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# **Globalisation, Football and emerging urban ‘tribes’: Fans of the European Leagues in a Nigerian city**

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# GLOBALISATION, FOOTBALL AND EMERGING URBAN ‘TRIBES’: FANS OF THE EUROPEAN LEAGUE CLUBS IN A NIGERIAN CITY

*Victor U. Onyebueke*

## *Abstract*

Football is arguably the world’s most popular and globalised sport, and it has been implicated in the continuing efforts in social science disciplines to understand current globalisation processes. Electronic colonialism, the metonym for the dominance of global mediascape by transnational media corporations like Sky and Fox has combined with the ongoing commodification of football to create a complex world-wide web of football authorities, clubs, players and agents, sport equipment makers, sponsors and advertisers, the media, cable and satellite television companies and fans. The central logic in this chain of events is that transnational broadcast of live football matches of European leagues is generating a massive base of ‘long distance’ fans of elite football clubs and star players across developed and developing countries. The current paper investigates the interplay between transnational football broadcasting and football viewing centres with a view to identifying the spatial, economic and socio-cultural correlates of the rising incidence of the so-called ‘electronic’ fandom in urban Nigeria. Drawing on a fieldwork conducted between 18<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015 in the city of Enugu in Southeast Nigeria, the paper argues that ritualised television spectating within the confines of various viewing centres in the city creates the social contexts that positively reinforce fan behaviours, values, and attitudes. Employing the emergent notion of sports fans as consumers, the paper highlights how this expanding television-mediated fan base has become a veritable target market for many Nigerian companies, and concludes by speculating on the economic and socio-cultural knock-on effects of this emergent phenomenon.

African fans have become intense supporters of European teams, although the fans are separated by distance and the absence of a personal or historical connection. Transnational television broadcasting has bridged the two continents. (G. A. AKINDES, 2011: 2186)

## **1.0 Introduction**

With the globalisation of political, economic and socio-cultural fabrics of society, the world has undeniably become a ‘global village’. Driven predominantly by ‘time-space compression’ – David Harvey’s (1989) shorthand for technological and economic innovation-driven elision of spatio-temporal distances –, this global integration is culminating in a transmutable state of affairs in which “spaces of very different worlds seem to collapse upon each other, much as the world’s commodities are assembled in the supermarket and all manner of sub-cultures get juxtaposed in the contemporary city” (p. 301-302). A cursory review of globalisation literature not only evinces these deep-seated globalisation-city interlinkages (see Short & Kim, 1999), but also explains how totalising and sometimes paradoxical they can be. In other words, hardly any facet of urban life is unsusceptible to globalisation’s assimilating effects: from the changing forms of work/employment, communication expansion with the attendant information overload, to cultural differentiation in lifestyle, perceptions and preferences such as ‘electronic’<sup>1</sup> or ‘long distance’<sup>2</sup> fandom or as clearly conveyed in the opening quote. Incidentally, this new form of football fandom, which we shall for consistency sake borrow Akindes’ (2011) ‘electronic fandom’, is not just an African or developing country obsession but has become a global preoccupation (see Kerr & Emery, 2011; Dixon, 2014 for example).

Even though Nigeria has a thriving football league (the Nigerian Premier League, NPL) with 20 full-fledged teams, a growing number of its citizens are devoted fans of teams and players in European leagues and championships. This upsurge of new interest in televised

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<sup>1</sup> The terminology was used by Akindes (2011) to denote fandom in an era in sub-Saharan Africa when “electronic viewership of live games, rather than stadium attendance, has become the main medium for experiencing live football” (p. 2180).

<sup>2</sup> This term is borrowed from Farred (2002).

spectating of foreign matches, this preoccupation has become a major talking point in the country, as can be seen in both academic writings (see Akindes, 2011; Majaro-Majesty, 2011; Omobowale, 2009; Adetunji, 2013; Onwumechili & Oloruntola, 2014, for example) and the popular press (Okeke, 2009; Olonilua, 2012; Famutimi, 2013). These two broad categories of publications some respects. While the academic works have sought to analytically examine the origins, practices and the attitudes of this particular fan phenomenon, the newspapers and magazines tend to be more alarmist though reflective, in ways that visualise these fans as estranged local supporters the poor-performing Nigerian football management (Amiesimaka, 2012 for example). However, most of these studies are aspatial in nature despite the fact that electronic fandom as a phenomenon is essentially space-orientedness (see Eastman & Land, 1997; Dixon, 2014). Another identifiable lacuna in the emerging Nigerian scholarship on the subject is the predominant insular outlook of many of the works that seem to divorce the everyday practices of the fans from the wider socio-economic environment of consumption and marketing, dominated by product retailers (clothes, souvenirs, beer, etc.), gambling outfits, and fund raisers of all sorts.

The current paper investigates the interplay between transnational football broadcasting and football viewing centres with a view to identifying how the interfacing of spatial, economic and socio-cultural factors do reinforce the rising incidence of electronic fandom in urban Nigeria. Drawing on a fieldwork conducted between 18<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015 in the city of Enugu, South East subregion of Nigeria, the paper argues that ritualised television spectating within the confines of various viewing centres in the city do create the social contexts that reinforce fan behaviours, values, and attitudes. The specific objectives are: (i) to map the spatial distribution of the football viewing centres in the study area; and (ii) to the identity construction and confirmation behaviours of the fans as well as clubs and players preferences. The paper is organised in five distinct but related sections.

Section One, which is about to end, introduces the connection between globalisation, media globalisation to be specific, and the emergence of the so-called electronic fandom. Section Two highlights the research context as well as the research methodology. Then, Section Three reviews the facts and contenting concerns in the interdisciplinary literature involving transnational television broadcasting and the straddling of national borders by fans of foreign clubs. A focus on the rising scholarly interest on the subject in Nigeria brings the matter closer to home. Section Four presents the empirical results of the survey showing the distribution of football viewing centres in Enugu and evidence of their centrality in the continuation of electronic fan in the city. Finally, Section Five discusses the results in the light of extant literature on the subject and Nigerian development prospects, and concludes with recommendations for both research and policy.

## **2.0 Research Context and Methodology**

### ***2.1 Study Area***

The study focuses on the city of Enugu, the capital of Enugu State, and the most important administrative centre in the South East geo-political subregion of Nigeria (see Figure 1). It is located on Longitude 6° 26' 24" and Latitude N 7° 29' 39" E, and covers an area of over 10,531.93 square metres with a 2013 projected population of 904,775. The city is also known the 'coal city', an appellation that signifies Enugu's past role, and undoubtedly a measure of its global reach profile<sup>3</sup>, as a key Nigeria coal mining urban centre. Today with the demise of coal production the city fulfills other administrative and socio-cultural functions in the subregion.

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<sup>3</sup> Contemporary globalisation theory has been berated for its omission of what Cooper (2001: 190) calls "the historical depth of interconnections" involving trade, manpower and administration. For a corroboration, see Robinson (2002) and Njoh (2006).

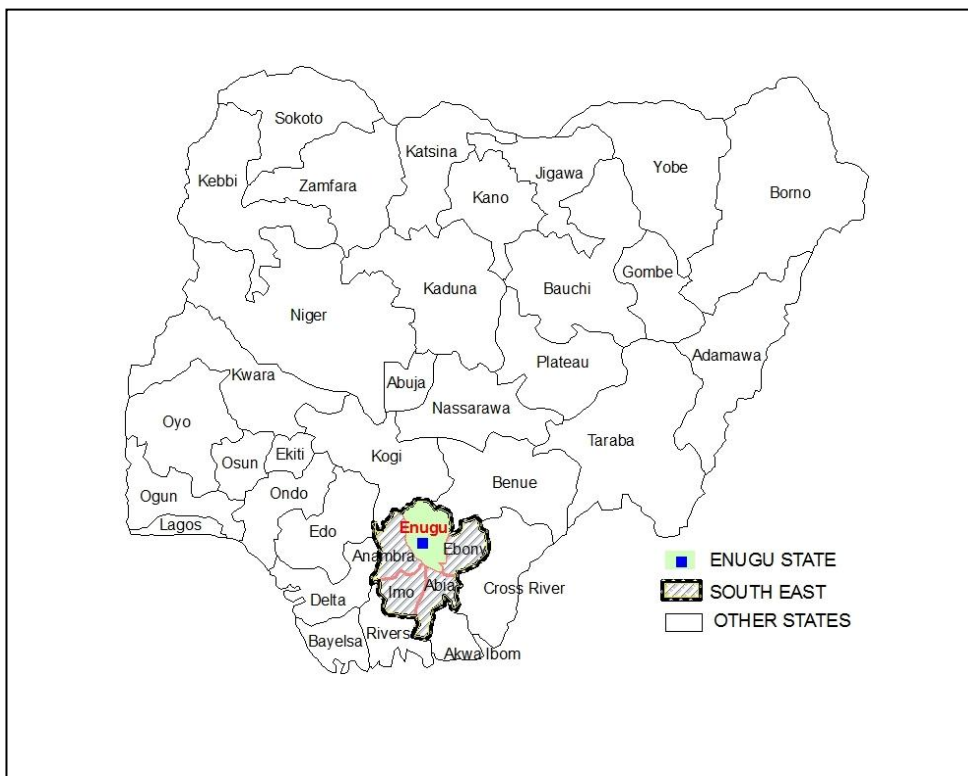


Figure 1: A map of Nigeria showing the city of Enugu, the capital of Enugu State in South East subregion. It comprises of Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Imo States (Author's drawing).

Like some other major Nigerian cities, Enugu is significant of urban Nigeria, and three rationales account for the city's selection as case study. One, the *levels of analysis* concept infers that "the urban system is characterized by political, social, and economic processes occurring at the local, regional, national, and global levels" (Andranovich & Riposa, 1993: 16). Two and a converse of the former, Enugu (like any city other city for that matter) functions as a prism through which globalization processes can be articulated (see Short and Kim, 1999). Three, the researcher's prior knowledge and familiarity with the city likewise influenced the case study selection.

## ***2.2 Study Methodology***

The fieldwork took place over a period of about two and half months (between 18<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015) in the city of Enugu in Southeast Nigeria. It adopted the *mixed methods design*, involving visualisation or observation, enumeration and focus group

discussions (FGDs) in order to generate both qualitative and quantitative statistics. The enumeration of the viewing centres was carried out with the aid of three paid field assistants equipped with GPS (Etrex Garmin). The survey covered 14 major neighbourhoods, namely: Abakpa, Achara, Asata, Garki, GRA<sup>4</sup>, Idaw River, Independence, New Haven, Ogbete or Coal Camp, Ogui, Ogui New, Railway Quarters, Trans-Ekulu, and Uwani layouts. A good number of these viewing centres are easily identifiable but the field assistants were required to walk through the streets and to ascertain exact streets and locations from boys and young men, the group most inclined to fanship. Yet, it is still possible a few may have mistakenly been omitted. Working in conjunction these aides, it was easier to familiarise with the various viewing centres, and subsequently, guided by publicised match fixtures, to embark on targeted reconnaissance that involved watching live matches at the selected centres (participant-observation).

Three viewing centres, Agu ‘Stadium’, Jim-Iyke Viewing Centre, and Ejindu Park in Garki, Ogbete (Coal Camp), and Ogui New neighbourhoods respectively were purposively selected for the FGDs based on size and location relative to the city centre, and were all timed to take place in periods after live matches. While the former two locations are archetypal viewing centres, the last (Ejindu Park) was a recreational space-turned ‘football bars’ assemblage<sup>5</sup>. A total of 25 fans were randomly recruited at the three venues, corresponding to 9, 11, and 5 for Agu ‘Stadium’, Jim-Iyke Viewing Centre and Ejindu Park respectively. Inauspiciously, all the participants are male due to the researcher’s inability to find a female in first two locations and failure to recruit any female fan at the Ejindu Park ‘football bars’ because the consent of they were accompanying could not be obtained. All the participants

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<sup>4</sup> It stands for Government Reserved Area and was formerly called the European Quarters. It was established in the 1940s by the British colonial administration and later became the housing of top public officers.

<sup>5</sup> There are about 10 different viewing centres made up of typical football bars and betting shops in Ejindu Park. Public spectating of football take place in diverse sites from hotel lobbies, bars, to make-shift viewing centres in Enugu (refer to Eastman and Land, 1997).



are male due to the researcher's inability to: (i) sight a female in first two locations; and (ii) recruit any female fan at the Ejindu Park 'football bars' owing to the fact they were oftentimes accompanied. The purpose of the research was first explained to them before they willingly gave their verbal consent to participate in the discussions. Participants were motivated with the modest incentive of either a bottle of beer or soft drink, according to choice. The researcher conducted each of the sessions with the help of at least one assistant, and the proceedings were documented using a cassette tape recorder and field note jottings, paying attention to the interview setting, refreshment, and "homogeneity within each group in order to capitalise on people's shared experiences" (Kitzinger, 1995: 300). English and Igbo (the dominant language in the subregion) were used interchangeably. Apart from the pre-interview arrangements to document the biographical information (age, street address, contact phone, and level of education) and beloved clubs of the discussants, the pre-written open-ended questions are organised around three core or cardinal elements: (i) the attraction of the viewing centre and their function in garnering fan activity; (ii) reasons for continuing to be a fan of a particular European club; and for triangulation purposes (iii) reasons for the apparent lack of interest in the Nigerian league/clubs<sup>6</sup>. Plate 1 shows the FGD at the Jim-Iyke Viewing Centre, Obiagu Road, Enugu.

The methods of data analysis employed include verbatim transcription of the recorded discussions, coding, as well as content analysis in order to reduce and make sense of the ample pool of collected data. The results are thereafter presented in frequencies and percentages as well as graphic/pictorial formats.

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<sup>6</sup> The low level of support most Nigeria clubs currently enjoy has translating into very poor match attendance. In view of this, League Management Company of Nigeria's (LMCN) urged Nigerian teams to devise way of 'luring fans back to the stadiums'. According to the proposed plan, clubs will earn points for each match an attendance threshold of 3,000 spectators is met, and which at the end of the football season is expected to earn them some financial benefits (Information Nigeria, 2014).



Plate 1: A session of Focus Group Discussion at the Jim-Iyke Viewing Centre, Obiagu Road, Enugu, Nigeria (Author's photo).

### **3.0 Globalisation, Media Colonialism and the *New Football* fandom: A Literature Review**

#### ***3.1 The Globalisation-City Connection and the Media***

Globalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon and construct that that speak of “acceleration, widening and deepening of cross-border transactions, linking not just economies but governance, cultures and people’s lives” (Rakodi & Nkurunziza, 2007). Though its categorisation intermittently vary between authors, the one by Kurdrle (1999) is wide-ranging and quite useful for the current analysis. Kurdrle (1999) distinguishes between *communication*, *market*, and *direct globalisation*, aspects of which offer us a composite idea of the occurrence. To him, *communication globalisation* involves technological-mediated innovations in telecommunications and transportation such as satellite/cable television, fibre optics, the internet, airplanes, high speed rail, etc. that do accentuate the ‘quantitative differences’ between successive epochs and enable the transpositioning of events and images

in distant places to the recesses of private homes. He also sees this aspect of globalisation as the prime mover that has “facilitated market globalisation and intensified direct globalisation” (p. 4). This is akin to the ‘time-space compression’ notion of Harvey (1989), which Robert Kurdrle like many contemporary globalisation scholars believe underpins the operation and movement of multinational corporations. This time-space reduction also shapes the ensuing global financial architecture of *market globalisation*, on the one hand, and the accompanying ‘international externalities’ or *direct globalisation*, on the other – that is, the “non-marketed actions that palpably affect persons across borders” (Kurdrle, 1999: 4). He distinguishes these ‘externalities’ of communication globalisation into the economic, cultural and comparison effects. In effect, the widespread economic and cultural diffusions have accentuated the disposition for benchmarking and opportunities to compare and make choices.

McPhail (2006) perceives global mediascape as the era of ‘media colonialism’, which is the existing unequal global mediascape in which major media conglomerates are dominating the airwaves and tabloids of less developed countries. According to him, this development phase is preceded by three earlier phases – *military colonialism* (BC-1000), *Christian colonialism* (1000-1600), and *mercantile colonialism* (1600-1950) – all of which involve, one way or the other, some ‘colonisation’ of the mind. Contemporary globalisation is perceived from the perspective of Western technological/economic and cultural dominance in two contrasting manner, either as ‘improver of everything’ or ‘destroyer of everything’ (Short & Kim, 1999: 6). While some scholars believe that globalisation has brought about significant improvement in lifestyle, environmental standards and even political freedom world over, to mention a few, others blame it for deep economic and social polarisation, among other things. In this respect, what is at issue is the extent to which the globalisation processes of transnational football broadcasting and electronic fandom in Nigeria is contributing to the

falling support for the national league as epitomised the frequency of empty stadiums during matches (see Information Nigeria, 2014).

### ***3.2 Internationalisation, Globalisation of Football and the new Fandom***

Football is arguably the world's most popular and globalised sport, and it has been implicated in the continuing efforts in social science disciplines to understand current globalisation processes (Milanovic, 2005: 329; Derbaix & Decrop, 2011: 272). Tracing the diffusion of the game from its medieval past in rural England to present world-wide prominence, Hill et al. (2014) emphasised that football first internationalised before it globalised. In other words, the sequential adoption of football (internationalisation) across countries and regions of the world created the 'global synergy' that helped in the globalisation. Another important aspect of this impetus is the critical role of television in this regard (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004). With worldwide media reforms, most public-owned television stations created more room for many subscription-based satellite and cable television companies to operate without borders supported by global media corporations like NBC, Sky, Fox, etc. Today, popular sports like football has become an attractive media franchise (Alegi, 2010). A good example is the recent record-breaking deal signed between the English Premier League (EPL), Sky and BT (British Telecommunications) worth £5.136 billion<sup>7</sup> for the transmission of live matches during the 2016-2019 seasons (Clements, 2015).

The rationale for the internationalisation of football has been attributed to the game's simplicity, working class appeal, universal and egalitarian value, coupled with the fact that it is unselective of equipment and facilities, physical build, as well as geographical characteristics (Murray, 1996; Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004; Hill, et al., 2014). Hill, et al. (2014) has successfully applied Bale's (2003) seven globalising tendencies of sport to

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Roan, the Sports Editor of BBC witnessed the contract signing ceremony. In the Evening News on BBC-1 of Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2015, he summed his report by likening the moment as marking the 'golden age of English football'.

football and they include: (i) global telecommunications and media; (ii) international division of labour (sports value chain players, coaches, managers, and equipments); (iii) international sports organisations (FIFA, and continental, regional bodies); (iv) international sports management firms that control athletes and promote events; (v) the promotional strategies of individuals and teams; (vi) global mobility of outstanding foreign athletes across national borders; and (vii) the growth of professionalism. Another prominent characteristic of globalised football is the exploding number and impact of electronic fans of ‘overseas sweethearts’<sup>8</sup>, which according to Cleland (2011: 299) comprise of “those whose support is mediated through consumer products and television and other forms of media”. This whole process has been conceived as cosmopolitanism and glocalisation par excellence, a situation often characterised by the substitution of the ‘global’ with the ‘local’ (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004)

But beyond Cleland’s (2011: 299) geographical imagination of ‘passive fans’ as UK phenomenon, this new form of fandom has itself become a global obsession (Ben-Porat, 2000 *Israel*; Farred, 2002 *South Africa*; Kerr & Emery, 2011 *Australia, Canada, Indonesia and United States*; Dixon, 2013 *England*; Akindes, 2011 *Nigeria*). For instance, Giulianotti and Robertson, (2004: 564) have reported Manchester United football club (FC) of England is estimated to have about 8 million fans in China alone and over 50 million fans worldwide! These ‘foreign fans’<sup>9</sup> together with other linkages have culminated into what Boyle and Haynes (2004: 139) have dubbed “a complex web of relationships between football authorities, players and agents, sponsors and advertisers, the media, telecommunications

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<sup>8</sup> An amicable term used by Amir Ben-Porat (2000) in his article published in 2000 on the long distance love of many Israeli committed fans of British clubs, an affection that is ‘far away but close to the heart’ (p. 344).

<sup>9</sup> This new type of fans is polyonymous and various scholars have adopted different names to fit their analysis. Apart from Akindes (2011) and Farred (2002) that adopted ‘electronic’ and ‘long-distant’ fans respectively, others like Redhead (1997) have called them ‘post-fans’, Dixon (2011) ‘media fans’, (Cleland, 2011) ‘passive fans’, and Dixon (2011, 2012) ‘media fans’. Still other variants of the term include: ‘virtual fandom’ or/and ‘virtual supporter’ (Bale, 1998; Fillisa and Mackaya, 2014), ‘late-modern sports fans’ (Williams, 2007), and ‘satellite supporters’ or/and ‘liquid fandom’ (Best, 2013).

companies and fans”. Typical of communication or cultural globalisation, while the elite clubs, big leagues and event stadiums seem to be attracting all the glitz and lucrative sponsorships, many less celebrated clubs and leagues seem to be losing both fan and sponsorship patronage, particularly in developing countries (Milanovic, 2005). Milanovic’s (2005) interesting model of the economy of global football is worth considering here. Free circulation of football players internationally is resulting, on the one hand, to ‘leg drain’ in developing countries, and increasing inequality among clubs (due to unequal concentration of skills in few elite clubs in Europe), and to decreasing inequality in the performance of national teams (as top-notch players return to play for their respective countries). Apart from the enhanced economic and skill benefits that do accrue to both of player and country, Branko Milanovic also believes the enhanced quality of the game and televised live matches of “the most important national league games all over Europe have provided lots of additional pleasures to the soccer *aficionados*” (p. 844). He infers that this situation of approximate non-zero-sum game, maintained only by FIFA’s redistributive policies, epitomizes the ‘desirable type of globalization’.

### ***3.3 From Television Consumers of Football to fans or ‘Tribes’***

Whether we trace sports spectating back to its historical origins in the 1936 Berlin Olympics<sup>10</sup> or to the inception of televised sports research and fan studies from the 1980s in the United States, it seems obvious that the phenomenon of ‘electronic’ or ‘cyber-mediated’ spectating/fandom per se is not entirely a new idea. In fact, it was more than three decades ago that Lemish’s (1982) outlined the four rules of public television spectating, regarding how a spectator becomes habituated to the setting, fellow spectators, the television set, and consequently, become open to television-mediated interactions and associated rituals. What is

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<sup>10</sup> The 1936 Berlin Olympics is on record as the first live coverage of sports (Television History, 2013).

actually novel is the sophistication of the transmission (satellite and cable technologies) as well as the scale and scope or expanse of the spectating and fan experiences. These days the common promotional phrase ‘the world is at your doorstep’ is no longer an exaggeration with regard to transnational football broadcasting and the growing incidence of ‘overseas sweethearts’ across the world. Recent revival in fan studies has both given the subject more verve, leading to a catalogue of terminologies for this ostensibly new form of fandom, which altogether offers us broad defining characteristics of this subculture.

The common trajectory under the present consideration is from being a spectator to becoming a fan, an activity now synonymous with tribe. The term ‘fan’ is believed to be derived from the word ‘fanatic’, and fans comprise “those with a particular interest in performers, personalities, and programmes, as well as athletes and sports teams” (Gantz et al., 2006: 96). And so, fanship as serious leisure activity is supposed to involve elements of perseverance, long-term career, significant personal effort, enduring self-benefit, strong mutual identification of members, and manifestation of a unique ethos within the activity. Giulianotti (2002) has devised a four-group classification of fans in descending order according to their disposition and degree of identification with their teams, namely: traditional/hot (supporters), traditional/cool (followers), consumer/hot (fans), and consumer/cool (*fâneurs*). Supporters and followers have more grounded identity with the teams than fans and *fâneurs*, whose relationships are more consumer-oriented. Football fans and teams have for long been identified as ‘tribes’ due, on one hand, to their clannish behaviours and belligerent tendencies, and on the other hand, to the common perception of football, and other competitive sports, as mock battles between opposing ‘clans’ (Morris, 1981; Maffesoli, 1996)<sup>11</sup>. More recently, a tribal marketing perspective of fans has emerged.

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<sup>11</sup> There is a hiatus of thought on this connection between tribe and football in works on football and fandom in Africa. There is a general disapprobation of using the term ‘tribe’ by many African social scientists, who consider the word rather derogatory and primitive (see Ngaruka, 2007). One exception is Pannenborg (2012).

To Cova & Cova (2002: 602), 'tribe' stands for "a network of heterogeneous persons – in terms of age, sex, income, etc – who are linked by a shared passion or emotion; a tribe is capable of collective action". Tribalism or tribal allegiance is invoked with regard to the consumption of a product or brand when its 'use value diminishes relative to its 'linking value' – i.e., the brand's capacity to engender bonding among the consumers (Cova and Cova, 2002). This object-directed ritualistic devotion tend to group narcissism and identity is common to football fans, many of who "display that allegiance through a consumption-dependent display of club products" (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004: 554).

### ***3.4 Viewing Centres as sites of Rituals and Identity***

The traditional mode of sports spectating has been stadium attendance until the development of televised broadcasting in the post-1936 era when at-home viewing gradually became fashionable. With time an 'other site' or 'third environment' – which is "conceptually and geographically somewhere between the stadium and home" (Weed, 2007: 407) – has also came into being. In such environments such as pubs, bars airport lobbies, mall displays, and so on spectators strive to get the best of two 'worlds' by balancing between the crowdedness and alcohol prohibition of the stadium and the domestic restrictions of the home (Eastman & Land, 1997; Weed, 2007, 2008, 2014). Wenner (1996: 77) conceived these 'virtual venues' of live matches as a place for masculine pastime and 'refuges from women' (in Eastman & Land, 1997: 161). Similarly, it has also been described as a place where the indulgent trinity of alcohol, football and male-bonding occur (Bale, 1998; Weed, 2006, 2007). Since fanship is a learned behaviour linked to associative learning, it is evidently in these spaces of ritualised football viewing that fan identity and practices are learned and formed (Eastman & Land, 1997; Campbell, et al., 2004; Dionísio, et al., 2008). Fans as 'ephemeral tribes' are often "on



the look-out for anything that can facilitate and support the communion: a site, an emblem, the support of a rituals of integration, or of recognition” (Cova, 2002: 75).

The key underlying principle in the whole issue of fanship or fandom revolves around the ego enhancement and protection functions of basking-in-reflected-glory (BIRGing) and cutting-off-reflected-failure (CORFing). Wann & Branscombe (1990) have demonstrated that fans often BIRG of successful teams or whenever they win matches, but often tend to CORF when the reverse is the case. They argue that aggression and hooliganism are the apparent by-products of the inability of many ‘highly identified fans’ to CORF in the event or threat of defeat (see also Campbell, et al., 2004). Undoubtedly, these psychological loops form the primary motivation for identity formation and confirmation behaviours as are evident in fans’ preoccupation with clubs, their colours and brand-denoted memorabilia such as jerseys, scarves, flags, hats, hand bangles, etc. (Dionísio, et al., 2008; Derbaix & Decrop, 2011; Iannaccone, 2013). In their own study involving fans of major teams across Belgium, France and Spain, Derbaix & Decrop (2011) saw club fetishisation as signifying the four consumption function of identification, socialisation, expression and sacralisation – a veritable substantiation of Bernard Cova’s thesis. Furthermore, Kerr & Emery (2011) have opined in their study of Liverpool FC supporter across 37 countries that ‘long-distant’ fans are attracted by at least seven factors, including: (i) media coverage; (ii) style of play; (iii) presence of particular player(s); (iv) team success; (v) history of success; (vi) participation in the highest division; and (vii) stadium. However, it is also important to note that fan activities are not momentary performative behaviour restricted to match venues and environs but that they constitute the everyday practices of specific members of these football subcultures (Stone, 2007; Best, 2013).

What then are the motivations and rewards of rooting for a faraway, foreign club? Literature evidence has shown that the self-perception of fans as an extension of their clubs,

make most of them share in similar thrills and grieves of players (Sloan, 1979). To Lloyd Sloan, active performative interest in sport bequeaths fans with: (i) a sense of belonging by identifying with a team; (ii) leisure or break from routine; (iii) stimulation; (iv) therapeutic relief from tension and aggression; (v) entertainment; and (vi) vicarious achievement. This checklist of six benefits that fans derive from sports is still very relevant today as it factors in the choice and lifestyle dimension, which are products of individual and collective human agency (Bandura, 2006).

Having elaborated the origin, characteristics and dynamics of electronic fandom with the diverse spatial, economic, and socio-cultural consequences, it has appropriate to zero-in on the Nigeria in order to clarify the country's experiences on this globalisation-mediated phenomenon.

### ***3.5 Fans of European Leagues and Upsurge of Electronic fan Studies in Urban Nigeria***

The rituals and antics long identified with the home fans of European teams are now part of the everyday life and conversation of numerous electronic fans in the streets of Nigerian urban centres. Akindes (2011: 2183) has described this phenomenon with respect to Nigeria and the rest of Africa as 'football cosmopolitanism of the fans'. A nation-wide survey of September 2013 by NOI<sup>12</sup> Polls (Nigeria) offers an insight into this devotion of overseas clubs as it concerns the English Premier League (EPL). The poll estimated only a mere 51% (50% males and 58% females) of Nigerians still support the Nigerian Premier League (NPL) as against a massive 89% (90% males and 82% females) that claim to be fans of the EPL. The figures are said to represent an 8-point increase from those of a similar survey in 2012. The sub-regional variations in supportership of NPL and EPL in addition to the names of the

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<sup>12</sup> NOI Poll (Nigeria) was established in November 2006 by Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Managing Director of the World Bank and current Finance Minister in Nigeria. NOI Polls acknowledges to be 'working in partnership with the Gallup Polls (USA), the global performance-management company it appears to be structured after.

most popular clubs are shown in Table 1 (note that the city of Enugu the shaded row, South East, and is the home base of Rangers International FC). Moreover, the poll revealed the most

Table 1: A Sub-regional Comparison of the Supportership of the Nigerian Premier League, NPL and the English Premier League, EPL (2013).

<b>GEO-POLITICAL ZONE</b>	<b>Nigerian Premier League, NPL, in %</b>	<b>Most Preferred NPL Club</b>	<b>English Premier League, EPL, in %</b>	<b>Most Preferred EPL Club</b>
1. North Central	53	Enyimba FC	89	Chelsea
2. North East	43	Kano Pillars FC	86	Manchester United
3. North West	54	Kano Pillars FC	92	Chelsea
4. South East	69	Rangers	84	Chelsea
5. South South	36	Enyimba FC	91	Manchester United
6. South West	49	Enyimba FC	90	Chelsea

Compiled from the NOI Polls Publication of September 2013.

popular English clubs (that is, those with the biggest fan base) in the country, in descending order, to be: Chelsea (37%), Manchester United (33%), Arsenal (22%), Liverpool (4%), and Manchester City (3%). Fans that do not support any club in particular make up a mere 1%.

The survey also highlighted the reasons for the unequal and rather unpatriotic support (see Table 2). The respondents' deep fascination with the players, coaches, and quality of play in

Table 2 Reasons tendered for supporting the English Premier League, EPL versus the Nigerian Premier League, NPL (2013).

<b>Reasons for supporting particular EPL clubs</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Reasons for supporting the NPL</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1. Good style and structure of playing as a team	34	1. Because it is Nigerian	60
2. They have the best, good and strongest players	32	2. Because of the players	16
3. Because of a particular player	11	3. Because of the club (indigenous)	12
4. They are champions or former champions	8	4. General love for football	6
5. Engagement of African/black players	6	5. It is the best league in Africa	6
6. Because of their coach	4	-	-
7. They are the richest clubs	2	-	-
8. Family member's/friend's influence	1	-	-
9. Zeal/focus in winning	1	-	-
10. Branding, logo, and jersey colour	1	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

Compiled from the NOI Polls Publication of September 2013.

the EPL is a key factor as against the plausible chauvinistic stance of the fewer NPL supporters. Notice also that the EPL supporters are not totally unpatriotic since a few of them (6%) based their allegiance to particular English clubs on ethnic or racial reason – ‘Engagement of African/black players’. And so, could the greater fan support Chelsea FC enjoyed in 2013, according to NOI Polls, be attributed to the club’s engagement of about four Nigerians?<sup>13</sup>

The Nigerian media reform that began in the 1980s paved the way for a more diversified media environment or mediascape in which foreign programmes, particularly football broadcasting, have become pervasive, relegating the local ones to the background (Omoera & Ibagere, 2010; Bankole, et al., 2012; Onwumehili & Oloruntola, 2014). Under this condition, transnational media corporations and their affiliate satellite and cable television companies such as *DSTV*, *GOTV*, *StarTimes*, *MyTV*, *Daarsat*, *Trend TV*, *Metrodigital*, as well as several free to air satellite TV channels now hold sway. Regularly, vivid images of live European matches are being transmitted to the sitting rooms in many Nigerian households as well as to the growing number of public viewing centres spring up in most cities in the country. The consequent evolvment of copious number of electronic fans in the cities has been variously studied to unravel their characteristics and behavioural patterns (Akindes, 2011; Onwumehili, 2011; Bankole, et al., 2012; Onwumehili & Oloruntola, 2014). Likewise, some remote rural countrysides are not left out (Ortserga, 2013).

The regular rituals of television spectating in several viewing centres and the consequent social bonding and identification with elite European clubs have marked out these set of fans as a peculiar football subculture in the country (Omobowale, 2009; Majaro-Majesty, 2011; Omotosho, 2012). A number of European club newspapers or fanzines (such

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<sup>13</sup> About five Nigerian to date are, or were, involved with Chelsea FC. They include footballers like Celestine Babayaro, John Mikel Obi, Victor Moses, and more recently, Habib Abdulfatai, a 15-year old player admitted into the Chelsea Under 18 team. The fifth person is the Chelsea Technical Director, Mike Emenalo, who was appointed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2011.

as *The Blues*, *The Real Madrid Echo*, *The Midweek Arsenal Focus*, etc.) coupled with mainline sports newspapers like *Weekend Soccer Star*, *Sports Day*, *Sports Life*, etc. have arisen to service this conspicuous new interest in foreign football (Ifeduba, 2011). In observing the rites of club and player adulation, they engage in teasing, joking, nicknaming, argument, and even in brawls as veritable tactics of identity confirmation (Adetunji, 2010, 2013; Olaoluwa and Adejayan, 2011; Ademilokun, 2012; Onwumechili & Olaruntola, 2014). Occasionally, these have degenerated into bitter rivalry that lead to outright fights and violence (Okeke, 2009; Olonilua, 2012; Ugwu & Ugwu, 2013; Ikuomola, et al., 2014). Furthermore, these attachments make many of these fans prone to social, psychological, and mental influences, either for good or bad (Tade, 2014).

Two major gaps or lacunas are identifiable in of the profusion of literature on electronic fandom and associated issues in Nigeria. The first is general aspatial leaning of the available literature, despite the fact that the phenomenon of electronic fandom is space-denoted<sup>14</sup>, that is, the significance of the spectating sites to the fans' the activity system (see Lemish, 1982; Weed, 2014 for example). The second lacuna borders on the general insular outlook of these studies that divorce everyday practices of fans from the wider socio-economic environment pattered by consumption and marketing. In other words, little or no mention is made of the intervening economic interests of product retailers (clothes, souvenirs, beer, etc.), gambling outfits, and fund raisers of all sorts in upholding or promoting fan activities. Consequently, a rich intellectual texture of knowledge concerning, for instance, football spector-gambling nexus as well as buying of foreign-club brands by Nigerian banks and companies are either overlooked or is treated as separate thematic silos.

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<sup>14</sup> Although the said literature have relied exclusively on aspatial methodologies, the fact of the phenomenon's spatiality does not go unacknowledged. This is borne out by their repeated mention to viewing centres either as a reference point or research site or both. Public television spectating sites and the concomitant interactions are fundamental to fan identity formation and confirmation (refer to Lemish, 1982; Weed, 2014 for example).

The ensuing result section will zero-in into the interplay between transnational football broadcasting and football viewing centres along interfacing spatial, economic and socio-cultural factors in the city of Enugu.

#### **4.0 Fans of European Leagues and ‘Virtual Stadiums’ in the city of Enugu**

By and large, it is apparent that electronic fans and viewing centres present a typical chicken-and-egg situation, in which it is rather difficult to tell which brought about the other. For the sake of restatement, the broad goal of the study is to investigate the interplay between transnational football broadcasting and football viewing centres with a view to identifying how the interfacing spatial, economic and socio-cultural factors do reinforce the rising incidence of electronic fandom in the city of Enugu, our exemplar of urban Nigeria. We shall approach this result presentation in two ways: first, to discuss the spatiality of electronic fandom from the perspective of viewing centre distribution based on data obtained from the enumeration exercise; and second, to explore the identity construction and confirmation behaviours of the fans as well as clubs and players preferences based on the narratives of fans derived from the focus group discussions (FDGs).

##### ***4.1 Spatiality of Electronic Fandom***

As earlier mentioned, viewing centres come in different forms and sizes, from bars, restaurants, sport betting shops<sup>15</sup>, to other makeshift structures (see Plates 2, 3 and 4). These ‘virtual stadiums’ have become a popular source of income for individuals and families in the informal economic sector; and they are often characterised by five distinct attributes, which include: (i) presence of one or more large-screen television along with available seats; (ii) possession of a generator in case of power failure or outage; (iii) current subscription to one or

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<sup>15</sup> Up to 15 out of the 187 viewing centres enumerated are solely sports betting companies or their agents. The companies involved are 1960 Bet, Sure Bet, Bet 365, R & S Sports & Betting, and Naira Bet.



Plate 2: Football spectating at the 'Agu Stadium' in Garki Neighbourhood, Enugu. The live match between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2015 that ended 3-5 in favour of Tottenham (Author's photo).



Plate 3: Fans watching two consecutive live matches 2015 at the Jim-Iyke viewing centre, Obiagu Road, Enugu. Arsenal-Southampton (0-2) and Manchester City-Sunderland (3-2) encounters on 1<sup>st</sup> January (Author's photo).





Plate 4: A Football Bar at the Ejindu Park in Ogbete neighbourhood, Enugu (Nigeria). Watching the Arsenal-West Ham United live match on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2014 that ended 2-1 in favour of Arsenal FC (Author's photo).

more cable television companies (for example, *DSTV*, *GOtv*, *StarTimes*, *MyTV*, or *Metrodigital*); (iv) fans are required to either pay 'gate fees' or to purchase commodities (drinks or food) in stock or tickets in the case of betting shops; (v) in many cases, posted notices of rules and regulations guiding spectators' conduct in the centre.

The survey revealed a total of about 187 viewing centres in the 14 neighbourhoods studied in Enugu (see Table 3). Based on the GPS coordinates of these viewing centres and hotels, a point pattern map was generated in ArcGIS environment, and is shown in Figure 2. Although they are unevenly distributed throughout the city, this roughly averages 13 viewing centres per neighbourhood, indicating a high prevalence of these fan 'hang-outs'. The shaded columns show the neighbourhood from where the viewing centres selected for the FGDs were drawn – Garki (Agu 'Stadium'), Ogbete (Ejindu Park), and Ogui New (Jim-Iyke Centre). This mapping is not just a concrete proof that their number is substantial but more



Table 3: The distribution of viewing centres according to neighbourhoods in Enugu, Nigeria

<b>Neighbourhood/Layout</b>	<b>Density (Housing/Population)*</b>	<b>No. of Viewing Centre</b>
1. Abakpa	High density	25
2. Achara	Medium density	14
3. Asata	High density	13
4. Garki	High density	20
5. GRA	Low density	3
6. Idaw River	Medium density	23
7. Independence	Low density	9
8. New Haven	Low/Medium density	22
9. Ogbete (Coal Camp)	High density	19
10. Ogui	High density	3
11. Ogui New	High density	21
12. Railway Quarters	Low density	12
13. Trans-Ekulu	Low/Medium density	5
14. Uwani	High density	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>193</b>

Source: Fieldwork analysis, November-December, 2014. \* Town Planning Department, State Headquarters.

significantly it epitomises the spatiality of electronic fandom in the city. Evidently, higher density neighbourhood have greater concentration of the centres than lower density ones, thereby confirming that socio-economic and density factors are implicated in the distribution of viewing centre in Enugu. Let us now explore the profiles, identities and preferences.

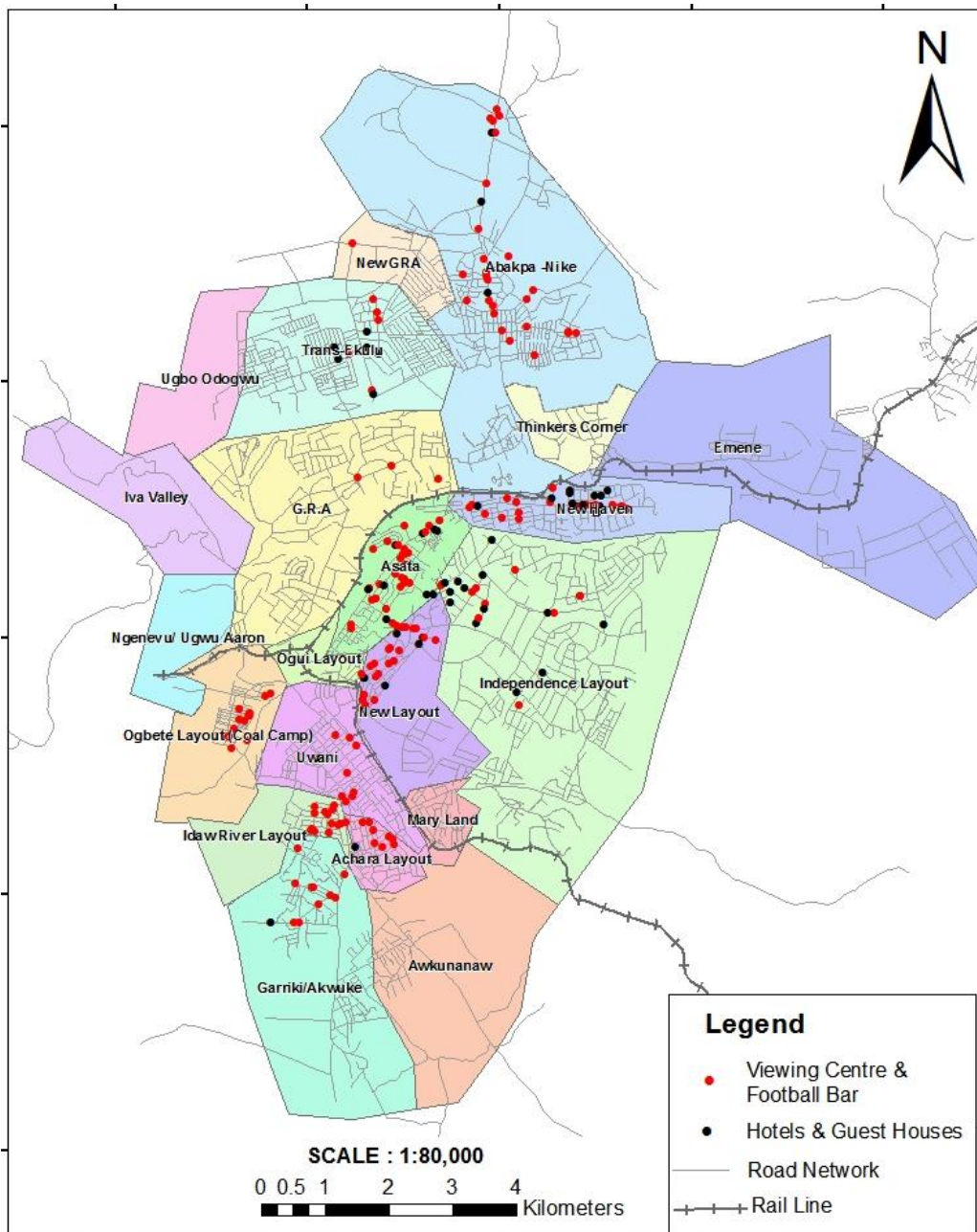


Figure 2: A point pattern distribution map of viewing centres and hotels in 14 neighbourhoods in Enugu (Author's drawing)

#### 4.2 Fans and Popular European Clubs

In this consideration, the tripartite or three-way connection between television spectating, viewing centres, and growing fan base of European clubs is quite discernible. This is not surprising considering the importance of television-mediated spectatorship to the incidence of

fan behaviour. Before delving into fan preferences behaviours and narratives, let us first consider their background.

#### 4.2.1 Biographical Background of Discussants

The discussants in the FGDs, as earlier explained, are all males with sufficient education. The dominant age cohort is between 19 and 30 years (see Table 4). Most of them demonstrated high identification with their respective beloved clubs judging their steady followership – average period discussants have been fans: 10.0 years for those in Agu ‘Stadium’, 6.6 years for Ejindu Park, and 10.1 years for Jim-Iyke Centre. Most of them quite knowledgeable about their beloved club and players, and admit to owning one or more of the club-branded collector items (jerseys, mufflers, towels, flags, wrist bands, etc.).

Table 4: Age group and educational level of the focus group participants in Enugu

Viewing Centre	No. of Fans	Age Category (Years)				Level of Education			
		<18	19-30	31-50	>50	None	Primary	Sec.	Tertiary
Agu Stadium	9	-	7	1	-	-	-	1	6
Ejindu Park	5	3	2	-	-	-	1	4	-
Jim-Iyke	11	1	5	3	-	-	1	4	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>

Source: Fieldwork analysis, November-December, 2014

#### 4.2.2 Fan Preferences, Behaviours and Narratives

Among the European clubs that are popular in Enugu, Chelsea has the most number of fans (36%). This is consistent with the findings of 2013 survey for only English clubs by NOI Polls, which showed that Chelsea (37%) and Manchester United (33%) have the biggest fan base in Nigeria and the Chelsea is the favourite club in the South East sub-region. From Table 5, the fans’ scale of preference for European clubs is, viz.: Chelsea (9 or 36%), Manchester United (5 or 20%), Barcelona (4 or 16%), Real Madrid (4 or 16%), and the outlier, Tottenham (1 or 4%). This lone fan of Tottenham Hotspur maintained he acquired this

preference from his father, a reason no other fan in all the FGDs gave. When he was asked why, remarked sarcastically:

Table 5: Major European clubs enjoying strong fan support among the participants in Enugu

Viewing Centre	No. of Fans	European clubs supported					
		<i>Arsenal</i>	<i>Barcelona</i>	<i>Chelsea</i>	<i>Man. United</i>	<i>Real Madrid</i>	<i>Tottenham</i>
Agu Stadium	9	-	3	3	2	1	-
Ejindu Park	5	1	-	2	-	2	-
Jim-Iyke	11	1	1	4	3	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>

Source: Fieldwork analysis, November-December, 2014.

My father is a fan of the club. Let me tell you... But for time, I can tell you names of Tottenham's captains since 1966. I can even tell you the number of its players that represented England in the 1966 World Cup. Since then, they have never been relegated...over fifty-something years! For me, I love the character of the team...and this is very vital. (TOTTENHAM FAN; Jim-Iyke Centre)

This answer agrees with the findings of Kerr & Emery (2011) that over 75% of their respondents became fans before adolescence and asserted they were influenced by their fathers (see also Ben-Porat, 2000: 349).

There are however several other reasons given by fans for supporting specific clubs. For the sake of concision and lucidity, summary lists of thematically coded responses to the three cardinal enquiries of the study are presented in Table 6. We shall discuss the three categories in turn, under the subheadings: electronic fans-viewing centre connection, electronic fans-European league connection, and electronic fans-Nigerian league disconnection.

Table 6: Summary lists of the coded responses in the three FDGs combined in Enugu.

<b>Cardinal enquiries of the study</b>	<b>Discussants' responses</b>
Special attraction to particular viewing centres	1. Proximity to my residence
	2. More exciting to watch matches than at home
	3. To discuss, argue and learn from fellow spectators
	4. It has a generator in case of power outage or failure
Reasons for supporting specific European club	1. Playing style and teamwork
	2. Quality of player(s)
	3. Winning streak/betting opportunity
	4. Hiring of Nigerian and African players
	5. Style/image of the coach
Reasons for lack of interest in the Nigerian league/clubs	1. Unexciting and lower quality of football
	2. Referee corruption ('home-win-away-loose')

	3. Corruption in football management
	4. Lack of television coverage
	5. Failing stadium infrastructure

Source: Fieldwork analysis, November-December, 2014.

*A. Electronic Fans-Viewing Centre Connection*

Proximity is a very important variable of in reinforcing the attachment of fans to the viewing centres. Apparently, the vast majority of spectators that patronise viewing centres in the same neighbourhood they live (see Table 7). From the residential addresses supplied by the discussants, 21 respondents or 84% of them live in the same neighbourhood and within vicinity of the centre while a disproportionate few (3 respondents or 12%) are outsiders. One

Table 7: Location of viewing centres relative to the residence of spectators in Enugu

Viewing Centre	Residence of spectator-participants relative to the viewing centre			
	Same neighbourhood	Different neighbourhood	Not indicated	Total
Agu Stadium	5	0	0	5
Ejindu Park	8	1	0	9
Jim-Iyke	8	2	1	11
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>

Source: Fieldwork analysis, November-December, 2014.

person (4%) did not disclose his address. The tendency for spectators to visit centres nearest to them is substantiated by proximity advantages of transportation cost reduction or elimination and environmental cognisance. Hence, it is possible to see that while acting as meeting places for these electronic fan, viewing centres function as neighbourhood leisure facilities. To most of them, the television match spectating experience parallels the actual stadium attendance as could be perceived from the usage of ‘Agu Stadium’ to refer to the viewing centre in Garki neighbourhood run by one Agu. The group effect of collective match spectating, and the consequent interaction (discussion, argument, teasing, learning, etc.) and social bonding are fundamental to fan identity formation and confirmation. One Arsenal fan spoke his motivation for preferring the viewing centre to at-home viewing:

Well,...to watch a match with a crowd is more exciting than alone with your family at home. You may not shout even when you want to because others may not understand you. They can even laugh at you, especially if they are girls. But shouting here (referring to the viewing centre) is not out of place because others will also shout with you. (ARSENAL FAN; Ejindu Park).

For others, regular visits to viewing centres can also have didactic ends, among others, as one of the discussants unabashedly admitted:

Why I come to Jim-Iyke to watch matches is not because I cannot afford *DSTV* (cable subscription). It is to catch fun. While I am here, I can learn many new things in football, like the names of players, their transfer records, and news about your club. I am a Man U fan and have supported them since 2005. No matter they are doing well now, but it is a lesson for them to buckle up. (MANCHESTER UNITED FAN; Jim-Iyke Centre).

It is therefore obvious that these ‘virtual venues of live matches’ are physical culminations of the object-subject interlinkages and mediated interactions described in Lemish’s (1982) four laws of television spectating.

#### *B. Electronic Fans-European League Connection*

The key objects in the acknowledged tripartite connection between television spectating of live European league and championship matches, viewing centres and the growing fan base of European clubs (and player) are in reality the clubs and player themselves. The football clubs and a number of star players are indeed the focus of attention and adulation in this whole affair. There are diverse reasons respondents give for being fans of particular European clubs, and they revolve around the following: (i) playing style and teamwork; (ii) quality of player(s); (iii) winning streak exhibited by the club, which provides some of them opportunity to bet; (iv) hiring of Nigerian and African players; and (v) style/image of the coach (refer to Table 7). In many cases, they are perceived in combination with the other as we can see from one Barcelona fan’s expression of his devotion to the team:

I love their style of management, mode of selection and playing, and calibre of players such as Messi, Xavier, Iniesta, etc. One of their former coaches, which is Pep Guardiola (2008-2012), is my mentor. I so much love the guy...the way he handled the team, the way the team progressed under

him because from 2009 down to 2012, they (Barcelona FC) they were the best team all over the world. For four consecutive years, they have been the best! Others are only catching up...yes, I mean other teams are playing 'catch up' to them. (BARCELONA FAN, Jim-Iyke Centre)

Electronic fandom not only constitutes of devotion and identification with beloved overseas clubs and associated practices, it also involves a strong element of social bonding and group narcissism among fans of same clubs that evoke the notion of tribes (see Morris, 1981; Maffesoli, 1996). One Chelsea fan put it succinctly:

I have found out it is something of the spirit, you understand? I eat Chelsea, I sleep Chelsea, I drink Chelsea! Sometimes, I find myself trusting my fellow Chelsea fans more than others. I have a personal likeness towards Chelsea fans because they say what I like to hear.

Another peculiar attribute of this electronic fan-European clubs connection is that this long distance 'love affair' is not entirely colour-blind. In far too many cases, the presence of a Nigerian or an African player in a club made a difference where a fan's loyalty lies, as one fan cheerfully acknowledged:

As for me, I support Chelsea because right from the time I developed interest in the team patronises African players. There was time they a Nigerian played, Celestine Babayaro...it is that time I picked interest in the club...you understand? Even the time of Drogba...first time around until his recent comeback. Again, even when Mikel joined them...so they like signing African players who are strong in the game. Coming to Nigeria, where they have a strong fan base..., you understand? Analysts say that in every 20 football fans, 15 of them are Chelsea...yes, 15 are Chelsea supporters! (CHELSEA FAN, Agu 'Stadium')

This factor is related to why Chelsea FC, a club with a history of signing Nigerian players, has the largest fan base in the country (see NOI, 2014).

### *C. Electronic Fans-Nigerian League Disconnection*

An estimated 89% of football-loving Nigerian are known to be electronic fandom of European league, and this phenomenon is proceeding at the expense of the local NPL which has only 51% following (see NOI, 2014). From Table 6, some of the reasons given by fans for not supporting or patronising the the former include: (i) unexciting and lower quality of football; (ii) referee corruption ('home-win-away-loose' syndrome); (iii) corruption in

football management; (iv) lack of television coverage; and (v) failing stadium infrastructure.

In response to the question about what things are likely to attract them to Nigerian clubs in such a way as to attend football matches regularly, one respondent said:

The LMCN's plan to lure fans back to Nigerian stadiums is not going to work. The reason is this: the only reason it will work is by improving the standard of the play. You don't even need to go around to beg for fans to come and watch you. When you put your home in order, they will rush you the money (gate fee), even if you put ₦1,500 ticket. And you organise your team and they are giving fans what they want, not kick and follow...play good football, everybody will love to be at Nnamdi Azikiwe Stadium. But by the time you are playing rubbish, even if you carry Enugu Coaster (bus), ringing a bell and begging everybody, at the end of the day your stadium will still be empty on Saturday because the standard of playing is very very poor. (BARCELONA FAN, Agu Stadium)

In the eyes of these fans, relative poor standards of football and perceived corruption in both match officiating and football management in the country make the Nigerian league to dwindle into insignificance in comparison with the European leagues. The 'home-win-away-loose' is a jargon used to refer to incessant referee bias and bribery in the NPL that have resulted in situations where most clubs win their home matches and by implication, more often than not, loose away matches. In the incisive words of another fan:

'Home-win-away-loose' is one reason why many of us have lost interest in the league. Even if you brought Lionel Messi to Rangers (NPL club based in Enugu), you don't expect any away winning to Kano Pillars (another NPL club based in Kano city)! Even as a fan you even risk being beaten thoroughly if you make noise. We don't have love of sportsmanship in Nigeria, that's why. Sometimes, if Rangers is travelling to the North (northern Nigeria), sometimes just about 10 fans accompany them. In Europe, more than 30,000 (fans) accompany their home teams to away matches. NFF (Nigerian Football Federation) needs to strictly enforce laws against hooliganism like in Europe. It is not good for football and sportsmanship (CHELSEA FAN; Jim-Iyke Centre).

Hence, overwhelming followership of foreign clubs is necessarily an intentional, and not a spontaneous, action. With the frequent but unequal comparisons of Nigerian league to EPL and other advanced European leagues, electronic fandom here appears to be emancipatory in intent since for most fans this pursuit signifies a form of escape from the distastful and uninspiring Nigerian league.

## **5.0 Discussion and Conclusion**



The rising phenomenon of electronic fandom in Nigeria, like other parts of Africa and the world at large, can be perceived as an outcome of what Milanovic (2005: 829) theorised as ‘additional pleasures’ trickling down to faraway fans from the condition of “higher overall quality of the game and increasing inequality of results among clubs” created in European leagues by free movement of talented football players. The frequent reference of fans to playing style and teamwork, quality of players, winning streak, and remarkable attributes to qualify their beloved clubs or ‘overseas sweethearts’ (to use Ben-Porat’s (2000) metonym) is an eloquent testimony to this fact. The comparison effects and the unequal options presented by live coverage of elite European league/championship matches and the ‘unexciting’ local league are quite compelling (see Kurdrle, 1999). Adokiye Amiesimaka, a former Nigerian footballer, retired judge and football administrator, once remarked in his commentary on the state of Nigerian football:

In comparison, our domestic league lacks class and polish, and is simply everything that the EPL is not! Hardly anybody who has access to cable television sees our own league as a viable alternative. From the way our so-called professional clubs are run as extensions of ministries of the governments that own them instead of as the true limited liability companies they are supposed to be; to quality of play that is below par; to controversial dispute-resolution processes, there is nothing to make our league competitive. And certainly, not against the EPL! (Amiesimaka, 2012: 1)

The emergence of electronic fans of European clubs has led to the proliferation of football viewing centres in Nigerian cities and elsewhere. The distribution of viewing centres in urban Nigeria signifies spatiality of electronic fandom since these centres act as key coordinates in the globalisation of football.

The significant local support still enjoyed by top Egyptian clubs like Al-Ahly and Zamalek as well as South African clubs like Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates show clearly the resilience of some local leagues in the face of destabilising influence of football globalisation (see Tuastad, 2014 *Egypt*; Fletcher, 2010 *South Africa*). But many other local leagues in Africa are not coping with this phenomenal shift in fan patronage engendered by

football globalisation and the consequent comparison effect. For instance, Nigerian scenario represents the negative situation of drastic drop in stadium attendance due to the patronage of European clubs. Hooked on these overseas football clubs, many electronic fans unable to 'love two masters' equally have abandoned their former local clubs, thereby posing enormous financial and patronage challenges not just for the individual Nigerian clubs but also for the entire NPL at large.

Along with these detractions, there are also elements of 'sponsorship flight', a paradoxical scenario in which a number of companies in developing countries are purchasing elite European club brands in order to extend their market reach (see Arsenal Holding, 2008: 8 for example). At least three Nigerian companies have partaken in such deals, namely: the United Bank for Africa, UBA (a leading commercial bank) for its Gunner Debit Card/Promo (UBA, 2009); Globacom Ltd (a leading telecommunication concern) and Chi Ltd (manufacturers of *Chivita* fruit juice). The latter two contracts are with Manchester United FC and are estimated at about £5 and £1 million<sup>16</sup> respectively (Egbokhan, 2012; This Day, 2014). Although fans have often found such gesture exciting, it is not well received in some quarters (see Osasuyi, 2015). Osasuyi (2015) quoted one Dele Ajayi, a representative of the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) and Chairman of the Ondo State Football Association, in his remonstrance against the Globacom deal:

You cannot imagine our sponsor paying Manchester United (₦1 billion)<sup>17</sup> without recourse to fulfilling its contract agreement to NFF. As I speak, Globacom is indebted to NFF to the tune of ₦350 million. This is a company that is making money from the country and cannot pay NFF their money.

Apparently, transnational broadcasting has pitched consumption of European football in zero-sum game with local football interests.

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<sup>16</sup> Chivita Ltd. fall under the same category of 'Regional Partners', whose contract sum ranges between £1 to £2 million (see Whitwell, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> One billion Naira, the amount quoted by *Otunba* Dele Ajayi is a rough conversion of the £5 million Glo-Manchester United deal.

Consequently, new subcultures or ‘tribes’ with distinct social identities framed by group affinity for elite European clubs have emerged. The ego enhancement and protection functions of basking-in-reflected-glory (BIRGing) and cutting-off-reflected-failure (CORFing) are fundamental in understanding the identity formation and confirmation traits of expanding populations of electronic fans (Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Jones, 2000; Ugwu & Ugwu, 2013). In line with the theory of human agency, an individual in exercise of his or her freedom and self-determination would normally seek to maximise his/her self-image by joining with others to identify with popular and successful teams. These identity consciousness and tendencies in the consumption of football brands have opened up new vistas for marketing and business transactions, involving fans, football clubs and authorities, players and agents, sponsors and advertisers, the media, telecommunications companies, breweries and sports betting companies (Cova & Cova, 2002; Boyle & Haynes, 2004). Also, football fandom has ramifications for political organisation and protest (Tuastad, 2014). With reference to the fans of Al-Ahly FC, the formidable Egyptian club and eight times winner of the CAF Champions League, Dag Tuastad concluded that:

Rather than ‘weapons of mass distraction’, football in the Arab world have served as a kind of weapons of the weak, to borrow Scott’s term referring to the resistance of marginalized groups. [...]When football supporters with their passionate energy allies with larger congregations of the youth segments, as the Muslim Brotherhood youth and Al-Ahlawi in Egypt, and the momentum spreads to the society at large, the lesson from the Arab spring is that football in given circumstances might spark riots and even political revolution (Tuastad, 2014: 384-385).

So far, electronic fandom appear to have an apolitical orientation perhaps due to its spatial disconnection from the actual centre of activity. But the potentials of phenomenon for conflict resolution and political organisation is justifiably high (see Majaro-Majesty, 2011).

For further studies, there is need to apply Wann’s (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) based on the 8-point gauge of eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic

gains, aesthetics, group affiliation, and family developed by in order to ascertain the level of identification of electronic fans to their beloved clubs.

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