

**VIEWERSHIP AND GRATIFICATIONS OF THE NIGERIAN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE
AND FOREIGN FOOTBALL LEAGUES AMONG YOUTHS IN AKWA IBOM STATE**

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Abstract

This study was set out to ascertain the viewership of the Nigerian Professional Football League and the English Premier League among Youths in Akwa Ibom State, as well as the gratifications derived thereof. The Uses and Gratifications theory formed the theoretical background for this study. The research method adopted for the study was survey. The sample size was 383, which was selected using the Meyer's guide for sample selection. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for this study, and each stage used a particular sampling technique until the respondents were accessed. The findings of the study revealed that youths in Akwa Ibom State preferred watching the English Premier League over the Nigerian Professional Football League. Furthermore, youths in Akwa Ibom State often watched European football because European football league matches are exciting and relaxing, and they derived entertainment, relaxation and recreation from watching European football league matches. Finally, youths in Akwa Ibom State have easy access to European football league matches, and this significantly boosts their interest in European football leagues. It was recommended that Local television station operators in Akwa Ibom and in Nigeria should endeavor to inject more of European football league broadcasts and other sports programmes into their programming schedules as this would enable them compete to some extent with foreign satellite television stations which broadcast European football matches. Also, the League Management Company (LMC) and the Nigerian Professional Football League TV (NPFL TV) should endeavor to observe and study aspects of European football leagues, particularly the English Premier League, so as to obtain ideas on how to upgrade the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL) and bring it up to a level that would be more appealing to football fans in Akwa Ibom State, and in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Viewership, Gratifications, Nigerian Professional Football League, Foreign Football Leagues.*

Introduction

Technological change is part of a new media landscape that has rendered older definitions, philosophies and contexts of television broadcasting insufficient. The advent of satellite channels, global networks and the internet has brought about drastic changes in the media environment from 1990 onwards. There are now stations broadcasting signals far beyond their immediate localities and national boundaries, thus shaping the opinions of people and leaders of other countries. It is therefore obvious that as a result of modern communication technologies, national boundaries are becoming blurry. Marshal McLuhan's prophecy in 1962 that mass communication would turn the world into a global village has come true.

The biggest change in international broadcasting in recent years has been the proliferation of global news, sports and music channels. This has been made possible through satellite broadcasting. These technological advancements are now prevalent even in developing countries; an opinion which is consistent with research assertions which affirm that the Nigerian media reform, which started in the 1980s, paved the path for a more diversified media landscape, and has empowered transnational media corporations and their affiliate satellite and cable television companies such as DSTV, Sky sport, CNN, which now hold sway in Nigeria. Therefore, foreign programmes, particularly football broadcasting, have become pervasive. In this view, Boyle and Haynes (2004) postulate that globalisation has reshaped the landscape of football: the way in which football is watched and how football clubs are supported have changed.

Football is the most popular and globalized sporting activity in the world. Among globally televised football competitions and leagues around the world, European leagues such as English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, Italian Serie A, German Bundesliga, French League 1, and the UEFA Champions League are at the top of quality organization and coverage. In fact, it is the dream of many local football players in Africa to play in these leagues and/or tournaments. Local players in developing countries are constantly making ways to reach Europe; therefore, they contact football agents to facilitate their movement to Europe (Onwumechili, 2014).

On the other hand, non-footballers (fans) in Africa engage in massive support for European football clubs and tournaments. Thus, broadcast of live football matches of European Leagues is generating a massive base of fans of European football clubs across developing countries and Nigeria in particular. This notion is consistent with a nationwide survey which found that only a mere 30% of Nigerians still support the Nigerian Premier League (NPL) as against a massive 70% that claim to be fans of the English Premier League (EPL) clubs. The same survey further divulged that most of the followers of European leagues frequently watched live matches in commercial viewing centres (Onyebueke, 2015). Similarly, Adetunji (2010) found that ever since the proliferation and increasing affordability of Satellite Television or Pay TV broadcast in Nigeria, watching English Premier League and other European League matches has caught the fancy of many Nigerian youths, women inclusive. On days when games are to be played (usually weekends and sometimes Wednesdays), fans make their way to viewing centres (halls, mostly makeshift, where matches from foreign football leagues are shown live at affordable rates) in their neighborhoods to support their favorite teams or watch the games of rival teams. This implies that youths in Nigeria have developed strong fondness for watching European football. This is buttressed by Majaro-Majesty (2011), who remarked that European football fellowship is a new “religion”, another kind of “ethnicity”, and other form of “ritual”. This suggests that at viewing centres, fans categorically display this “religion” or “ethnicity” by knowledge of the clubs’ history and player profiles. Intrinsically, fans in Nigeria have put in place “associations of supporters”, with slogans such as Manchester United - the kings of England or One love, Arsenal - Gunners for life, Chelsea - the Blues, Real Madrid - home of wealth, Barcelona - home of football, among others.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Nigerian football lovers, including youths in Akwa Ibom State, are highly enthusiastic about football leagues. However, it is not quite certain their viewership patterns of football leagues (local and foreign), as well as the gratifications derived thereof. Therefore, this study is set out to among others, ascertain the viewership pattern of the Nigerian Professional Football league and the English Premier League among youths in Akwa Ibom State, as well as the gratifications derived.

Statement of the Problem

Since the proliferation and increasing affordability of Satellite Television or Pay TV broadcast in Nigeria, watching local foreign football leagues such as the Nigerian Professional Football League and the English Premier League has caught the fancy of many Nigerian youths. On days when games are played (usually weekends and sometimes midweek), these fans make their way to viewing centres in their neighborhoods or even far from their neighborhoods to support their favourite teams or watch the games of rival teams. Some even spend ridiculously long hours each match day watching football matches.

Thus, youths in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria by extension, have developed fondness for watching football so much such that they do not mind sacrificing their resources (time, money and energy) and even their comfort in order to watch and support their favorite foreign football teams. It is also common to find these youths argue, quarrel, and sometimes fight over seemingly trivial issues about foreign football clubs and leagues, to the extent that supporters of some clubs and leagues look derogatorily on others who support different clubs and leagues. In spite of these, not much can be said concerning the football viewership patterns of these youths. This has necessitated this study to ascertain the viewership pattern of the Nigerian Professional Football league and the English Premier League among youths in Akwa Ibom State, as well as the gratifications derived.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives of the study, the following were the research questions:

- i. How frequently are youths in Akwa Ibom State exposed to local and foreign football leagues?
- ii. What are the motivations which drive exposure to local and foreign football leagues by youths in Akwa Ibom State?
- iii. What gratifications do youths in Akwa Ibom State derive from exposure to local and foreign football leagues?
- iv. To what extent does ease of access influence the interest of youths in Akwa Ibom State in local and foreign football?

Literature Review

Viewership of European Football in Nigeria

The embrace of European football may be pan-African, but it has reached unprecedented levels in Nigeria. According to Goldblatt (2019), countries around the world not only consume the football played by clubs from Southampton to Newcastle and everywhere in-between in vastly different ways, but they are also avid devotees of the leagues – and few more fervently than Nigeria. Furthermore, foreign football clubs such as Arsenal, Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool, Barcelona, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Bayern Munich, and so on, have colossal followership in Nigeria, and these fans hardly ever pass on an opportunity to support these clubs one way or the other (Alaka, 2015). Also, Adetunji (2010) points out that an average Nigerian football fan supports a particular clubside (or club) and feels duty-bound to watch his/her favourite team play, week in week out.

Every matchday (particularly on weekends), people from across the country, especially youths in their large numbers, from street to street, troop to the various football viewing centres to feed their eyes with the skillful dribbles, superlative goals, amazing saves and precise passes which make foreign football so irresistible. Alaka (2015) opines that a typical football fan in Nigeria spends an average of N19,000 every nine months (August – May) watching foreign football matches at viewing centres. Furthermore, Hamzat (2017) argues that the average amount of money spent by Nigerian youths to view foreign football leagues per year is about N112 billion. These arguments are supported by Kente and Lucas (2020) who state that fans of foreign football clubs would not mind spending the last penny in their pockets, including the resources meant for tests, assignments and other important things, on viewing their clubs display live through pay per-view centres, or purchasing and reading sport stories (on newspapers) or visiting their club websites via mobile phones or cyber cafés, or displaying their club's stickers on notes and textbooks, and room walls, or putting on their clubs' 'polos' or complete jerseys, shoes and so on.

The love of foreign football leagues among Nigerians has extended beyond merely watching. For instance, in May 2008, before the UEFA Champions League Final encounter between Chelsea and Manchester United, fans of Chelsea in the neighborhood of Ebute Metta, Lagos State, gave out free jerseys and prepared a public feast, including a bull painted in Chelsea's team colours, in anticipation of their club's victory. Also, every December, supporters of Arsenal from five local government areas in Kogi State converge on Okene to celebrate 'Arsenal Day'. This tradition began in 2006, following Arsenal's successful run to the final of the UEFA Champions League. In 2018, supporters of Barcelona went to their various places of work/business with Barcelona FC jerseys and scarves following their club's victory over Chelsea in the UEFA Champions League round of 16. All of these instances suggest that viewership of foreign football has become so popular among Nigerians so much such that European football is now being regarded as a popular culture or a religion of its own among Nigerians. This is supported by Edim, Odok and Osaji (2016), who state that many Nigerian football fans have adopted European football clubs (particularly from the English Premier League) as their own and spend considerable amounts of money on the procurement of jerseys and other paraphernalia of the clubs. Some fans even sacrifice cows to supplicate for their club's victory before a major game, even though they live thousands of kilometers away from the cities where these teams are domiciled. Adetunji (2010) also states that Nigerian football fans have gone to an extent of putting in place "associations of supporters", especially for the traditionally-successful EPL teams.

However, there is a school of thought that European football has negative influences on its viewers and supporters. Onukogu, Salifu and Taofeek (2016) assert that a lot of people (football fans) can go any length just to show their affection for their clubs, as there have been cases where some people went as far as betting with exorbitant sums of money, vehicles or houses, resorting to fighting and physical violence when their teams lose, and sometimes missed their tests and lectures or other important functions in order to watch their club's football matches. Edim, Odok and Osaji (2016) add that many Nigerian football fans are ready to fight and sometimes do fight just to defend the reputation of their clubs. Similarly, the Emir of Minna, Dr. Umar Faruq Bahago, attributed the mass failure of the 2009 Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSCE-WAEC/NECO) to "addiction of Nigerian youths to the English Premier League and other football leagues like La Liga around the world".

Majaro-Majesty (2008), while commenting on the psychological effects of foreign football leagues on Nigerians, posits that football fans in the country in 2006/2007 went to the extent of naming streets after their favourite football clubs, particularly the English football clubs. The situation also degenerated to the point of quarrelling, fighting and even killing themselves over these foreign football clubs in places such as Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and other parts of the country. Despite these concerns over the negative influences of foreign football leagues on the Nigerian populace, followership and viewership of foreign football leagues in Nigeria have continued to grow.

Broadcast of European Football Leagues in Nigeria

New technologies, deregulation and the liberalization of media across Africa have significantly increased audience access to football programming. According to Akindes (2017), satellite broadcasters such as Canal Horizons, beIN SPORTS and Supersport have transformed African access to football. Thus, access to satellite pay-TV from Canal Horizons and DStv with SuperSport and beIN SPORTS has boosted African audiences' accessibility to European football leagues and international football. African football fans can watch the most prestigious and globally popular leagues such as the English Premier League, the Spanish La Liga, the German Bundesliga, the French Ligue1 and the Italian Serie A.

Since the proliferation and increasing affordability of Satellite Television or Pay TV broadcast in Nigeria, watching foreign football leagues such as the English Premier League and other top European League matches has caught the fancy of many Nigerian youths. Therefore, European football has gained viewership of youths over the years as a result of advances in mass communication technologies such as satellite television. According to Kente and Lucas (2020), satellite television has facilitated and motivated the youths to often leave in a hurry or abandon their household duties and educational tasks in order to watch live broadcast of these European football matches, particularly the English Premier League. Komobol (2015) adds that the popularity of satellite television in Nigeria's nooks and crannies cannot be separated from the "craze" among Nigerians for European football. For one reason or other, many Nigerians prefer to watch European football and these matches are brought to them primarily via satellite television.

Of the many satellite television operators in Nigeria, the dominant company supplying foreign sport content is the South African conglomerate, Multichoice (with its satellite TV provider, DStv, and sport group, Supersport). Multichoice reserves the exclusive broadcast rights to the English Premier League in Nigeria. In fact, DStv is the only licensed broadcaster of the English Premier League in the entire Sub-Saharan Africa (<https://premierleague.com>, 2022). DStv is also the exclusive broadcaster of the UEFA Champions League and the UEFA Europa League in Nigeria. In addition, DStv also broadcasts other foreign leagues such as the UEFA Conference League, Spanish La Liga and the Italian Serie A.

Startimes TV, a Chinese-owned pay TV company and DStv's major competitor in Anglophone Africa, is another popular satellite television operator which supplies European sport content to the Nigerian audience, but not enough to dethrone DStv (Akinpelu, 2020). However, Startimes is the official broadcaster of the German Bundesliga in Nigeria. Startimes also has a dedicated channel for live broadcast of the Spanish La Liga, but the commentary is in French, compared to DStv's coverage of the league which is in English.

A number of local terrestrial television stations in Nigeria have begun to venture into live broadcast of foreign football leagues by acquiring broadcast rights from licensed satellite television broadcasters. One of such stations is the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA Sports 24), which secured sub-licensed media rights to broadcast one live

English Premier League match per week on free to air television. The sub-license deal is said to have been acquired from Infront Sports and Media Agency, the substantive rights holder to Free-To-Air distribution in Sub-Saharan Africa (Akinpelu, 2020).

Another local terrestrial television station in Nigeria which has ventured into live broadcast of foreign football league matches is Silverbird Television (Stv). Stv also secured sub-licensed media rights to broadcast one live English Premier League match per week as well as a handful of English Premier League-produced magazine programmes weekly from Infront Sports and Media Agency, the substantive rights holder to Free-To-Air distribution in Sub-Saharan Africa (Koigi, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored upon the Uses and Gratifications theory. The theory was proposed by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974, and is concerned with how people use media for gratification of their needs. The Uses and Gratifications theory is concerned with the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other source, which leads to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratification and other consequences, mostly unintended ones (Ojobor, 2002). Similarly, Littlejohn and Foss (2008) state that “the uses and gratifications approach takes the media consumer rather than the media message as its starting point and explores his communication behavior in terms of his direct experience with the media. It views the members of the audience as actively utilizing media contents, rather than being passively acted upon by the media. Thus, it does not assume a direct relationship between messages and effects but postulates instead that members of the audience put messages to use, and that such usages act as intervening variables in the process of effect”.

From the foregoing, it can be said that this theory is based on the assumption that the audience is proactive and seeks media which satisfies particular needs. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), the audience is assumed to be active and goal directed. The audience members are largely responsible for choosing media to meet their own needs. McQuail (2010, p.423) identifies some typical audience needs to include ‘information, relaxation, companionship, diversion or escape’.

By implication, football lovers as well as youths in Akwa Ibom State expose themselves to either local or foreign football leagues because they feel that such programmers would fulfill certain expectations which they may have of television or would gratify specific media needs.

Methodology

The research design which was employed for this study is the survey. This method was considered appropriate because of its capacity to measure the attitudes and opinions of people in a given area on an issue. The population for this study comprised residents of Akwa Ibom State who watch football. The projected population of Akwa Ibom State as at the period of this study (2023) stands at 5,423,700; according to data from the National Population Commission (NPC), Uyo. Therefore, the population for this study is 5,423,700. In selecting the sample, the researcher used the Philip Meyer’s guide for sample selection.

Population Size	Sample Size
500,000 and more	384
100,000	383
10,000	381
5,000	370
3,000	341
2,000	322

1,000	278
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Meyer's Guide for Sample Selection

Based on the Meyer's guide, a sample of 384 respondents was selected. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for this study, and each stage used a particular sampling technique until the respondents were accessed. At the first stage, the researcher adopted cluster sampling. The three senatorial districts constituted the clusters. The clusters therefore were Uyo senatorial district, Eket senatorial district, and Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. The population distribution of the three clusters is shown below:

Uyo Senatorial District

Ibiono Ibom	322,388
Itu	215,956
Uyo	526,274
Uruan	201,110
Ibesikpo Asutan	230,071
Nsit Ubium	217,992
Nsit Atai	126,811
Nsit Ibom	184,638
Etinan	287,721
Total	2,312,961

Source: NPC (2023)

Eket Senatorial District

Ikot Abasi	224,439
Mkpat Enin	302,661
Eastern Obolo	102,923
Onna	209,734
Eket	293,346
Esit Eket	108,291
Ibeno	128,146
Okobo	176,896
Oron	148,683
Udung Uko	90,572
Ure Offong/Oruko	120,970
Mbo	176,820
Total	2,083,481

Source: NPC (2023)

Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District

Abak	236,453
Essien Udim	327,535
Etim Ekpo	179,210
Ika	123,996
Ikono	224,236
Ikot Ekpene	243,230
Ini	168,633
Obot Akara	252,077
Oruk Anam	293,511
Ukanafun	215,956
Total	2,264,837

Source: NPC (2023)

At the second stage, the researcher adopted proportionate sampling, in order to determine the sample sizes to be drawn from the different clusters. This sampling method was adopted because the three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom state are each composed of different Local Government Areas which are vastly different in the sizes of their populations.

The sample sizes therefore were drawn from the different clusters using the formulae illustrated below:

$$pn = \frac{pN}{N} * n$$

Here, pn is the sample size of the selected cluster; pN is the population of the selected cluster; N is the total population; and n is the total sample size.

Uyo Senatorial District: $pn = \frac{2312961}{6661279} * 400$

$$pn = 139$$

Eket Senatorial District: $pn = \frac{2083481}{6661279} * 400$

$$pn = 125$$

Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District: $pn = \frac{2264837}{6661279} * 400$

$$pn = 136$$

The researcher further divided the sample size for each cluster by the total number of Local Government Areas in each cluster. Therefore 15 subjects were drawn from each Local Government Area in Uyo Senatorial District, 10 from each Local Government Area in Eket Senatorial District, and 13 from each Local Government Area in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.

At the second stage, the researcher adopted purposive sampling to access respondents in the clusters. The criterion for participating in the research was that respondents watched football. And finally, the researcher then adopted convenience sampling to access respondents in the clusters who met the criteria set out in purposive sampling.

Data Presentation

A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents, but 375 were retrieved and found useful for analysis. The analysis which follows is therefore based on the responses of 375 subjects. Out of the 375 respondents who participated in the exercise, 304 representing 81% were male, while 71 representing 19% were female.

Table I: Respondents' Frequency of Viewership of football league games

Frequency of Viewership	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Regularly	112	30
Often	180	48
Rarely	79	21
Uncertain	4	1
Total	375	100

According to the data in Table I, the majority of the respondents indicated that they often watched football league games.

Table II: Respondents' preferred Football Leagues

Preferred Football League	Number of Respondents	Percentage
NPFL	15	4
EPL	266	71
La Liga	37	10
Serie A	34	9
Bundesliga	23	6
Total	375	100

According to the data in Table II, the (English) Premier League is the most preferred football league among the respondents.

Table III: Respondents' Motivations for watching Football League Games

Major Motivation	Number of Respondents	Percentage
League football matches are exciting and relaxing	176	47
It keeps me occupied during boring weekends	109	29
Because everyone I know watch	11	3

League football matches

To be able to engage in sports betting	71	19
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To learn about players, playing styles, tactics and rules	8	2
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Total	375	100
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According to the data in Table 4.3, the major motivation for respondents' viewership of league football was that European football league games were exciting and relaxing

Table IV: Respondents' gratifications from Football League Matches

Gratification	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Relaxation and Recreation	165	44
Companionship	56	15
Diversion/Escape	128	34
Information	11	3
Education	15	4
Total	375	100

According to data in Table IV, relaxation/recreation is the major gratification which respondents derived from their preferred European football league games.

Table V: Ease of Access and Respondents' Interest in Football Leagues

Option	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
There are viewing centres showing football matches in my area of residence, and as such watching European football matches has never been a problem	290 (77%)	77 (21%)	8 (2%)	0 (0%)	375 (100%)
There are not enough Viewing centres in my area of residence, and the few ones around do not air football matches all the time	15 (4%)	23 (6%)	157 (42%)	180 (48%)	375 (100%)
Viewing centres are located somewhat afar off from my area of residence, but I can still visit them if I so wish	65 (17%)	58 (15%)	157 (42%)	95 (26%)	375 (100%)
There are no viewing centres in or around my area of residence, so I do not often watch football league matches	8 (2%)	19 (5%)	110 (29%)	238 (64%)	375 (100%)

According to data in Table V, majority of responses provided by the respondents indicates that they had easy access to football league matches, and as such watching football matches has never been a problem to them.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: How frequently are youths in Akwa Ibom State exposed to local and foreign football leagues?

This research question is addressed by Data in Table I. Data in Table I shows that majority of the respondents picked 'Regularly' and 'Often' when asked the extent to which they exposed themselves to football league matches. In other words, their level of exposure to football league matches can be described as 'Very High' and 'High'. Only very few picked 'Rarely' and 'Uncertain' when asked the extent to which they exposed themselves to football league matches, or in other words had 'Low' and 'Very Low' level of exposure to football league matches.

Furthermore, according to Data in Table II, majority of the respondents agreed that they watched matches from of the English Premier League more than any other league. Much of the respondents equally agreed that they watched the Spanish La Liga, but not as much as they did the English Premier League. Only few respondents agreed that they watched matches from the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL), Italian Serie A and the German Bundesliga. As such, it may be concluded that the youths in Akwa Ibom State watched European football leagues (particularly the English Premier League) more than they did the Nigerian Professional Football League. Therefore, it may be concluded that youths in Akwa Ibom State often watched football league matches and preferred watching the English Premier League over the Nigerian Professional Football League.

This in line with the submissions of Alaka (2015), that European football is highly popular among football fans in Nigeria, and hardly do these fans pass on an opportunity to watch and support European football teams. This is also in line with the finding of Dogari, Apuke, and Shadrach (2018), that on match days, many fans arrive viewing centres as early as thirty minutes to the commencement of the match. They also ensure that they had good sitting positions as well as book seats for their colleagues mostly people who support the same European club.

From the finding above, it is obvious that youths in Akwa Ibom State love and admire European football leagues so much such that would not mind spending the last penny in their pockets, including the resources meant for other important things on viewing their clubs display live through pay per-view centres. This is supported by Hamzat (2017), who states that the average amount of money spent by Nigerian youths to view foreign football leagues per year is about N112 billion. Alaka (2015) also adds that a typical football fan in Nigeria spends an average of N19,000 every nine months (August – May) watching foreign football matches at viewing centres.

Research Question 2: What are the motivations which drive exposure to local and foreign football leagues by youths in Akwa Ibom State?

This research question is addressed by Data in Table III. According to Data in Table III, majority of the respondents agreed that they watched European football matches because European football matches are exciting and relaxing. An equally large number of respondents agreed that watching European football league matches kept them occupied on boring weekends, and that European football matches provided them with the knowledge to engage in sports betting. Only few respondents agreed that they watched European football league matches to learn about playing styles and tactics or just to join the bandwagon of European football fans. Therefore, the high level of exposure to European football league matches among youths in Akwa Ibom State can be attributed to two major motivations: that European football league matches are exciting and relaxing, and that European football league matches keep one occupied on boring weekends. For respondents who agreed that they watched European football matches because European football matches are exciting and relaxing, this group of persons take watching of European football matches very seriously, and would do all they possibly can to ensure nothing comes in the way of them watching European football matches on weekends and on every other match day. On the other hand, respondents who agreed that watching European football league matches kept them occupied on boring weekends do not take watching European football league matches as seriously, and if they have important businesses to attend to, they would not mind forgoing European football matches so as to attend to them. From the foregoing, it may be

concluded that the major motivation for Youths in Akwa Ibom State' exposure to European Football leagues is that European football league matches are exciting and relaxing.

This finding is in line with the submission of Alaka (2015), that Nigerian football fans troop out in large numbers to various football viewing centres on weekends and other match days to feed their eyes and excite themselves with the skillful dribbles, superlative goals, amazing saves and precise passes which make European football so irresistible. This finding is also in line with the finding of Namethe (2021), that the desire to be thrilled at a live event is one of the major motivational variables which compels football lovers to visit football viewing centres to watch European football matches.

Research Question 3: What gratifications do youths in Akwa Ibom State derive from exposure to local and foreign football leagues?

This research question is addressed by Data in Table IV. According to Data in Table IV, majority of the respondents agreed that watching European football league matches was entertaining and relaxing. Furthermore, a large number of respondents agreed that European football league matches provided a reliable avenue through which they could escape boredom and tension, and also that watching European football league matches helped them bond with friends and fellow football lovers. From the foregoing, it may be concluded that the major gratification which youths in Akwa Ibom State derived from watching European football league matches revolves around entertainment, relaxation and recreation.

This finding is in line with the finding of Dogari, Apuke and Shadrach (2018), that that entertainment, pleasure or escapism are the major reasons Nigerian football fans love and follow European football. This finding also supports the finding of Kente and Lucas (2020), that Nigerian youths view English Premier League matches because of the entertainment benefits and nothing too serious.

This finding is also in consonance with the major postulations of the uses and gratifications theory, which is based on the assumption that the audience is proactive and seeks media which satisfies particular needs. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), the audience members are largely responsible for choosing media to meet their own needs, which may include surveillance, excitement, guidance, relaxation, tension release, social integration, entertainment, escape, identity, socialization and information acquisition. By implication, the need for entertainment and recreation is the major gratification which motivates preference and exposure to European football by youths in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 4: To what extent does ease of access influence the interest of youths in Akwa Ibom State in local and foreign football?

This research question is addressed by Data in Table V. According to Data in Table V, majority of the respondents agreed that there are viewing centres showing European football matches in their areas of residence, and as such watching European football league matches has never been a problem to them. Data in Table V also shows that larger numbers of respondents disagreed with the negative assertions that they had little or no interest in European football because they were hardly any viewing centres showing European football league matches around them. This implies that the abundance of football viewing centres significantly contributes to the growing popularity of European football leagues among youths in Akwa Ibom State LGA; therefore, it may be concluded that ease of access significantly boosts the interest of youths in Akwa Ibom State in European football leagues.

This finding is in line with the finding of Adetunji (2010), that ever since the proliferation and increasing affordability of Satellite Television or Pay TV broadcast in Nigeria, watching English Premier League and other European League matches has caught the fancy of many Nigerian youths, therefore European football has gained the interest and viewership of youths over the years as a result of the proliferation of communication technologies such as satellite television. It is also in line with the findings of Tenilola (2019), that viewing access is one of the factors which contributed significantly to Nigerian youths' preference and love for European football leagues.

Given that the major motivation behind exposure to European football league matches by youths in Akwa Ibom State is that they are exciting and relaxing, and that entertainment, relaxation and recreation are the major gratifications which youths in Akwa Ibom State derive from exposure to European football league matches, it is

therefore unsurprising that ease of access is a significant contributor to the growing interest in European football because the abundance of football viewing centres provides a very wide range of options and avenues through which residents of Akwa Ibom State can satisfy their need for entertainment and relaxation with very little effort and at less cost.

Conclusion

From the findings obtained in this study, it is concluded that youths in Akwa Ibom State often watch more of European football league matches (particularly the English Premier League) than the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL). Also, youths in Akwa Ibom State prefer watching European football leagues because European football league matches tend to satisfy their need for excitement, relaxation and recreation.

Furthermore, youths in Akwa Ibom State have easy access to European football league matches due to an abundance of football viewing centres which makes it easy for them to satisfy their need for entertainment, relaxation and recreation. Therefore, ease of access is a major contributing factor to the growing interest in European football leagues among youths in Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Local television station operators in Akwa Ibom and in Nigeria should endeavor to inject more of European football league broadcasts and other sports programmes into their programming schedules. This would enable them compete to some extent with foreign satellite television stations which broadcast European football matches.
2. The League Management Company (LMC) and the Nigerian Professional Football League TV (NPFL TV) should endeavor to observe and study aspects of European football leagues, particularly the English Premier League, so as to obtain ideas on how to upgrade the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL) and bring it up to a level that would be more appealing to football fans in Akwa Ibom State, and in Nigeria.
3. It is probable that football fans in Akwa Ibom State and in Nigeria patronize much of European football leagues due to uneasy access to the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL). Therefore, the NBC and the LMC should endeavor to ensure that there is easier access to the NPFL. This would encourage patronage of local content by football fans in Akwa Ibom State and in Nigeria.

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