this study is an effort to separately evaluate the impact of different tools employed as a source of the interaction of the mass media with various aspects of the sport.

According to Burton (1999), the business of sports and sporting celebrities are represented through the media in ways that tend to conceal the commodified nature of the relationship between sports, sports people, and the media. Jarvie (2006) also asserts that large parts of the society are immersed in media sport and virtually no aspect of life is untouchable.

Furthermore, sports and the media especially television are interwoven because of the visual entertainment appeal the television comes with. Similarly, Miller et al (2001) said that sports and media now have a symbiotic relationship in which sport is a staple of media content and the media are essential to the finances and promotion of sports (Moradi, 2010).

The main roles of mass media include informing, supporting the law, supervising to obey the law correctly, creating suitable fields to affront different opinions, providing continuous instruction, helping cultural and thinking growth of society, providing instructive entertainment, and creating partnering, cooperative inspiration to develop programs (Moradi, 2010). Sport has been changed part of daily life in international political, cultural, economic, organizational, social, and interpersonal relationships and sports value is higher than its symbolic role of it (Etang, 2006).

### **III. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 The Importance of Sports Reporting**

The importance of sports reporting in society cannot be underrated. The media has no doubt brought the sport to the doorstep of fans. First and foremost, sports reporting is one of the areas through which the media plays its entertainment role. Sports play a vital role in keeping society moving as it helps divert people's attention especially youths from all forms of social vices. Boyle (2006) state that there is no doubt that sports have become increasingly global in the contemporary mediated age. The fusion of sports and the media, and Television, in particular, has helped propel and transform major events such as FIFA world cup and the Olympic Games. In this vein, the following could be seen as the major importance of sports reporting:

Sport Development imagine sports without media coverage. This obviously will be a big turn-off to fans and even sports personalities. Sports reporting has no doubt brought about a transformation in the area of sports as it employs some sections of society. Sports talents will happily go into the field knowing fully well that the world is watching and they stand of chance of making a great career.

Money Spinner there is no gainsaying that sports especially football has become a revenue-generating avenue in recent years as many business tycoons have recognized sport as an area to invest their money. While the media use sports to increase its audience and thereby increase its chances of advertising revenue, the sports teams also get publicity from the media and also receive some percentages of the revenue generated by the media as a result of sports coverage. This is what is called TV rights. For example, the multi-choice company that owns DSTV bought the right to show football games in England and Spain. They generate their money through satellite subscriptions by customers and thus remit some part of it to all the football teams it covers. Advertisers also seize the opportunity to display their products and service because they know there are millions of sports fans out there watching. In this vein, both the sports teams and media smile home with a huge amount of revenue.

Improving the Economy sports reporting provides the avenue to preview the situation of facilities in intending host countries of international tournaments and if the facilities and state of infrastructure in the host nation are below standard, sports writers expose the situation and this attracts development in such areas. In this vein, nation(s) billed to host international sports events have the opportunity to improve infrastructures and amenities like roads, good transportation equipment, better electricity and water supply, decent hospitals, and what have you. This includes a security network in the host city and other parts of the nation.

Exposing Budding sports Talent The coverage of local leagues, academies, and other grassroots sports expose upcoming talent to the world after which international scouts go after them. Sometimes, sports reporters conduct documentaries in some areas in a bid to expose young talents and bring them to the limelight. Without such initiative, such talent may likely end up unnoticed.

Sports Unite Societies a typical example is the nature of support the national team gets when they play football. The support cuts across tribes and religions supporting the team. Sports exhibit the spirit of sportsmanship, which ensures opponents shake hands before games while some opponents hug and exchange jerseys after games.

Agent of Tourism sports reporters go as far as covering beautiful areas close to the venue of sport competition in a bid to show guests what to expect when coming into the city. These usually attract tourists to the cities for sightseeing and holidays in various points of attraction. Sports reporting also exposes lifestyles of host cities which tourists might find interesting and may trigger them to come back to appreciate such cities.

### **3.2 Sources of News for a Sport Reporter**

Sports reporting is a diverse area of reporting and as such there are many sources where a reporter can get his news. Nwabueze (2009) stated that some of the following places help a sports reporter to get a sports news:

*Sports Personalities:* every sports personality is a news source thus a sports reporter should not miss the opportunity of getting access to sports persons. Virtually every interview with a sports personality is usually an exclusive story to that reporter or his media. So, the reporter should make effort to get access to players, coaches, athletes, managers, promoters, scouts, physical trainers, team doctors, and even club owners.

*Sports Venues, Complexes, and Training Grounds:* a reporter goes to the stadium to watch and report a game, not to catch fun and just report the results to the audience, it is to carefully report the game action by action and buttressing it with corresponding pictures. In this era of social media, many sports reporters are expected to report actions as they happen. These are places where sports games and training take place and thus sports reporters get information to their audience. Sometimes the reporter has a chance to report incidences during players' training that ordinary football fans may not get to see. Thus sometimes you see reporters telling their audience the number of players that have reported to camp and stories related to players' preparation for games.

*Sports regulatory and Governing Bodies:* all sports have their own governing and regulatory bodies. Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is the overall body that regulates all footballing activities in the world. Any press release from FIFA is newsworthy. There have also been corruption scandals in FIFA which is also a good source of news for the sports reporter. There is also the body that supervises and regulates African Football that is, the Confederation of African Football (CAF). There are many other bodies like the World Tennis Federation, Federation International Basketball Association (FIBA), and many others which are all sources of news for the sports reporter. It is pertinent to say that sports ministries and parastatals may also come under this category.

*Personal Observation:* this is when the investigative instinct of the sports reporter comes to play. The reporter needs to observe sporting issues around him to get a news story for his audience. Sometimes there are salient issues like player selections, the performance of a particular player, and other issues related to the state of sports equipment and facilities.

*Inside Sources:* these inside sources are usually some special sources that are privy to some information. Thus, sports reporters should have access to these sources for exclusive information and other scoops on the latest development in decisions and policies related to sports.

*Relations of Sports Celebrities:* recently, a picture went viral on the internet. It was said to be the picture of the mother to late Nigerian Football international, Rashidi Yekini. Sadly, the woman is living in penury, and the attention of the general public and government has been called to come to the aid of Yekini's mother. Thus relations of sports celebrities are one important source that can help in the development of the sport in any part of the world.

*Autobiographies:* many sports personalities do write their biographies exposing certain information that was initially not in the media. Comments made in such publications constitute major news across the globe. For example, Former Manchester United Sir Alex Ferguson released his autobiography where he revealed some inside information about some players and technical staff.

*The Media:* a good number of sports stories carried in sports pages of publications in Nigeria were usually monitored and retrieved from the international sports media. There are many sports media like Brila FM, Super Sports, and the like. These media do reveal information that may need further verification. The reporter can use this kind of information to develop a good feature story.

*The Internet:* the internet has become a good source of information for every news reporter and the sports reporter is not an exception. Every sports team has a website and social media pages. Thus posts on their websites are also a source of news for the reporter.



### 3.3 Ethical Issues and Challenges of Sports Reporting

Ethical issues in journalism are virtually the same in all areas of specialized reporting. It is expected that every reporter should cultivate the ethics of accuracy, fairness, balance, and all other ethics of journalism. Accuracy is especially important in sports reporting because it deals more with numbers and a reporter doesn't have any room for mistakes. The same goes for balance, fairness, and other ethics which have been subtly explained in the techniques of sports reporting above. Among some of the challenges of sports reporting include:

1. The need to travel from one place to another. This means the reporter has to adapt to the ways things are done in every location he goes to cover a sport.
2. Financial challenge is another issue every reporter including sports reporters faces in the course of his duties. Sometimes he has to travel all by himself to a sporting location to cover events.
3. The sports reporter also stands the risk of being killed or injured in a situation of crowd violence.
4. A sports reporter may also have the problem of internet connection especially when he has to update a social media platform during reporting a game.

Interestingly, the media have been advised on several occasions via different platforms to ensure their staff is properly remunerated to ensure they cover their beats effectively. Stakeholders in sports can also hold seminars and workshops on how to cover beats effectively while following the ethics of journalism. Fans should also be cautioned against violence as the game is fair play.

## IV. Conclusion

At this point, it is pertinent to say that sports have gone beyond mere instruments of entertainment. It has become a very lucrative business with many investors rushing to invest their money into one football team or the other. Sports reporting has opened an opportunity for many hidden talents to come to the limelight and it has helped in improving infrastructures among other merits. For the sports reporter, the beat is entertaining and at the same time demanding. Thus, a sports reporter has a lot of principles to follow if he wants to become a successful sports reporter. Sources of news for sports reporters are countless even though they may face some challenges in the process of news gathering. The paper concludes that with the arrival of new actors in the journalistic field, the heavy use of social media and its impact on sports consumption patterns is imperative. The search for new business models for news organisations and the disrupting technology that is being explored and applied as innovation in the sports coverage all require new conceptual approaches to better understand the sports news.

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