

A Non-Media-Centric Approach to Mediatization: Digital Orientations in the Lives of Football Fans

MICHAEL SKEY
Loughborough University, UK

SOLOMON WALIAULA
Maasai Mara University, Kenya
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

In this article, we argue for the importance of a non-media-centric approach to mediatization. To do this, we develop a theoretical framework that combines Schulz's influential work on the four dimensions of mediatization with novel insights from the phenomenology of media. The latter foregrounds the significance of practical, embodied forms of mediated knowledge and habit as well as the extent to which media environments become part of the familiar landscapes that people traverse. Using football (or soccer) fans in East Africa as a case study, we show how football-related activities are increasingly orientated toward the schedules and performances of leagues, clubs, and players in Europe and, as a result, become inextricably bound up with, and informed by, media. This approach offers an important means for theorizing both the sport-media nexus and the power of media in the contemporary era.

Keywords: football, mediatization, Africa, fans, sport, ethnography, practices

To its adherents, mediatization is a means of understanding both the media's increasing significance as an institutional actor over time and the extent to which everyday interactions are mediated in an era of digital technologies. To its critics, it is a poorly defined concept that too often produces grand, sweeping narratives of social change that obscure more than they reveal (Billig, 2013). As a means of addressing such critiques, more recent empirical studies of mediatization have tried to both ground the concept (Driessens, Raeymaeckers, Verstraeten, & Vandenbussche, 2010) and place a variety of different social actors, migrants (Madianou, 2014), politicians (Driessens et al., 2010), and young people (Johanson, 2014) at the heart of their analyses. In this article, we adopt a similar strategy by using what Andersson (2017) labels a non-media-centric approach to mediatization. At first sight, this might seem like an oxymoron, given mediatization's emphasis on media power "from above" (Livingstone, 2019) and non-media-centric approaches' attempts to foreground everyday agency and practices. However, we believe that it may be possible to navigate between these two poles by developing an approach that acknowledges both forms of actively cultivated mediated

Michael Skey: M.Skey@lboro.ac.uk

Solomon Waliaula: solomonwaliaula@gmail.com

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knowledge and habit, as well as the extent to which both media-related social settings and digital platforms become part of the familiar landscapes that people traverse “so that they come to be experienced as self-evident and . . . normal” (Markham & Rodgers, 2017, p. 7).

To do this, we develop a theoretical framework that combines insights from Schulz’s (2004) seminal paper on the four dimensions of mediatization—namely, extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation—with “phenomenological approach[es] to the study of everyday media use” (Moores, 2015, p. 18). Of particular interest here are the dimensions of extension and accommodation and how they can be extended using concepts from media phenomenology, including orientation, embodiment, and wayfinding. In this case, the activities in question focus on a domain of social life, football (or soccer), that has received relatively little attention from scholars of mediatization (see, for exceptions, Becker, Kautsky, & Widholm, 2014; Johanson, 2014; Ncube & Mhiripiri, 2020).

We also draw on empirical materials from an underresearched region, East Africa, and explore the ways in which football fans follow and discuss the sport. As we will see later, many of these discussions now revolve around “foreign” leagues, players, and teams, notably those from Western Europe. The article is divided into two main sections. The first offers a brief overview of how the concept of mediatization has risen to prominence. It notes some of the key arguments of its main proponents and critics, and outlines our own theoretical framework, which uses phenomenological perspectives as a means of grounding the concept more effectively. The second part of the article discusses the salience of our case study and method, and the third and final section provides a number of examples culled from our engagements with football fans—watching, discussing, and playing football—and interviews with football journalists in East Africa.

Mediatization—Up, Down, and All Around

After first being popularized in relation to the study of politics in the later 1990s (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999), debates around mediatization have mushroomed over the past two decades. The concept has been applied in studies of war, religion, play, tourism, education, sport, science, music, consumption, and death (see Driessens, Bolin, Hepp, & Hjarvard, 2017, for an overview). Its main proponents have argued that mediatization is not only an effective means of theorizing the media’s influence over longer term historical periods, but also the impact of digital technologies on contemporary forms of social organization and practice (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Driessens et al., 2010; Hjarvard, 2008). The most influential work on the topic has focused on relationships at the institutional level, with mediatization defined “as the influence of media institutions and practices on other fields of social and institutional practice” (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014, p. 705). For example, Rawolle and Lingard (2014) point to the ways in which media have impacted the field of education, first observing the use of new technologies in the classroom and beyond (computers, smart boards, data management systems, online assessments and marking, and so on). They then note how these technologies lead to “new means of organizing teaching and learning, and challenges to and effects on multiple practices in education, including pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment” (p. 599).

While *mediatization* may have become the “word of the decade” in media studies (Corner, 2018), some scholars have been much more critical, arguing that the concept is so poorly defined that it risks becoming a dumping ground for studies of very different phenomena (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). A second critique is

concerned with the extent to which proponents of mediatization trade in narratives of social change that overemphasize the role of a “singularized media” as a causal agent (Corner, 2018). More recent work, inspired by a variety of theoretical approaches—including media anthropology (Madianou, 2014), domestication (Hartmann, 2014), audience theory (Schröder, 2017), and practice theory (Driessens et al., 2010)—has addressed some of these critiques by focusing on everyday activities, in particular, social domains as a means of grounding the concept.

Indeed, what these approaches share is an interest in studying “mediatization from below,” which emphasizes the importance of “ethnographical thick descriptions, clearly delineated social contexts and . . . contextualization” (Andersson, 2017, p. 38). In addition, these studies have been significant not only in placing people at the heart of any analysis, but also in reframing questions of media power and influence. As Livingstone (2019) recently observed, by focusing on the workings of power from above, much mediatization theory neglects the agency of “ordinary” social actors. In other words, “we are left with a contradiction—the media are becoming more and more important across ever more fields of society, and yet people’s engagement with such media is, seemingly, unimportant” (Livingstone, 2019, p. 178). This article follows a similar trajectory, but draws on a novel set of insights from media phenomenology, which emphasize “the practices and experiences of daily living that help to give media their meaningfulness” (Moores, 2017, p. 1) and the extent to which these mediated activities become normalized and “taken-for-granted” (Markham & Rodgers, 2017).

Dimensions of Mediatization

To respond to the argument that “mediatization is a nebulous concept that often seems like it has no boundaries” (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, p. 1040), we make three analytical moves. First, we approach mediatization as “a medium-level concept” (Ekström, Fornäs, Jansson, & Jerslev, 2016, p. 1092) rather than one designed to “describe overall developmental trends in society across different contexts” (Hjvard, 2008, p. 113). In other words, the article focuses on a particular social domain (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014), football (or soccer), that has its own set of specific sociocultural practices and institutional frameworks; these involve players, fans, administrators, government agents, and so on, and have influenced and been influenced by various media over time (Frandsen, 2016).

Second, we return to Schulz’s (2004) seminal paper discussing four dimensions—extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation—of mediatization because we believe it still offers a useful path toward operationalizing the concept so that it has “more defined indicators for the purposes of analytic differentiation” (Corner, 2018, p. 83). Third, to extend Schulz’s (2004) ideas and address the problem of media-centrism, we draw on novel insights from phenomenological approaches to the study of everyday media uses (Markham & Rodgers, 2017; Moores, 2015, 2016). With a particular focus on the dimensions of “extension” and “accommodation,” we explore the ways in which football-related activities become oriented toward particular places and institutions and the extent to which these activities increasingly rely on engagements with a variety of media platforms. We then examine how their understanding of both the game itself and related issues is informed by mediated interactions and forms of knowledge. Such an approach places particular emphasis on practical, embodied forms of knowledge and habit, and enables us to track the degree to which media environments become part of the familiar landscapes that people inhabit when following football.

Extension, Substitution, and Amalgamation

In Schulz's (2004) work, extension refers to the ways in which communication through technologies overcomes physical constraints, connecting individuals and groups in previously distant areas. In relation to football, numerous studies have noted how the growing availability of satellite and digital technologies has enabled increasing numbers of football fans access to live games around the world (Akindes, 2011; Siundu, 2011; Vokes, 2010), and social media platforms have also connected organizers, clubs, players, and fans in new ways (Price, Farrington, & Hall, 2013). However, a phenomenological perspective can be used to develop "the complexities of the self-media-place relationship" (Lavi, 2017, p. 175) by drawing on the concept of orientation. Rather than seeing newer technologies as simply enabling mediated connections between places, orientation encourages us to think about the complexity and ambivalence of people's experiences (Couldry & Markham, 2008). In the case of East Africa, we see significant numbers identifying with foreign clubs and players because of their association with glamour and success (Onwumehili & Oloruntola, 2014). These processes of identification are not only embodied through everyday objects and practices, and made meaningful in local contexts, but also shot through with some degree of ambivalence in that the power and success of Western leagues are often contrasted with the poverty and corruption of local equivalents (Omobowale, 2009).

This example leads us rather nicely to Schulz's second and third dimensions, substitution and amalgamation. The former is the process whereby "media partly or completely substitute social activities and social institutions and thus change their character" (Schulz, 2004, p. 23). This might refer to people watching football on television rather than in a stadium, or playing a football video game with friends instead of kicking a ball around outside. Amalgamation involves the interweaving of media and nonmedia practices—for example, the ways in which fans follow updates or place bets on a mobile phone when attending a live game. Accommodation is the final dimension and will be discussed in more detail in the next section. As we will see, by incorporating further insights from media phenomenology, we can extend our understanding of Schulz's original definition and provide a new way of thinking about processes of mediatization from below.

Accommodating Media-Related Activities and Knowledge Into Everyday Lives

Accommodation usually refers to the manner in which nonmedia institutions have to adapt their own practices to meet the demands of the media. It is worth noting that this has been one of the most popular arguments from the domain of politics in relation to mediatization. It is commonly associated with what has been labelled the structuralist/institutional tradition (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014; Hjavard, 2008), and it provides a top-down perspective that views media institutions as independent actors who are increasingly able to influence and, in some cases, dominate forms of social communication. Much of this tradition draws on Altheide and Snow's (1979) seminal account, *Media Logic*, which argues that "media are the dominant force to which other institutions conform" (p. 15). In football, the most obvious example of accommodation would be understood to include the moving of live matches from one date to another in accordance with media schedules. While such top-down forms are obviously important in tracking the influence of particular media organizations in a given domain, we believe that a complementary bottom-up perspective can also offer us important insights by exploring the ways in which individuals increasingly accommodate mediated practices and forms of knowledge into their football-related interactions. An

example is how increasing numbers of people are required to navigate through complex media environments in order to access particular forms of content or display their knowledge as a fan (Skey, Stone, Jenzen, & Mangan, 2018). It is here that further insights from the phenomenology of media, particularly relation to the concepts of embodied practices and wayfaring, can be productively employed.

Embodied Practices and Wayfaring

As noted earlier, a non-media-centric approach to mediatization argues that media technologies and uses should be situated within the larger “contexts in which they operate” (Morley, 2007, p. 1) and that “it is everyday lives and habits, not audiences or media, that must take center stage” (Moores, 2016, p. 136). This doesn’t, of course, mean that we neglect wider social institutions and the limits they may place on such “lives and habits”; instead, we try to “understand better the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other” (Morley, 2007, p. 200).

For the purposes of this article, we want to suggest that two insights from Moores’ (2014) work can not only be used to better understand this relationship between media processes and the everyday lives of football fans, but also extend and deepen Schulz’s (2004) fourth dimension of mediatization: accommodation. The first of these refers to Moores’ (2014) discussion of the importance of embodied practices in relation to media uses and the manner in which our desire to use particular technologies requires us to learn new practical skills that eventually become normalized, taken for granted, and habitual. Moores (2014), for instance, provides a detailed example of the process by which he checks his email using a laptop every morning. Not only does this media practice become a ritual part of his day, but it also involves particular bodily dispositions and movements. Furthermore, these skills—in terms of how to use both hardware and software—are obviously something we have to learn. It is this process of learning and, then, habituation that can be viewed as another aspect of accommodation, as new forms of mediated knowledge and practice are accommodated into our everyday lives to achieve certain objectives. In relation to football, one might think of how fans use mobile devices to check updates on a match when taking part in other non-football-related activities or communicate with fellow fans using social media when watching a live game on television. However, by also emphasizing the physical movements that become embodied forms of knowledge, we can begin to reconfigure the idea of “accommodation” so that it extends to “the bodily incorporation of . . . media” (Richardson, 2007, p. 207) into everyday lives.

This leads to a second insight from Moores’ (2015) work that we want to pick up on. In addition to pointing to the process by which media technologies become interwoven into everyday embodied practices, he also draws on Ingold’s (2011) writing on “wayfaring” to observe the ways in which individuals become familiar with particular environments through the establishment of forms of practical knowledge and habituation that are tied to ongoing movements. While Ingold (2011) is very much interested in physical movements through everyday environments, Moores (2015) suggests that the notion of wayfaring can be usefully applied to the online world to foreground the manner in which some “online environments . . . are negotiated on a more regular basis and experienced as thoroughly familiar spaces of movement” (p. 205). A good example of this from a recent study (Skey et al., 2018) is the use of a digital platform, YouTube, by young football fans who expertly searched for video clips on the platform to highlight the perceived qualities or inadequacies of particular players. In this case, habitual embodied practices involving particular forms of

hardware such as keyboards, monitors, and phones combine with a largely taken-for-granted knowledge of how to navigate through a familiar online environment. These habitual activities enable users to access certain forms of content and showcase their own knowledge of the game and/or provoke fellow fans.

What is particularly noteworthy in relation to this study is that wayfaring as both a physical and virtual movement through more or less familiar environments becomes absolutely fundamental for football fans who can *only* access their favorite teams, players, and leagues through media. In other words, going to physical places to watch games—for instance, bars, restaurants, cafes, friends' houses, or betting shops—is combined with a growing knowledge of how to access and then navigate through online environments. Moreover, it is by foregrounding these processes of orientation through embodied practices and mediated forms of knowledge that we can begin to offer a more sophisticated analysis of the ways in which media become central to this particular domain of everyday life. By starting with the activities of ordinary people and then moving out to see how these are shaped by a desire to engage with prized media content and, over time, develop mediated forms of knowledge, we can also highlight the advantages of a non-media-centric approach to mediatization. In the following sections, we provide some context for our chosen case study, which is football in East Africa. We then outline a brief rationale for how our data were collected and analyzed.

African Football Fandom

Football in East Africa was introduced by the colonial powers and, therefore, has a fairly long history of being played informally and then in often segregated amateur competitions (Ncube & Mhiripiri, 2020). However, the formation of professional leagues happened relatively recently—in 1962 in Zambia, for example. While many clubs retain links to ethnic or regional groupings or have historic ties to a particular organization, whether public ones (such as the army, police, or government departments), or commercial ones (such as mining companies, banks, or insurance companies), attendance at matches is generally low (Hawkey, 2009). There is much stronger and more evident support for the national team with key international games sometimes attracting tens of thousands, compared with the 2,000 or 3,000 who might witness a key top-flight domestic game (Onwumechili & Akindes, 2014). Evidence of support for foreign clubs is easy to find, with replica shirts of six major European teams¹—Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Liverpool, Chelsea, and Arsenal—a regular sight in everyday settings, and almost everyone we spoke to had his favorite overseas (usually English) team (see also Onwumechili & Oloruntola, 2014).

When it comes to wider research on African football fandom and media, there is a small but growing body of work, with the vast majority of studies pointing to the profound impact that occurred in the late 1990s, as new television technologies, telecommunications, and information technologies, coupled with the liberalization of media, opened African space to transnational television broadcasters (Akindes, 2011; Ncube

¹ It is worth noting that a quantitative survey of football fans in Nigeria indicated similar levels of popularity for the same English football teams: Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal, and Liverpool (Onwumechili & Oloruntola, 2014). This is broadly associated with their levels of success when English Premier League football became popular in Africa in the 2000s, alongside the number of African players they featured at this time.

& Mhiripiri, 2020; Siundu, 2011; Vokes, 2010; Waliaula, 2015, 2018, 2019; Waliaula & Okong'o, 2021). It should be remembered that initially, European football was viewed as something exotic and quite far removed from the immediate geography and social world of most people. As studies in South Africa (Fletcher, 2014) and Kenya (Waliaula, 2018) observed, the earliest fans of European football were members of the local middle class who could afford satellite television and/or access to the public places where this media technology was available. However, by 2010, satellite television had become widespread in much of the region, with growing numbers watching European leagues and clubs as part of a communal experience that replicated the earlier consumption of radio (Vokes, 2010).

In many cases, these European alternatives were compared favorably with local versions, which continue to be plagued by poor organization, lack of investment, and, in some cases, corruption (Omobowale, 2009). As Akindes (2011) notes, these problems were further compounded by local broadcasters' inability to compete with the marketing budgets and slickly produced content being beamed in from overseas by transnational corporations. Akindes (2011) argues, in an echo of the cultural imperialism thesis, that this rapid transformation of the African mediasphere means that "African football fans are placed in a passive and remote position; they have become football content consumers of just a handful of European teams" (p. 2187). The flow of football content from Europe to Africa is not reciprocated, and, as shown in this study, it has had a significant impact on everyday football-related activities. But whether or not the fans should be characterized as passive and/or mere "consumers" is open to question.

For instance, other studies have pointed to the emergence of new enterprises on the ground that, in catering to the growing interest in European football, lead to new, sometimes quite open, forms of sociability between different generations and classes (Waliaula, 2015, 2018). In a similar vein, it has been argued that fans of the English Premier League in Kenya, far from being "mere" consumers of Western products, use talk about their favorite teams and players as a form of social currency to boost their own standing and, in some cases, commercial operations (Waliaula, 2018). It is these forms of knowledge, interaction, and sociability, alongside the wider social structures and technologies that underpin and inform them, that are of particular interest to this study. Therefore, after discussing how we collected and analyzed our data, the final sections of this article will use illustrative examples to highlight the non-media-centric approach to mediatization that we have been advocating thus far.

Methods

East Africa is an underresearched yet highly pertinent case study for a project such as this. Although football is incredibly popular in the region, local leagues and clubs are not that well supported, with one or two notable exceptions in each country; however, European leagues and clubs, notably the English Premier League, are avidly followed by large numbers (Monks, 2016). Therefore, it offers an ideal opportunity to study the everyday activities and interactions of football fans and the extent to which they are interwoven with media.

The data used in this article come from two research projects carried out in three countries: Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The first is an ongoing ethnographic study of football fans in Eldoret, Kenya, which goes back to 2006, when satellite media technology was the only link to "live" European football. Data were collected through attending televisual mediated "live matches" in a variety of places, ranging from more

upmarket cafes in the earlier years, to bars, betting shops, and “video lounges” in low-income neighborhoods. The latter are where the bulk of the European football fandoms were created and, over time, became part of the lived experience of increasing numbers of people. These forms of participant observation were combined with focus group discussions and semistructured in-depth interviews from 2013 to the present day.

The second set of data, which was more limited in scope, was collected during March and April 2018 in Zambia and Zimbabwe. It also involved participant observation in bars and cafes showing live matches, and a series of “on-the-fly” interviews with football fans on the street, in taxis, in pubs, and at local football matches. In this case, a form of purposive sampling was used and focused on individuals wearing the shirts of European club football teams, of whom there were many. We asked them general questions about their affiliations and football-related activities. A total of 40 interviews were carried out with fans, and these were complemented by interviews with six sports journalists in Zambia and the organizers of a sport-development charity, also in Lusaka, Zambia.

In terms of who was involved in the research, all the participants were men, barring one or two exceptions. While football is followed by women in East Africa, their presence in the public arenas where most football is watched and discussed, and where our research was conducted, is very limited. These public settings also affected the age range of respondents; the vast majority were between 30 and 60 years of age. As we noted earlier, accessing televised football in East Africa generally involves a payment, which affect the ability of younger men to participate, particularly in Zambia and Zimbabwe. This also meant that our sample in the said locations was skewed toward more middle-class groups, notably in the wealthier bars and restaurants, which are only accessible to a relatively small portion of the local population. To some extent, this was offset by interactions in other areas, such as on minibuses or on the street, but these tended to be more fleeting and subject to interruptions.

As is the case for most forms of ethnography, we cannot claim that our sample is remotely representative of the population in East Africa. However, when it comes to popular support for overseas football—in particular, Western European football—our findings are supported by other more representative studies of football fans in Africa (Akindes, 2011; Koma Koma, 2005; Olaoluwa & Adejayan, 2010; Omotosho, 2012; Onwumechili, & Oloruntola, 2014). With regard to data analysis, all the interviews were subsequently transcribed, and then they and the field notes were coded using Schulz’s four dimensions as an initial framework for analysis. The data were then input into NVivo and rechecked using a thematic analysis. Once this second round of coding was been completed, illustrative examples for each theme were selected.

Following Football: Extension and Substitution

When looking to apply Schulz’s (2004) framework to our own empirical study of football fandom in East Africa, the dimension of “extension”—the connection among distant groups through media—would seem to be the most self-evident. The popularity of foreign players, clubs, and leagues can be seen on a daily basis in a range of “ordinary” settings, from posters in shop windows, people wearing replica club shirts, and logos adorning taxis, buses, and private vehicles, to people watching games in bars, restaurants, and betting shops, and so on (Waliaula, 2018). Furthermore, we can safely assume that, given relative levels of wealth in East Africa and that only one Western team, Everton, has ever played a game in the region, their support for, and

knowledge of, said players etc., *has* to come through communication technologies—whether satellite television, websites, Internet feeds, or mobile phone networks. While research into football in Europe has also noted the increasing shift from local to mediated forms of fandom, there is still the *possibility* that Norwegian fans of, say, Manchester United will go to see their favorite club—and many do (Hognestad, 2006). For fans in East Africa, their *only* connection with the club is through media, whether directly, in relation to their own media-related practices, or indirectly, by engaging with others who relate to or draw on their experiences.

Likewise, the interview data support other studies in Africa that all point to processes of not only extension, but also substitution, as people shift their attention from the local league and instead become orientated toward, and then passionate about, games taking place in Europe. In the following extracts, Moses, Wedi, and Ian discuss changes in football habits in relation to Zambia:

Moses: They stopped [going to live games]. The numbers really drastically dropped. Because again, when the social setup in most cases is that every bar has a TV. And they pay for DS TV, and they show Manchester. And everybody likes beer. (Football journalist, Lusaka)

Interviewer: Do you think the interest in the English Premier league has a negative impact on the Zambian league? Is that true?

Wedi: It is true, it is true. When Manchester City was playing Man United at 1400 hours, then the stadium would be empty.

Interviewer: So the Premier league is more popular?

Wedi: Yes, they are denying the income that the teams could have got in by going to watch football team from England. Instead, they're making people who run bars with the pay channels earn much more money than the club would earn. So that is on the negative side. And then on the other side, again because of probably our teams don't look much more established to the extent that if I look for a jersey for a team, I can't find them anywhere for me to buy in Zambia. (Manager, youth sports organization, Lusaka, Zambia)

Ian: People in Zambia prefer the English Premier League to the Zambian Premier League. On Sunday, if you go to any bar, it will be full of people watching the EPL. In fact, I had to ask the bar staff to turn on the ZPL game this afternoon!! (Football fan, bar in Lusaka)

These insights are supported by studies in other African countries, including Nigeria, where Omobowale (2009) talks about a "redirection of fans" alignment with European clubs; in the Ivory Coast, where a top official laments "empty stadiums" (as cited in Akindes, 2011); and in Kenya, where the rivalry between two Manchester sides is more keenly anticipated than the final of a major African tournament (Akindes, 2011).

A number of points are worth making in relation to these quotations. First is the manner in which they point to a shift from the local to the transnational, a *reorientation* that is built on access to newer forms of communication technology, such as satellite television and digital platforms, in combination with other political

and socioeconomic factors. It is important to note the latter, otherwise we risk trading in rather crude tales of technological determinism, in which media becomes the key for understanding everything that is happening, or has happened, within a given domain. A good example comes from Zambia; we were told that the overt politicization of public service broadcasting, which used to carry much of the coverage of local football, prompted many to turn to commercial alternatives, where they first gained access to foreign leagues and competitions.

Media Places

The references to bars and other establishments showing the English Premier League are also worth exploring in relation to some of our earlier discussions of the orientation skills of media users. Given the cost of accessing satellite television, the majority of East African fans tend to watch foreign games in public places—betting shops, video lounges, and so on—or as part of a group of friends where payments can be shared (Akindes, 2011). These places not only have become an important feature of the local economy (Onwumechili & Oloruntola, 2014) but also, at least initially, had to be incorporated into fans' social and mental landscapes. In other words, if people wanted to watch foreign football, they had to first find out about these places and then accommodate the demands of foreign media schedules into existing patterns of work, family, and leisure. For instance, a young fan in Kenya told us how he negotiated with his parents about when he should do his household chores: "You know I was such a deep and committed fan [of the EPL] that every Saturday my parents understood, and wouldn't assign me work to do, I preferred to work on Sundays" (Joshua, football fan, Eldoret, Kenya).

Once at the game—having, of course, saved up the money to gain admittance—the eager fan is then confronted with becoming part of a new sociocultural setting with its own norms, values, and hierarchies. This is where other forms of mediated knowledge gleaned from watching live games, but also increasingly other digital sources (official club websites, mainstream news reports, social networking sites, and so on), come to the fore and can be usefully conceptualized in relation to Moores' (2015) work on virtual wayfaring.

"You Start Seeking Out for More Information"

We noted that new establishments had grown up around the practice of watching mediated European football in East Africa. It was also argued that new cultural norms and hierarchies have emerged in relation to these activities, with fans wanting to not only watch the games but also display their knowledge about players, clubs, and the league as a whole. As a supporter in Kenya commented,

When people meet in social life, like now here where we work, you find people that talk about their teams, some supporting Chelsea, Man U, Arsenal . . . they talk about how their teams are faring on, so that thing starts getting into you, you start following too. You start seeking out for more information, going out to watch the matches, and indeed you get thrilled at how the game is played. That way you start knowing more and more about the teams, the players' transfers, etc., and sometimes it is very exciting, like here, when the fans ask each other questions, you see one of them respond very informatively, and he strikes you as a very well-informed person. . . . You start to gain interest, so that you too can be informed and participate in these conversations. (John, football fan in Eldoret, Kenya)

While the preceding extract only makes reference to television as a mediated source of information, many of the other people we spoke to also discussed the importance of digital platforms, ranging from official websites of clubs to the social networking accounts of their favorite players or Facebook groups. These, they argued, provided the most up-to-date information that could then be used to prove one's credentials in more public settings. A good example of this comes from the fieldwork in Kenya, where the following notes were made after conducting participant observation at a televised match between Arsenal and Chelsea in a relatively upmarket restaurant:

Most of the fans here are part of the local elite. They carry around fairly expensive smartphones and spend most of their time checking out details of reports on the English Premier League on BBC Sport, what is termed gossip, on player transfers, managers, etc. On this particular day there was an argument about Mourinho and his spat with a team doctor. Each fan whipped out his smartphone to check details of the incident.

Another example of this process came from a man who was interviewed while traveling on a minibus in Lusaka. The man was wearing a Manchester United T-shirt and was happy to talk football and technology, being the proud owner of an iPhone. In addition to providing a detailed history of his support for the club (he followed his father's lead) and the poor brand of football that his team was currently playing under the then managership of Jose Mourinho, he also talked at length about how he used his phone to keep up to date on the club's activities, including transfer targets, team selections and tactics, match reports, and so on. He was a supporter who had navigated his way to a whole host of sites, discussion groups, and social networking accounts that provided him with information that he could then use to inform his discussions with friends and family—not to mention foreign travelers on Lusaka's colorful and chaotic public transport system. The link between public transport and the display of mediated football knowledge can also be seen in the Kenyan context. In East Africa, because much of the public transport is not planned according to predefined schedules, a lot of waiting is involved; therefore, it becomes one of the most "natural" places where media and nonmedia practice intersect—what Schulz (2004) labels "amalgamation." As, Joseph, a minibus driver in Eldoret observed,

My matatu [minibus] always fills up quickly; it is especially preferred by young people who enjoy our football talk. Even at the park station I always have a crowd of people around me. They ask me many questions about the EPL that I happily answer.

A further example of how such mediated knowledge is used for practical objectives, away from dedicated "media places" (Couldry, 2000), can be seen in the following extract. Here, Samuel, a barber in Kenya, noted how an ongoing orientation toward the English Premier League enabled him to build forms of social capital that became absolutely crucial to the development of his business:

Up to date I have lots of patronage from the well-to-do fans, both Arsenal and Manchester United. My life in this town has been possible because of my being part of the community of local fans of European football.

These examples again are a useful way of extending Schulz's (2004) dimension of "accommodation" and providing a complementary "bottom-up" perspective on media's influence in a given domain. In the example earlier, if we start with what people are doing in a barbershop, we can begin to see how such activities, and indeed the very existence of the business, are bound up with a range of media-related practices. This business has become a hub for football fans, and the economic activity is largely dependent on the forms of social and cultural capital that come not only from ongoing engagements with televised matches, but also from an ability to navigate, or find their way, (Moore, 2015) to and through relevant online platforms and websites.

These examples, then, for all their apparent banality in showcasing people tapping on phone keys and tracking through websites, actually offer us a potentially interesting way of thinking about media power in the contemporary era. In this social domain, it is not only the fact that mediated representations of football increasingly inform everyday activities, concomitantly impacting on the status and significance of local forms of the sport; it is also how these everyday activities—orientated toward football in other parts of the world—generate new forms of embodied behavior and, above all, knowledge that become both prized and, then, increasingly habitual. To paraphrase Idhe (1990), for football fans, media become part of the way they ordinarily experience the game, so that it is eventually difficult to notice them at all. This idea can be further explicated in relation to another more recent example, which looks at the ways in which people in East Africa discuss football-related activities during a period of profound change and uncertainty: the COVID-19 outbreak.

COVID-19 and the Breaching of Everyday Norms

One of the most important insights from the phenomenology of media concerns how mediated practices become taken for granted, thereby showcasing the extent to which they remain beyond everyday perceptions (Markham & Rodgers, 2017). The COVID-19 outbreak, which temporarily halted professional sport in many parts of the world during 2020, demonstrated the extent to which everyday activities (including conversations, forms of physical and virtual wayfaring, and financial exchange) in East Africa are orientated toward, and bound up with, mediated representations of European football. In effect, the COVID-19 outbreak could be viewed as a mass breaching experiment (Garfinkel, 2004), forcing people to confront and call into question the taken-for-granted habits and forms of knowledge that have come to be perceived as "normal." Two examples from the Kenyan context showcase this argument:

I have made many good and loyal friends in my long-term experience as an English Premier League football fan. . . . My store is small, and poorly ventilated, so we always stand out here, next to the road and spend hours talking. . . . But currently, things are different. The football is on hold. People are advised to stay at home, and even when they come out, you are expected to wear a face mask and keep social distance. (Steven, shopkeeper, Eldoret, Kenya)

Over time, I have attracted many clients, and retain most of them. I believe one of the reasons they stay on is because my barbershop is always buzzing with EPL talk. But now, in these Corona times, business has gone down. Among other factors, I think the lull in the English Premier League has also contributed. (Samuel, barber, Eldoret, Kenya)

In these cases, we can see that mediated football and the rituals and routines connected to it have become embedded into the everyday rhythms of life in East Africa. However, it is their ordinariness that marks their significance, whether as lubricators of everyday interactions or, more important, as the foundations for a thriving business. In Garfinkel's (2004) terms, the embedded forms of knowledge and embodied practice tied to mediated European football only become foregrounded when challenged or, in this case, when mediated representations stop. It is particularly telling that in a period of great uncertainty, with communities in Africa thought to be some of the most vulnerable to the pandemic, for many, the general tension and anxiety about the pressing "closure of normal life" so often focuses on the restart of the English Premier League.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued for a non-media-centric approach to mediatization, which eschews some of the grander claims around social change that have become associated with the concept and instead starts by examining the activities of "ordinary" people and whether, and in what ways, they are becoming increasingly interwoven with, and informed by, media. Theoretically, we have used Schulz's (2004) four dimensions of mediatization—extension, amalgamation, substitution, and accommodation—as a starting point, before arguing that the final dimension, accommodation, can be enriched by drawing on insights from Moores' (2014, 2015) phenomenologically inspired work on digital orientations. That is, we moved beyond the institutional level to focus on people's embodied habits (use of phones and keyboards, movements through physical and online spaces) and the forms of mediated knowledge that become a prized, and then increasingly normalized, part of what most fans know, in the domain of football. East African football fans offer a particularly telling case study; over the past two decades, growing numbers have become increasingly preoccupied with European football leagues, clubs, and players, often to the detriment of local alternatives.

The popularity of these foreign clubs has led to the emergence of not only new socioeconomic establishments that show live and recorded games, but also new forms of scheduling and sociability that pattern everyday lives. Elsewhere, increasing numbers are "finding their way" (Moores, 2015) through a range of online spaces, which furthers their connections with the overseas game and bolsters their status in more local settings. Finally, that it is so routine for people in East Africa to primarily follow football through mediated forms, to orientate themselves toward foreign players and clubs, and to accommodate into everyday routines the schedules of leagues thousands of miles away actually tells us something rather important about the significance of media in this context and their power to inform disparate lives. It is suggested that this approach, which emphasizes the wider connections and shared orientations that draw together countless football fans in East Africa and beyond, offers an important means of theorizing both the sport-media nexus and the power of media in the contemporary era.

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