

Social Identities and Rivalries among Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates Online Football Fans in YouTube Podcasts

Admire Lesenga Maluleke¹, Mopailo Thomas Thatelo^{*2}

Department of Communication Science, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

thatemt@unisa.ac.za

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines how Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates online fans are involved in participatory cultural agency through YouTube podcasts production and commentary in South Africa. Drawing on participatory culture framework integrated within a thematic critical analysis approach, the study analyses ten purposively selected YouTube podcast episodes from South African football fan channels active between January 2023 and March 2026. The paper adopts a qualitative interpretivist design. Study findings reveal that fans are not passive consumers of media, however, they are active cultural producers who creates, circulate and contest meaning through online podcast discourse. Through the thematic critical analysis, six themes emerged from data, namely: fan rivalry and identity, loyalty, love of the club, community and social cohesion, passion, and criticism of club management and performance. These themes collectively demonstrates that South African football fans deploy podcast platforms as spaces of participatory agency. They challenge mainstream sports media narratives, assert multilingual cultural identities and build local communities of practice. This paper address a significant research gap in African sports media research by centering South African football fandom in digital media scholarship.

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1. Introduction

The rise of digital media has fundamentally transformed how football fans engage with their favourite sport teams. This study probes the role of podcasts within the South African football industry, examining its advancement from a traditional media news platform to a dynamic engagement across social media platforms. This paper examines the role of YouTube podcasts in South African football fan culture. It traces the transition from traditional broadcast media to participatory digital platforms. Particular attention is given to how fans of Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates construct discursive identities through online engagement. The rivalry between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates constitutes one of the most historically significant sporting content on the African continent. Orlando Pirates was established 1937, while Kaizer Chiefs was founded in 1970. The historic rivalry between the two clubs began in Soweto in January 1970 during the Rogue Beer Cup third and fourth play-off, resulting in a 6-4 victory for Orlando Pirates (Ncube, Mare & Muzondo, 2023). It was unforeseeable that these two teams, who kicked off the event, would rise in prominence to the point where from the modest origins, both clubs grew into continental football giants. They attracted supporters from across Southern Africa, including Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, and Lesotho (Kuhn, 2019). The Soweto Derby is now a mass social event that transcends sport.

The growth of digital media has created new spaces for fan engagement. Podcasts are digital audio and video files distributed via the internet. They can be accessed on computers, smartphones, and portable media players (Rahmiyati, Dewi & Eliza, 2021). Podcasting gained significant traction following Apple's iTunes 4.9 podcast support in 2005 (Sullivan, 2019). Since then, the medium has expanded rapidly. It now encompasses sports, education, commentary, politics, and popular culture



(Jacobson, 2021). In South Africa specifically, YouTube hosted football podcasts have emerged as significant spaces where fans engage in multilingual discourse about their clubs. These platforms have not been adequately studied, particularly from an African media studies perspective (Shernell, 2021).

The present paper addresses this gap. It draws on a broader master thesis (Maluleke, 2025) to present a critically interrogated, methodologically refined analysis of fan discourse on YouTube football podcasts in South Africa. The analytical framework adopted here is a thematic critical analysis framework. This framework moves beyond descriptive thematic mapping to engage critically with the power relations, identity constructions, and ideological formations embedded in the fan discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Research Question: How do Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates fans exercise participatory cultural agency through YouTube podcast production and commentary?

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1 From traditional to digital media in football

Historically, football fans in the Global South accessed sports through traditional mass media. These includes television, radio, television, newspapers and magazines (Mattesi, 2019). The emergence of digital media technology, and specifically the internet, has significantly changed the football consumption among football fans (Breen & Hoey, 2022). The transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 decentralised information production. It empowered users to generate and share content in real time (Randles, 2021). This shift has had profound implications for sports journalism and fan culture, enabling participatory media practices that challenge the gatekeeping role of professional journalists (Berg, 2021).

In the South African context, the shift to digital media has been marked by the adoption of multilingual fan generated content. YouTube channels such as *Ama Fans Wethu TV*, *Khosi Nation Fan TV*, *Diski Galore*, *Talking Buccaneers*, *Amakhosi Fan Channel* and *iDiski TV* have become central to football discourse. These channels conduct discussions in isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana and English. This linguistic diversity reflect the multilingual character of South African society and complicates assumptions about digital exclusion in Africa (Alegi & Timbs, 2019; Choto, Chiweshe & Muparamoto, 2019). Jenkins *et al.* (2013) identify this shift as the emergence of spreadable media, a media environment in which audiences actively spread content across platforms and networks rather than receiving it through broadcast channels. South African football YouTube podcasts exemplify spreadable media, through fans production of content, social media shares and comments, and embed it in wider digital conversations about football governance, player form and club identity. The media spreadable distinguishes YouTube podcasts from traditional broadcasts and from earlier forms of digital fan engagement such as club websites and forum posts.

1.2.2 Social media and football discourse

Social media platforms have transformed how supporters interact with football. They provide immediate access to news, match updates and behind the scenes content (Popp, Horbel & Germelmann, 2018). Platforms like X, Instagram and Facebook have enabled clubs and players to establish direct connections with fans (Wakefield, 2016). However, these platforms are not neutral spaces, they are embedded within political economies that shape what can be said, by whom and with what visibility (Theocharis & Jungherr, 2021). Fan discourse on YouTube is therefore not expressive, it is also constrained by platform algorithms, advertising and digital inequalities.

the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the migration of fan engagement to digital platforms. With physical attendance suspended globally, social media became primary space for football community building (Louis, 2023). For South African football fans, this was particularly significant given the high levels of social media usage among young urban demographics (Shernell, 2021). Digital platforms such as YouTube thus became not merely supplementary but central to the social experience of football fandom. From a participatory culture perspective, the pandemic period produced a sharp intensification of fan content production. Unable to attend matches, fans channelled their energy into podcast creation, commentary, and digital community building. This period marked the consolidation of fan led YouTube podcast culture in South Africa as a mainstream form of football engagement.

1.2.3 Football Podcasts: Engagement, Identity and Community

Football podcasting has grown rapidly as a distinct genre of sports media. Research indicates a trend toward informal, post-match conversational formats that foster parasocial relationships between hosts and audiences (Granberg & Lofblad, 2023). Thomas (2020) found that sustained engagement with sports podcasts creates enduring listener loyalty, particularly when hosts develop consistent personas and discussion styles. This aligns with social identity theory, which suggests that group-mediated identity formation is strengthened by consistent exposure to in group narratives and shared emotional experiences (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, Hirshon, 2020).

South African football podcasts are distinctive in that they deploy indigenous language, address local football governance, and create critical space outside editorial control of commercial broadcasters. From a participatory culture perspective, these podcasts channels constitutes what Jenkins, *et al.* (2013) call “fan labour” creative, affective and technical work performed voluntarily by fans out of passion and community commitment. This fan labour produces cultural values that commercial sports media does not provide, authentic, insider, multilingual football commentary that speaks directly to the experiences and identities of South African football fans.

Despite the growing popularity of football podcasting, the literature reveals a significant Eurocentric bias. Most studies focus on Euro-American sports discourse (Granberg & Lofblad, 2023; Berg, 2021; Sullivan 2019). The specific domain of South African football fan discourse on digital platforms remains substantially under-researched. This article makes a direct contribution to this gap. It does so by applying participatory culture theory to s context that has been largely invisible in the existing scholarship on digital fandom.

1.3. Theoretical Framework: Participatory Culture Theory (PCT)

This paper employs Participatory Cultural Theory (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013) as a foundational theoretical framework. Participatory culture theory argues that digital media has enabled audiences to move from passive consumption to active cultural production. Jenkins (1992) introduced the concept of participatory culture in the context of fan communities that actively produce creative texts, such as artwork, commentary, stories, videos and response to mass media content. This early formulation emphasised the creative and communal dimensions of fan practice. Jenkins *et al.* (2013) subsequently developed the concepts of spreadable media to account for the shift from Web 1.0 broadcasting to Web 2.0 participation, arguing that audience have become active agents in the circulation and transformation of media content. A participatory culture, as defined by Jenkins *et al.* (2013:xi), is one “with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices.” This definition is analytically productive for the study of South African football podcasts. The YouTube podcasts ecosystem exhibits each of these characteristics: fan channels are accessible and low-cost to produce, podcast communities actively share and respond to episodes, and experienced podcasts hosts model discursive norms for newer fans.

Deuze (2021) argue that participatory culture has produced a media life condition in which media participaion is no longer a discrete activity but an ambient feature of everyday social existence. For football fans, this means that club allegiance is not expressed only at the stadium or in front of the television, but expressed continuously through digital participation, creating content, commenting, debating and sharing. YouTube football podcasts in South Africa are, therefore, a direct manifestation of the media life condition.

However, it is important to point out that participatory culture has limitations. Jenkins *et al.* (2013) acknowledge that participation is structured by inequality of access, platform power and social capital. Not all fans can participate equally. For instance, in the South African context, digital divide remains significant, with data costs, device access, unreliable network and digital literacy shaping who can participate in YouTube podcast culture (Ntuli & Lesame, 2022). Bosch (2022) similarly cautions that digital participation among South African youth is shaped by structural inequalities that the discourse of participatory culture can obscure.

Despite these cautions, the participatory culture framework offers a productive lens for understanding YouTube football podcast discourse in South Africa. It directs attention to the creative,

collaborative and political dimensions of fan practice that consumption based framework overlooks. It allows the researcher to ask not just what fans say but what they do, and how they produce, circulate, challenge and collectively make meaning through digital media.

1.4. Analytical Framework: Thematic Critical Analysis

This article adopts a thematic critical analysis (TCA) framework of qualitative research paradigm. TCA integrates the interpretive rigour of Braun and Clark's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis with a critical theoretical foundation that attends to power, ideology and social construction in discourse. Unlike conventional thematic analysis, which describe patterns in data, TCA interrogated why those patterns exist, whose interests they serve, and what social relations they reproduce.

Four theoretical lenses inform this framework. Together they constitute a multi-perspectival apparatus for the critical analysis of South African football fan discourse on YouTube podcasts:

Lens 1: Participatory culture theory

Participatory culture theory (PCT) functions as the overarching framework for this study. PCT holds that digital media has transformed audiences from passive consumers into active cultural producers. It directs analytical attention to how fans create content, spread media across platforms, and exercise cultural agency within and against dominant media structures (Jenkins et al., 2013). This theory enables a critically analysis attending to the conditions, constraints and power relations that shape fan participation.

Lens 2: Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (Hirshon, 2020) is a psychological framework that examines how fans construct in-group and out-group identities through podcast discourse. It attends to the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions to team allegiance. Within the PCT framework, social identity theory explains why fans invest their participatory energy in club specific channels, given that podcast participation is an act of cultural production and an act of identity assertion.

Lens 3: Social media engagement theory

Social media engagement theory (Santos, Correia, Biscaia & Pegoraro, 2019) examines the behavioural and cognitive dimension of fan participation in digital discussions. It attends to the effective investments and community-building practices of podcast audiences. Within PCT, social media engagement theory explains the mechanisms through which participatory culture is enacted deploying likes, shares, comments, and return viewing that sustain the YouTube podcast ecosystem.

Lens 4: Agenda-setting theory

Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) examines how fan podcasts set their own agendas. Unlike traditional agenda-setting theory, fan podcasts represent a form of counter-agenda-setting in which fans determine what matters in football discourse outside editorial gatekeeping. This lens is analytically complementary to PCT. Where PCT explains fan agency as cultural production, agenda-setting theory explains how that production shapes the informational environment determine: what issues are discussed? which players are scrutinised? And which governance failures are held to account?

Together, these four lenses constitute a thematic critical analysis framework is interpretive, critical and participatory in its orientation. This framework is designed to produce a scholarly account of South African football fan podcast discourse that is attentive to both the agency and the structural condition that enables and constrain that agency (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2013; Terry & Hayfield, 2020).

2. Method

This paper adopts an interpretivist approach which holds that social reality is subjective and socially constructed, it generates multiple realities that are best understood through the experience and meaning-making practices of participants (Sengul, 2019; Curry, 2020). This paradigm was appropriate because it foregrounded the subjective dimensions of fan identity and discourse. It enables the researcher to engage with podcasts content as meaningful social artefacts (Scauso, 2020). In the context of the thematic critical analysis framework and with the participatory culture lens both are committed to understanding social phenomena from within the experience of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This paper follows a qualitative research design which is exploratory and interpretive which is concerned with the interrogation of underlying ideological meaning, lived experiences and social contexts (Priya, 2021). The alignment of qualitative methodology with participatory culture theory, is qualitative, ethnographic and interpretive tradition. Jenkin's foundational work on fan communities was grounded in participant observation and textual analysis (Jenkins, 1992). This study extends that tradition to the digital context of South African football fandom.

The study employed a purposive sampling to select ten YouTube podcast episodes from six South African football fan channels. These channels were *Ama Fans Wethu TV*, *Khosi Nation Fan TV*, *Diski Galore*, *Talking Buccaneers*, *Amakhosi Fan Channel*, and *iDiski TV*. The episodes were selected from the period January 2024 to March 2026. Selection criteria included: the episode featured Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs as the primary subject: the episode was at least fifteen minutes in duration, and the episode had been publicly accessible for at least 40 days. An additional PCT derived criterion was applied; episodes were selected to ensure representation of fan-produced content (rather than journalist-produced content). This criterion operationalises the participatory culture framework by ensuring the data reflects genuine fan agency rather than professionalised sports commentary.

The qualitative coding process followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis protocol. To operationalise the participatory culture framework, PCT-derived sensitising concepts were applied as a secondary coding layer during Phase 2 (initial coding). These sensitising concepts, drawn from Jenkins et al. (2013), included participatory agency, spreadability, fan labour and textual productivity. These codes were applied alongside the inductive thematic codes to ensure the PCT framework was systematically operationalised in the analysis.

The six phases of the thematic analysis were as follows:

Phase 1: Familiarisation. The researcher watched each of the ten episodes in full. Descriptive notes were made on topics discussed, emotional register, linguistic choices and moments of particular analytical significance.

Phase 2: Initial coding. Sentence-by-sentence coding of transcribed extracts was conducted. Transcription was completed in English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho and Setswana with bilingual assistance. PCT sensitising concepts were applied as secondary codes alongside inductive descriptive codes.

Phase 3: Theme construction. Initial codes were sorted into preliminary themes through iterative grouping and re-sorting.

Phase 4: Theme review. Themes were checked against the full dataset for coherence, distinctiveness and analytical relevance to the research question.

Phase 5: Theme definition and naming. Each theme was defined with precision, specifying inclusions and exclusions. The six themes identified were: fan rivalry and identity; loyalty; love of the club; community and social cohesion; passion; criticism of club management and performance.

Phase 6: Report production. The analytical narrative was written as an integrated thematic critical analysis with PCT and the three complementary lenses applied to each theme.

3. Results and Discussion

The thematic critical analysis of ten YouTube podcasts episodes produced six themes. Each theme is examined in terms of its descriptive content, its critical dimensions and its theoretical implications. Each theme is also analysed through the participatory culture lens examining how the theme illustrates fan cultural agency and production.

3.1 Fan Rivalry and Identity

Rivalry emerged as the most pervasive and intense theme across all ten podcast episodes. Fans of both clubs articulated their identities in direct opposition to the rival group. The language of rivalry was often extreme. Hosts and callers described the opposing club in terms of failure, arrogance or delusion. This finding is consistent with social identity theory's prediction in-group favouritism and out-group derogation (Hirshon, 2020; Haslam, Boem & Fransen, 2020). In Video 01, a host from *Ama Fans Wethu TV* described the Soweto Derby in visceral terms; the results was not merely a scoreline but a statement about social worth and community pride. This resonates with Tyler, Cobbs and Xantos (2019) characterisation of sports rivalry as a social phenomenon rooted in demographic, geographic, historical, and identity factors.

For instance, the discussion regarding the potential appointment of Pitso Mosimane as Kaizer Chiefs coach illustrates how historical rivalries shape fan perceptions beyond the pitch. Some supporters rejected Mosimane due to his previous association with Mamelodi Sundowns, interpreting his past competitive stance as personal animosity towards Chiefs.

Fan 2: *"I would prefer couch Nabi. It's not that Pitso lacks ability, but during his time at Mamelodi Sundowns he seemed openly hostile towards Kaizer Chiefs, which make it difficult for me to accept him at the club. His conduct at Sundowns suggested he has an issue with Chiefs"*

Fan 1: *"In my view, that was simply football rivalry. He was deeply committed to winning with Sundowns, and his remarks about Kaizer Chiefs reflected that intensity rather than any personal problem"*

In Video 3 this reaction demonstrates how rivalry narratives become embedded in collective memory, influencing present attitudes and decision-making. Rather than evaluating Mosimane solely on professional competence, fans observed his candidacy through the lens of historical rivalry and identity-based loyalty.

Carragher (2020) notes that rivalry often structures fan discourse, prompting supporters to defend not only their teams but also their own identities as members of a symbolic community. The exchange further reveals how supporters interpret opposition success as hostility, thereby reinforcing in-group versus out-group distinctions consistent with Social Identity Theory (Haslam et al., 2020).

Fan 3: *"Orlando Pirates are now back-to-back Nedbank Cup champions. How long did it take us to secure two trophies consecutively this season? I noticed some people claiming it was a one-sided match. If that were true, why didn't that team Sundowns win? And if the argument is that Sundowns were the stronger side on the night, how do you explain the fact that Orlando Pirates registered eight shots on target compared to Sundowns four?"*

In Video 6 reveals that fan identification as a form of personal attachment. Fan identification refers to the personal commitment, a sense of connection and emotional engagement a spectator feels towards a sports team, where the team's successes and setbacks are experienced as the fan's own (Mahmuodin, Sadeghi-Boroujerdi & Baker, 2024). The psychological attachment whereby team success is experienced as personal achievement. Such discourse exemplifies how fans mobilise factual, emotional, and symbolic resources to protect group status. Winand *et al.* (2021) argue that identity involves social distinctive traits and shared attributes, here, defending Pirates' performance became a way of affirming membership in the Orlando Pirates community.

In addition, from a participatory culture perspective, the rivalry theme reveals an important dimension of fan agency. Fans do not merely respond to the rivalry constructed by clubs and mainstream sports media. They actively reproduce, elaborate and transform the rivalry through their own content production. Jenkins *et al.* (2013) describe this as "textual productivity", the fan practice

of generating new texts in response to existing cultural material. The podcast hosts in this study are textually productive in a very specific sense, they take the raw material of a match result and transform it into extended, emotionally rich, culturally specific commentary that mainstream sports media does not provide. In doing so, they exercise genuine participatory agency.

Critically, the rivalry discourse also revealed gendered dimensions. Male voices dominated the podcast discussions. Women's perspectives on football were largely absent. This is a significant analytical observation. From a PCT perspective, this is limitation of the participatory culture on display. Participatory culture, as Jenkins *et al.* (2013) acknowledge does not eliminate existing social inequalities. It can reproduce and even amplify them. The male-dominated character of South African football podcasting reflects the gendered exclusion of broader football culture. Future research should specifically investigate the conditions under which women fans participate in YouTube podcast production.

3.2 Loyalty

Loyalty was expressed consistently and emphatically across the episodes. Fans of both clubs articulated unconditional commitment to their teams. This commitment persisted across periods of performance, controversial management decisions and disappointing transfer windows. For instance, in Video 03, fan deploys a symbolic language to demonstrates their individual loyalty to the team.

Fan 2: *"We are not a dead horse, Under the leadership of coach Cavin Johnson, we have redeemed ourselves and are not going into our game as a dead horse."*

The use of symbolic language in a form of an idiom in Video 3, suggest that they are not a useless team, like a horse. Orlando Pirates is a productive football team that has won virous South African tournaments. The clever use of symbolic language demonstrates fans loyalty to the Orlando Pirates football team. This aligns with Kucharska, Confente and Brunetti's (2020) finding that football fan loyalty is structured by psychological attachment resistant to rational cost-benefit analysis.

In Video 5, a Kaizer Chiefs fan podcast discussed the club's poor recent during the 2026 Soweto Darby where the team has lost to Orlando Pirates. Despite frustration, the host consistently returned to expression of unflinching loyalty: *"Chiefs nje (only) always."* This expression of code mixing in English and isiZulu, encapsulates the affective logic of fan loyalty. Language here serves as an identity marker signaling authentic fan belonging. From a participatory culture perspective, loyalty is not merely a psychological state. It is a performed and produced quality. The podcast host in Video 5 does not simply feel loyal but perform loyalty for their audience. They produce loyalty discourse that circulates within fan community and reinforces collective commitment. Jenkins (1992) describe this as the fan practice of "poaching" cultural texts, in other words, taking the raw material of club membership and transforming it into kind of cultural poaching. Fans take the affective attachment they feel towards their clubs and transform it into content that sustains and deepens that attachment for the entire community. Rahman, Rosenberger, Yun, de Oliveira and Köcher (2024) similarly found that sustained loyalty is produced through ongoing emotional engagement rather than passive allegiance. The podcast format, as a regular and intimate medium, is ideally suited to this kind of loyalty production.

3.3 Love of the Club

Love, as a theme, was expressed in all sampled YouTube videos 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8 through the language of devotion, sacrifice, and non-romantic attachment.

Fan 1: *"I will be ready to give you an injection after Orlando Pirates has inflicted pain on you. Are you ready for what? I will be there to give you that drip. I don't want to see you in pain, friend, you know I love you."*

In Video 3 deployed love expression that shows how they love their teams and the deep connection they share. Fans described their love relationship with their clubs in terms that strengthens family bonds. This suggests that fandom in the South African context is a form of social belonging constitutive of personal and collective identity (Ricatti & Klugman, 2020). Several hosts spoke about

having inherited their club allegiance from parents and grandparents. This intergenerational transmission of football love was described with pride. This finding connects with Ncube, Mare and Muzondo's (2023) observation that Chiefs Pirates rivalry has been transmitted across generations since the 1970's.

Participatory culture theory adds an important dimension to this theme. The intergenerational transmission of club love is no longer confined to family dinner-table conversations or match attendance. It now occurs through digital media participation. Young fans inherit club allegiance from older family members and then participate in the same podcast's communities alongside those family members. The YouTube podcast space collapses generational boundaries. Older and younger fans produce and consume content together, sustaining the love of the club as a living, digitally mediated cultural practice. Jenkins *et al.*, (2013) describe this as the "circulation" dimension of spreadable media, the way content and cultural commitments spread not just horizontally across peer networks but vertically across generations.

3.4 Community and Social Cohesion

Community and social cohesion emerged as a significant theme. Podcast episodes functioned as digital community spaces where fans shared experiences, debated match events, and offered mutual support. Ronconi (2022) defines community and social cohesion as an ongoing process of shared values, common challenges, and equal opportunities grounded in trust, hope and mutual support.

Fan 1: *"These two teams (Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs) are well supported in the continent. Some people will come from Nigeria to witness the beautiful game; they have already made travel arrangements."*

Fan 2: *"This is one of the biggest derbies in the world, and everyone will be watching."*

In Video 3 demonstrates the reveals a sense of community of football lovers, thus, fans were talking about how big the Soweto Derby is and that it is supported across the continent. Moustakas (2022) argued that at the community level, sports are promoted as a tool for creating social cohesion, strengthening community ties, and providing access to positive role models. Finger, Amann, Biel, Niemann and Reinke (2023) argue that social media offers football clubs significant advantages, enabling them to extend their research, engage with their supporters and connect with a broader audience that includes local, national and international fans.

Participatory culture theory provides the most analytically productive framework for understanding this theme. Jenkins *et al.* (2013:xi) define participatory culture as one with "strong support for creating and sharing creations" and "some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices." The podcast communities in this study exhibit all of these qualities. Experienced hosts model discursive norms of newer participants. Listeners are encouraged to contribute through comments and call ins. Content is explicitly produced for the community rather than for commercial gain.

Critically, the community dimensions of these podcasts extend beyond social cohesion in a benign sense. They also function as spaces of counter-public formation. Fraser (1990) and Deuze (2021) argues that marginalised group form counter-narratives to challenge the dominant public discourse. South African football fan podcasts in indigenous languages constitute counter-public that challenge the English-language dominance of mainstream sports broadcasting. This is a politically significant form of participatory agency. Ntuli and Lesame (2022), Raw, Sherry and Rowe (2022) similarly document how mediated sport and indigenous language media combine to produce spaces of cultural affirmation and community resilience in South Africa.

3.5 Passion

Passion was expressed through heightened emotional intensity, extreme language, and physical gestures visible in the video format.

Fan 1: *"If Orlando Pirates scores first, Kaizer Chiefs will never recover."*

The football fans in Video 1 assert that Kaizer Chiefs “*will never recover*” if Orlando Pirates scores first reveals that passion in football fandom is not merely enthusiasm but a psychological state that distorts rational judgement. Tucker (2020) defines passion as a strong positive orientation towards an object that motivates sustained engagement with the favourite teams. Newson, Buhrmester and Whitehouse (2023) observe, fans employ passionate language to point out commitment and to distinguish themselves from other teams. It reveals underlying commitment to Orlando Pirates and what it can actually do on the field. Thus, fans engage passionately about their football teams, because they care about the outcomes of their teams. In addition, passion is the soul of the Soweto Derby, however, it is also an unreliable witness.

From a participatory culture perspective, passion charges conversations with emotional intensity that reinforces group solidarity at the expense of critical reflection (Carragher, 2020; Jenkins, 1992). Fans produce content not because they are paid to do so but because they are passionate of their football teams. The South African football podcast hosts in this paper are exemplary instances of this passion driven production. They invest time, technical skill, emotional energy, and community reputation in producing podcast content.

This analysis has implications for how football clubs and the Premier Soccer League (PSL, an administrative body governing professional football in South Africa) should understand their fan base. Fans who produce passionate content on YouTube podcasts represent the most deeply invested segment of the supporter community. They are cultural assets whose enthusiasm sustains club culture. The PSL and individual clubs should engage with this participatory fan culture constructively rather than treating it as irrelevant to their commercial strategies (Jenkins *et al.*, 2013; Deuze, 2021).

3.6 Criticism of Club Management and Performance

Criticism of club management was a consistent and analytical significant theme. Fans used the podcasts space to hold club management accountable in ways that traditional media rarely facilitate. Aichner (2019) argues that social media criticism functions as a mechanism of fan accountability. Fans are not commenting on decisions already made, but debate on alternative strategies, propose coach appointments, critique transfer policies and analyse training methodologies.

Fan 2: “*There is a problem as Kaizer Chiefs, and the management must take full responsibility for that.*”

Fan 4: “*The coach doesn’t have the luxury of choosing the team for himself. The management is doing that for him.*”

Fan 5: “*Who is responsible for recruiting players? Because for the past seasons, the Kaizer Chiefs management has been signing the players for the coaches, not the coaches signing players for themselves.*”

In Video 5 demonstrates a growing dissatisfaction among fans regarding their respective club’s management and overall performance, particularly Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates. Supporters are no longer passive consumers of football content. They are actively shaping the narrative through digital platforms such as YouTube podcasts. The criticisms directed at club management highlight deep-rooted issues such as the lack of autonomy granted to coaches, poor recruitment policies, ageing squads and outdated club operations that hinder progress. Fans voiced strong opinions about the need for structural changes, including modernising the management approach to align with global football standards.

Participatory culture theory is significant for this theme. Jenkins *et al.* (2013) argue that participatory culture enables fans to move from passive consumption to active civic engagement with the institutions and industries that produce their cultural experiences. For instance, in the context of this video 5, fans call for accountability, forward-thinking planning, transparency among coaches and club management. The criticism of club management in these podcasts is precisely this kind of civic engagement. Fans are not merely venting frustration, but they are exercising a form of participatory citizenship, holding sports institutions and officials accountable through public, creative and networked discourse. In the South African football context, participatory politics takes the form of fans using their podcasts to demand transparency from club boards, question the PSL’s

governance, and advocate for reforms in how football is managed. This political dimension of fan podcast culture has been entirely overlooked in existing scholarship on South African football. It represents one of the most significant contributions to this paper.

Deuze (2021) argue that participatory culture creates conditions for what he calls. “media citizenship”, essentially as form of public life organised around the active production, sharing, and contestation of media content. South African football podcast hosts are media citizens in this sense, are producers, commentators, critics and community builders. Their role in South African football culture deserves recognition and sustained scholarship attention.

4. Conclusion

This article has examined how Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates fans exercise participatory cultural agency through YouTube podcast production and commentary in South Africa. By integrating participatory culture theory with thematic critical analysis, social identity theory, social media engagement theory and agenda-setting theory, this article has produced a various perspective account on South African football fan discourse that is both theoretically and empirically grounded. The six themes, namely, fan rivalry and identity, loyalty, love of the club, community and social cohesion, passion, and criticism of club management and performance demonstrate the multi-dimensional character of fan cultural production in the digital age. Each theme reveals a distinct dimension of participatory agency, textual productivity in rivalry discourse, performative loyalty production, intergenerational cultural transmission through digital circulation, counter-public formation in indigenous language community building, passion driven affective labour in content production, and participatory politics in club management criticism.

The adoption of a thematic critical analysis framework has enabled this paper to move beyond description, by interrogating the power relations, identity constructions and ideological formations grounded in fan discourse. This framework reveals dimensions of South African football culture that remain invisible in exploratory analyses. The integration of participatory culture theory as a theoretical lens is the primary theoretical contribution to this paper. The PCT reframes the understanding of South African football podcasts culture, that is, fans are not passive consumers. Instead, they are active cultural producers whose YouTube podcast work constitutes a significant form of media citizenship. Their participatory agency challenge mainstream sports media hegemony, sustains multilingual cultural communities, and holds football institutions accountable through networked public discourse.

This paper makes the following contributions to the literature: 1) it addresses the significant gap in African sports media research by centering South African football podcast discourse. 2) It documents the role of indigenous language in constructing digital fan communities in South Africa. 3) It establishes that YouTube podcasts have become a significant counter-agenda setting space in which fans exercise discursive agency that traditional media denies. 4) It applies participatory culture theory to South African football fandom for the first time, demonstrating that Jenkins et al. (2013) framework has significant analytical purchase in African digital media context beyond its Euro-American origins. Although this paper made significant contribution, future research need to investigate 1) the gendered politics of South African football podcast discourse and the barriers to women’s participation in fan podcast culture. 2) Comparative studies of participatory football fan culture across the African countries and how it would enrich understanding of digital fandom in the Global South.

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