Factors Influencing Fans to Attend Matches Amid Pandemic: Exploring the Role of Trio of Team Affiliation, Sportscape, and Team Quality

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Abstract
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Keywords
team, football, fans, quality, factors, motivation, matches, qualitative research

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Factors Influencing Fans to Attend Matches Amid Pandemic: Exploring the Role of Trio of Team Affiliation, Sportscape, and Team Quality

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Football is a sport that has attracted global attention. Individuals who attend competitive football associate with teams and athletes to a point where they become ardent attendees. Post-pandemic, fans have returned in droves to watch live matches at stadiums following the relaxation of strict observance of safety protocols. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to determine the factors that prompt fans to attend matches during games by focusing on three main factors including team affiliation, sportscape and star players. We used a qualitative phenomenological approach to obtain deeper comprehension regarding factors that influence fans to crowd at stadiums to watch football. We deployed semi-structured interviews which gave us the opportunity to probe and gather relevant responses. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed to pave the way for content analysis. Results show that fan affinity and star players are prime determinants of fans’ match day attendance at stadiums. Sportscape yielded mix results with some fans putting premium on sportscape but others lamented the deplorable conditions of stadium amenities such as washrooms, insecurity, and malfunctioning scoreboard on whose evidence sportscape does little to motivate them to attend matches. We recommend the need for teams to pool resources into recruitment of star players and build a groundswell of loyal fans through outstanding in-field performances to attract crowds to the stadium.

Keywords: team, football, fans, quality, factors, motivation, matches, qualitative research

Introduction

Football has become a sport with universal appeal (Kaneda & Dupuis, 2017). People in search of a pastime often utilize their leisure in pursuit of happiness. The competitive nature of football with its tricks and flicks has become the preferred choice of many pleasure-seeking people (Palacios-Huerta, I. (2004).

One major attribute of football that keeps fans on edge for prolonged spells is its competitive nature (Michie & Oughton, 2005) with athletes and contestants exhibiting intense effort and enduring spirit in order to beat the competition and emerge as winners. The outcome of football matches can be uncertain and it’s common to find some match day results defying the predictions of fans and bookmakers (Szymanski, 2003). These characteristics have further contributed to making football an exciting pastime for many followers of the game.

It is against this background that football has seen a meteoric rise of fans across the globe and has permeated regions that hitherto attracted scant interest (Fallahi et al., 2011). The return of fans to the stadiums following a lull in the COVID-19 pandemic wave during EURO
2020 across centers in Europe and other parts of the world, bears sturdy testimony to the hunger of fans to patronize their favorite sport by attending matches at the stadium, a routine that has eluded them for the best part of a year and couple of months. Yet these fans had access to football matches via television. What are the factors that make fans troop to the stadium when they can watch football matches in the comfort of their homes and buzzing pubs? The search for answers has aroused the probing efforts of researchers and football pundits worldwide (Armstrong, 2002).

According to Huang (2011), the presence of fans at stadiums creates an exciting atmosphere that spices the game of football. Fans bring a lot to the game of football and it’s common to find players applauding their fans before, during and after a game as a form of appreciation for their support. Fans illuminate the stadium atmosphere with their cheers and roars which spur match day players to display spirited performances (Cheng et al., 2004). Cheng (2007) expressed the view that, presence of fans at football matches is an important determinant in measuring the success of the game.

James and Ridinger (2002) analysed followers of football and their level of emotional attachment. They opined that people interested in the sport of football are considered as fans. The importance of fans attending football matches can be realized in how the absence of fans during football matches adversely affects player wages and club earnings across the world. The need to therefore sustain the interest of fans in football by delving into the factors that propel them to attend live football matches at stadiums through adoption of plausible promotional campaigns is critical (Armstrong, 2002). Consequently, researchers Skourtis et al. (2011) studied sport fans motivation to attend football matches in Super League of Greece and outlined avoiding boredom, relaxation, drivers of fan attendance. Wann et al. (2008) widened the scope of their entertainment match quality as major study on fans motivation to include 13 different sports in America and posited that, aesthetic motivation constituted a major stimulus for fans to attend individual, non-aggressive and stylistic sport. Won and Kitamura, (2007) put the searchlight on the Korean and Japanese football leagues and discovered differences in motives of their fans’ attendance. The researchers noticed that Korean football followers were driven to attend matches because of drama, quality of players and family whilst Japanese spectators were enthused with vicarious attainment, exhibition of skills and entertainment.

The glut of such research in Europe is rather matched by scant exploratory investigations of undercurrents of fans’ attendance to stadiums in Africa (Shani, 2017). Pederson et al. (2011) added to Won and Kitamura’s (2007) study on determinants of fan turnout to football stadiums in Asia as fans’ interest to attend matches to enjoy the game and support their teams continue to gather momentum. In the United States of America, upsurge in passion for soccer and phenomenal growth of fans to football stadiums has prompted researchers to examine the factors driving this phenomenon (Kim et al., 2008).

In spite of the inroads researchers have made in this subject, many critical factors driving attendance remain uninvestigated (Kim et al., 2019). Isabirye and Surujlal, (2012) argued that factors influencing fan attendance in Europe, America and Asia may be different from fan attendance motivation in Africa and suggested the need for specific research in fans’ attendance in Africa. In this study, we explored how team affiliation, sportscape and team quality motivate fans to attend live football games in stadiums in Ghana, a sub-Saharan African country popular for its football exploits in international competitions. The country has ardent followers of the game of football whose motivations for appearing in stadiums remain less explored. Through this qualitative study, we focused on three factors including team affiliation, sportscape and team quality to obtain deeper insights into football match attendee motives for patronizing matches at stadiums. Availability of propitious research in sport marketing has led to the development of deeper insights into fans’ motivation but this notwithstanding, questions remain in the area of fans’ attendance that needs to be explored (McDonald et al., 2002).
As fans troop to the stadiums to watch match day football amid the outbreak of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 pandemic, it raises the imperatives of conducting explorative studies on fans’ attendance to obtain deeper understanding of their attendance motivation to football stadiums (Samra & Wos, 2014; Wiid & Cant, 2015). Fans’ attendance in Malaysia has taken a downward trend and has sparked alarm and questions are being raised by the football fraternity with regards to the connection between fans’ motivation to attend football games and team quality (Yusuf et al., 2008). This study examined the role of team quality in stadium attendance using views from participants in Ghana. Some scholarly works have focused on determining the influence of sportscape and fans intentions to attend and repeat stadium patronage and have noticed that sportscape features positively impact stadium attendance (Chang, 2000; Hill & Green, 2000; Lee et al., 2003; Westerbeek, 2000).

Our work examined the role of sportscape in propelling fans’ attendance using a different geographical area in sub-Saharan Africa. The studies by Yusuf et al. (2008) and Hill and Green, (2000), Westerbeek (2000), Chang (2000) and Lee et al. (2003) focused on single factors. This study expanded the discourse by assessing the influence of team quality, sportscape and an added key variable, team affiliation (Basil & Brown, 2004; Wann, 2006) in an attempt to expand the discourse of fans attendance in Ghana.

The prime question of our study was: How influential is the role of team affiliation, sportscape and team quality in propelling fans to attend football matches in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, when fans were allowed to throng to the stadium after lockdowns? Finding an answer to this question will assist football policy makers and administrators comprehend fans’ attendance motivation within the parameters of team affiliation, sportscape and team quality which will prove useful in the quest to find solutions to arrest the downward pattern of fans attendance during matches in Ghana. This study has a global appeal because dwindling match day attendance figures have been reported in Europe, Asia and Central America and the outcomes of this study can inform the understanding of the phenomenon (Carvalho et al., 2015; Kuntopuntari, 2015; Solberg & Turner, 2010).

**Literature Review**

This segment of the study contains an assessment of prior literature that is pertinent to our study context. The literature review synthesizes the research that is relevant to the research problem and research question: How influential is the role of team affiliation, sportscape and team quality in propelling fans to attend football matches in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic? We begin with a discussion about types of fans, followed by sport fan motivation, team affiliation, sportscape, and team quality. We conclude this review with an explanation of how this study uniquely contributes to the literature and qualitative methods.

**Types of Fans**

Fans are individuals who are attracted to a sport and often associate with a team or athlete. They may participate in a game for leisure and they spend a considerable amount of time talking, reading and discussing sports (Norris et al., 2014; Wann et al., 2001). Fans can be categorized into three types: temporary, devoted and fanatical fans. A temporary fan identifies with a team, sport, or athlete in an ephemeral way. The support exuded by the temporary fan is transient and is usually time bound. More often, such a fan associates with peers during a sport event and once the event is over, the fan truncates the brand association (Cialdini et al., 1976). The temporary fan is likely not to agonize over a defeat of a team or athlete. Devoted fans show some appreciable level of brand loyalty to a sport or club they follow. They associate with values and convictions of their teams. They support their teams...
with vigor and their own self-concept dovetails into the world view of their favorite team. *Devoted fans* subject their teams and players to critical appraisal and can criticize performances and direction of a team if they deem necessary (Ball & Tasaki, 1992). They find utmost pleasure in their team’s victory and their support wanes in the wake of a string of poor performances by their teams. This is not the case with fanatical fans. The loyalty displayed by *fanatical fans* defies logic. Fanatical fans are not daunted by prolonged periods of dismal performances by their teams or athletes. Their intense loyalty and enthusiasm for their club stimulates them to show growing support for their team even when results do not go their way (Agas et al., 2012; Cova & Cova, 2002; Funk & James, 2001; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Whang et al., 2004). Their affinity to a team is stunning and dedication to their teams leave the neutral attracted to the team to test the brand. It is this kind of intense loyalty that sports marketers leverage to rake in steady streams of income across the fan’s lifetime value (Huffman et al., 2000; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). To build a healthy balance sheet of a sport team, there is a need to have a fanatical fan base that invests in season long tickets and throng to stadiums to watch matches. Wealthy teams are those with a groundswell of fanatical fans and marketing-oriented clubs devise strategies to keep them loyal to the team brand (Hugenberg, 2002).

**Sport Fan Motivation**

The Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) was espoused by Wann (1995) to provide insights into driving forces behind fans’ attendance to stadiums. He outlined eight determinants of fan attendance: eustress, self-honor, escape (daily routine actions), entertainment, economic, ambience, group association and family bonds. These eight factors that propel fans to attend football matches are quite comprehensive and the SFMS has been a reference point for several studies in fan attendance. A slight variation in spectator attendance motivation was postulated by Milne and McDonald (1999) under the banner, Motivations of the Sport Consumer (MSC) and elaborated on 12 motivation drivers including risk attraction, escape, level of rivalry, team association, talents on parade, aesthetics, self-esteem, self-actualization, value development, social networking, vicarious attainment, and competitive hostility.

The MSC framework enriches the quality of studies in fan motivation by covering factors such as stars on parade but conspicuously missing from the elements of the concept is the financial factor such as cost of tickets and transportation costs to the stadium, which are key factors in determinants of fan attendance (Shani, 2015). Trail and James (2001) in their analysis of the SFMS and MSC, found some methodological limitations and specifically questioned the validity and reliability of the methods used in the constructs. The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) was therefore conceived by Trail and James (2001) using more robust and rigorous statistical analysis and put forward nine motivation elements including knowledge, aesthetics, drama, eustress, family bond, sportscape, talented players, socialization and achievement. The MSSC construct in spite of its methodological rigor is limited by the absence of an important fan motivation factor such as uncertainty of outcome (Forrest & Simmons, 2002). Funk et al. (2009) introduced the socialization, performance, excitement, esteem, and diversion (SPEED) concept opining that these elements constitute the “big five” determinants of fan attendance. The big five description showed an air of veneration for these factors. In Funk et al.’s (2009) explanation, socialization was seen to be the quest for networking and fraternizing with others, family and peers; performance was deemed to be the exhibition of exquisite displays by players that evoke ecstasy; excitement was described as yearning for mental and emotional stimulation; esteem was averred to be quest for personal and group glory; and diversion was defined as departing from boring life routines.

Empirical studies conducted by Madalozzo and Berber Villar (2007) on factors motivating fans to patronize the Brazilian top league chronicled anticipated match quality,
performance and outcome uncertainty as influential factors propelling fans to watch games. European football leagues have gained universal attention from football fans and researchers across the globe. Consequently, European football competitions have become the epicenter of studies on factors impacting fans to attend football matches. Borland and Macdonald (2003) examined attendance to football matches across three European leagues namely Spain, England and Scotland and discovered that five major determinants of match day attendance are fan favorites, cost, stadium architecture, level of competition and supply capability.

Many football clubs in Europe such as Arsenal and recently Tottenham Hotspur in the premiership in England have constructed new stadiums with enhanced capacity and attractive features to attract more fans to the stadiums. Hoye et al. (2012) disclosed that building new arenas, provision of incentives, star studded teams, awe inspiring performances that break existing records and violence impact a fan’s decisions to attend live games. Hoye et al. (2012) added violence to the mix of factors which was corroborated by Ostrowsky (2014) in his study where he identified violence as attendee’s motivation. Three factors that have also found space in literature as key motivators of fan attendance are entertainment, stress relief and achievement seeking (Beech & Chadwick, 2004; Mehus & Osborn, 2010). Fallahi et al. (2011) appraised the determinants of match attendance of disparate age groups and revealed that the age of fans influenced their thoughts of attending matches adding that, fans in the age bracket of 21 years have a strong urge to attend live day matches at the stadium.

Team Affiliation

Team affiliation refers to the degree of psychological linkage a fan has with a football entity. It involves a sense of social connection a fan develops with a particular team (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008; Wann, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann, Hunter et al., 2001; Wann, Melnick, et al., 2001). Football fanatical fans usually associate strongly with clubs with some attendant consequences (Wann, 2006). In the expressed view of Basil and Brown (2004), fans build formidable relationships with their clubs resulting in a team loyalty that boosts a fan’s self-esteem following a run of positive results chalked by the team. Conversely, a fan with solid team affiliation can suffer a slump in self-esteem when a favorite club suffers a dip in form leading to a poor string of results (Madrigal, 2001) and as Trail et al. (2005) declared, such fans will embark on self-preservation by cutting off reflected failure (CORFing) through keeping a distance from the club matches. However, a team’s fanatical fans can exhibit intense brand loyalty that makes them stick and stay with their clubs in dire times (Wann, Hunter et al., 2001). Dhurup, Dubihlela, and Surujlal (2010), in their work on fans attendance, indicated that team affiliation is a major factor that attracts fans to attend match day matches because they want to contribute to the revenue stream of the team and also cheer their club to victory.

According to Fink et al. (2002), fans are motivated to associate with teams that chalk positive results overtime and have a positive brand image because of their profound and prolonged period of success. Some fans identification with clubs is driven by not only results but by the geographical location adding that residents of a particular locality normally identify with local teams (Brian Greenwood et al., 2006). Dimmock and Grove (2006) hinted that parents and peers play various roles in team affiliation. Team identification is a strong reason why fans attend games and to further build brand loyalty, fans invest in club paraphernalia and associate with symbols and colors of their teams (Chun et al., 2004). Loyal fans exhibit strong propensity to buy tickets and remain undeterred by price hikes in tickets (Piipponen, 2011). The behavioral traits of loyal fans show a pattern that portrays their unalloyed affinity to their team which influences them to consume the football match at the stadium in order to provide support for the team (Bee & Havitz, 2010). Attending games to exhibit support feeds into the empirical notion that presence of fans can influence match outcomes (Giulianotti, 2012).
Sportscape

Football is played in an arena usually populated by fans. The return of fans to various stadiums following a lull in the coronavirus pandemic bears testament to just how much fans are inseparable to the football industry. Sportscape is the stadium that provides the physical architecture where football is produced including internal and external features such as scoreboards, car parks, washrooms and public address systems (Hill & Green, 2000; Wakefield et al., 1996). Place is that element of the marketing mix in which football is played and therefore represents a core ingredient in football production (Westerbeek & Shilbury, 2003). Pederson et al. (2011) posited that stadium facilities, personnel, ease of entry and maintenance culture are highly rated by fans in their decision-making process of attending live football matches as well as intentions to reattend (de Carvalho et al., 2015; Dhurup et al., 2010; Pilus et al., 2010). Aminuddin and Lee (2008) studied fans’ motives for attending matches and found that sportscape is central to fans’ overall satisfaction of live football experiences at stadiums and suggested that a modern stadium significantly influences a fan’s decision to attend and sustain their attendance to football matches. A sportscape with tidy facilities and adequate parking lots stimulates fans to attend football matches (Greenwell et al., 2002). In their investigation of relationship between sportscape and fans’ motivation to attend football matches in Malaysia, Asiah et al. (2010) emphasized the immense role of sportscape in drawing fans to the stadium but more importantly, in stimulating a fan’s desire to maintain attendance over the long haul. Several studies have established the positive nexus between stadium facilities in swaying fans to the stadium and making them regular stadium attendees (Asiah, 2010; Chang, 2000; Hill & Green, 2000; Lee et al., 2003). Correia and Exteves (2007) examined the impact of sportscape on fans’ satisfaction and stated that football fans are delighted when a stadium has exterior facilities like car parks, ticket counter space with security in attendance and are therefore predisposed to enhance the frequency of their attendance to watch games at the stadium. Stadium facilities encourage fans to attend matches and also motivates fans to attend forthcoming matches (Pilus et al., 2010; Silveira et al., 2018).

Team Quality

A football team that is saturated with stars capable of exhibiting sublime performances is likely to generate interest amongst fans and attract them to the stadium when they are scheduled to play a match. Quality of a team is therefore one of the determinants of fan attendance to watch games (De Schriver & Jensen, 2002). Elements of quality in a football team consist of the proportion of victories recorded (Parkhouse, 1996) and number of talented players in the team (Plunket, 2008). A team with a glut of superstars normally draws record crowds during matches because fans are baited to the stadium to catch a glimpse of the hypnotic displays of the stars that can set them cheering and throw them into ecstasy. A major attraction is when such gifted players exhibit enthralling performances that yield high winning ratios resulting in good standing on the league log (Leeuwen et al., 2002; Yusof et al., 2008). Other elements of team quality consist of intensity of rivalry, winning ratios, field of play performances and number of star players (Branvold et al., 1997; Greenwell, 2001; Leeuwen et al., 2002). Spectators are drawn to stadiums when their favorite teams record victories and engage in tactical displays that mesmerize their opponents to the delight of the fans. Football teams that play at high tempo with players displaying creative and superb skills will have their fans returning to the stands in subsequent matches (De Scriver & Jensen 2002; Hill & Greene 2000; Yusof et al., 2008). Fans go to watch live games filled with the expectation of watching exquisite displays and brilliant performances. Therefore, fans are highly motivated to attend
and upscale their match appearances at the stadium when team quality leads to sustainable competitive results anchored on deft and nifty performances during matches.

This study contributes to scholarly works by bringing fresh perspectives from geographical and methodological perspectives. Our literature review reveals a disproportionate concentration of extant literature on sports fan motivations on Europe, America and Asia (Correia & Esteves, 2007; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Funk et al., 2004; Skourtis et al., 2011; Wann et al., 2008; Won & Kitamura, 2007). Our study departs from this pattern and plugs the gap by conducting this study to throw the spotlight on fans attendance motives in a country in sub-Saharan Africa. Besides, studies on sport consumption by fans has been dominated by quantitative approaches which fails to provide participants with the platform to narrate their lived experiences and give researchers and practitioners and in-depth understanding of fans motivation to consume live matches at stadiums. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on why football spectators choose to attend live matches in order to broaden our understanding of football fans consumption behavior.

Our choice of method for this study is informed by our status as full-time academicians and faculty members in reputable higher institutions of learning (Dix et al., 2020) working on a topical subject that generated interest amongst football policy makers, fans and practitioners. We are all sports-oriented marketers and two of the researchers are football pundits and all of us have served in higher levels of management of marketing and finance.

Methods

Our research is moored on qualitative approach prompting the researchers to utilize exploratory and interpretative research that allows participants to provide first-hand experiences on match day attendance relative to team affiliation, sportscape, and team quality. Consequently, we adopt the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) which has the bright prospects of eliciting detailed narrative on the subject being explored (Mridul & Sharma, 2024). Utilizing phenomenology is sports research has been advocated by researchers because of the compelling nature of this approach to unearth the lived experiences of fans within a space that allows free expression of their mood (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Consequently, we adhered to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as we systematically explored and obtained the picturesque and unique perspectives of our participants on the role of team affiliation, sportscape and team quality trigger their desires to attend football matches at the stadiums and the premium they put on the factors (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Tomkins, 2017; Watkinson et al., 2016). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is used in the knowledge that it finds relevance in interacting with participants as they relive their experience in detailed narrative. This approach allowed us to delve deeper into the motives behind the crowds that were recorded at some league centers when fans were allowed to return to the stadium following a lull in the COVID-19 pandemic. We utilized IPA because it is deemed useful when we are concerned with complexity of respondents’ experiences and perceptions which is critical in this study (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Sample Size and Participants

The sample size comprised 11 participants. It has been established that studies anchored on IPA thrive on the use of small sample sizes (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). In an attempt to attain the core objective of this research, a fairly homogenous group of participants who throng to the stadium regularly to watch match day matches across four major stadiums were selected (Noon, 2018; Patton, 2015). We utilized purposive sampling in recruiting our participants by
initially identifying five fans who were regular stadium attendees during matches. We identified these initial five participants purposely targeting attendees in a team regalia and having face to face discussions with them during recess of live matches at the stadiums. As we approached a participant, the Lead Author introduced the team and explained our intention of selecting the participant for interview on the topic of fans’ attendance using team affiliation, sportscape and team quality as factors. The Lead Interviewer engaged each of them through self-introduction and informing them of our objective as lecturers and researchers to find some answers to the question of fans’ attendance at the stadium to watch live matches. This approach afforded us the opportunity to build rapport and exchange telephone contacts to enable us confirm on the time and venue for the interview.

The other six respondents were roped into this study through a snowball sampling technique where our five earlier informants assisted us in reaching out to other stadium revelers who were willing to participate in this present work (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). We screened the participants for interest of the subject and willingness to participate and we continued this process until we interviewed the eleventh respondent where we realized data saturation because no fresh insights emerged (Groenewald, 2004; Henning et al., 2004). Guest et al. (2006) opined; 80% saturation is often reached after interviewing six participants. The 11 participants were eight males and three females. Two participants identified themselves as temporary fans; three participants described themselves to be devoted fans; and six participants categorized themselves as fanatical fans. The 11 participants had eight of them showing support for nine Ghana premiership football teams in the country with the rest of the three participants showing allegiance to first division sides in the football league in Ghana. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 54 years with four of them employed in the formal sector and six self-employed. One male participant was a job seeker.

Procedures

The 11 targeted participants were personally contacted before football matches at the various stadiums in order for them to be interviewed the following week. The one week notice proved useful with follow-up telephone calls a day before the interview for them to confirm their availability. Once confirmation was obtained, an agreed venue at the stands in the stadium was earmarked and a specific time, mostly two hours before the commencement of the match was settled upon. Before commencement of the interview, a consent form was signed by the participants (Abduh et al., 2021). This study posed no ethical challenges and based on our articulation of the purpose of the study, there was an appreciable level of alacrity to provide responses through the face-to-face interviews. Nonetheless, participants were assured that data acquired were to be used for the intended purpose of determining the impact of team affiliation, sportscape and team quality on fans’ attendance to watch live matches at the stadium.

Analysis

All the face-to-face interviews were audio recorded to allow for play back during transcription. The Authors reviewed the transcribed data to check for accuracy and comprehension. Utilizing IPA, data were analyzed using the following steps: (a) Unique themes that emerged but fitted into dominant themes were appropriately transferred to the right segment. (b) The dominant themes were described in appreciable detail and interpreted by the authors. (c) We then perused the description to ensure it captures the narrative of the participants, and (d) The Authors then internalized the meaning of the themes within the context and parameters of the study (Cooper et al., 2012). Consequently, the present work
utilized Charlick et al. (2015) and Pincombe (2015 adapted from Smith et al., 2009) seven (7) step approach (see Table 1).

**Table 1**
(Charlick et al., 2015 as adopted Smith et al., 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION OF IPA</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Themes and sub themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Familiarity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Perusing and scrutinizing responses</td>
<td>Developing insights into responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Dominant ideas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Noting likely emerging themes</td>
<td>Team affiliation- team news, buying regalia. Sportscape- Car parks, cleanliness of washrooms, score board, green turf. Team quality- Super stars, good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Capturing relevant statements</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Noting relevant quotes relative to themes</td>
<td>Ascribing quotes to relevant participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Establishing common themes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Integrating and linking common themes</td>
<td>Themes and sub themes for analysis integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Moving to the next case</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bracketing previous themes and trying to sight new ideas</td>
<td>Noting marginal themes and trying to establish level of dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- Patterns</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Looking for patterns across cases</td>
<td>Establishing clear patterns of dominant themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Deeper interpretation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Deepening analysis and extracting in-depth meanings</td>
<td>Interpreting the dominant themes and sub themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences in thought and interpretation were reconciled by the collective contribution of authors. Final scrutiny of transcribed data was undertaken by the researchers to ensure all key themes were sufficiently rooted in the data. To ensure credibility of the process, interviews were followed by transcription within days as the interview exercise was still fresh. Dependability of this work was ensured by the main author engaging in the transcription and all co-authors participating in reading the interpretation of responses to ensure robustness of findings. The authors engaged in discussions of the interpretations and results of the work to certify that no theme and insights from the information were omitted. To further cement the rigor of the work, we engaged in cross-checking of emerging themes (Creswell, 2014). To ensure adequate and accurate representation of dominant themes, we used axial coding and we furthermore employed selective coding to determine the final outcomes of this qualitative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell 2015).

We ensured trustworthiness of our study by collecting relevant data through semi structured interviews and documented every step of data collection, transcription and analysis (Jones et al., 2014). We crosschecked our transcription of each interviewee’s responses for their affirmation (Birt et al., 2016). All researchers met regularly to for transcription and analysis of informants’ responses on the key areas of team affiliation, sportscape, and team quality to enhance the accuracy and credibility of the study (Campbell et al., 2013) We have a sense of conviction that sports practitioners will put premium on our work.
Results

As indicated earlier, we set our sights on determining the level of influence team affiliation, sportcape, and team quality have on fans’ attendance. Responses obtained from the participants are articulated in narrative form to underscore the qualitative stance of this work. In conformity with IPA technique, we present our findings based on the three master themes (Verner et al., 2021) and the sub themes that emerged from the lived experiences narrated by participants.

Master Theme 1: Team affiliation

Team affiliation involves the bond of relationship a fan develops with a team (Samra & Wos, 2014). The participants perceived team affiliation as having a strong affection for a club to a point where they staunchly support the club even on the back of poor run of match results. Based on interviewees’ response, we discovered that team affiliation, sub themes that emerged from team affiliation include fans perusing and listening to team news and purchasing club regalia to outwardly portray dedicated support for the club.

Team News

Perusing team news from a variety of media sources emerged as a sub team of team affiliation. According to one of the participants:

P6: I will listen to news and reports on my team on radio and television before and after matches. This makes me get to know events going on in my favorite club and I will attend matches when my team is playing having assimilated some club information.

Asked to explain further he quipped, “By following team reports on the media, I’m able to understand what’s going on in my team, updates on players and some information about our immediate opponents so that I can form my own expectations before attending the match.” Ask whether if he attends matches when he realizes his team is facing a formidable opponent, he replied emphatically “I will always attend because my umbilical cord is attached to the team. I don’t really get scared because of opponents.” This was one of the fanatical fans who goes to the stadium to attend matches of his favorite team and he will travel to watch them when they are playing away from home. The participants had a sense of unanimity in their proposition that, team affiliation is a strong determinant of fans’ stadium attendance.

Buying and wearing club regalia

Fans affiliation to teams finds expression in not just attendance to matches but the purchase of team regalia and other merchandise (Kaya & Yücel, 2023). By donning a club regalia, fans are literally evangelizing the team that can result in attracting more fans and sponsorship as well as promoting the image of the sports (Kawasaki, 1992).

One of the participants, P9, opined that, his attendance to stadium will be bereft of satisfaction if he is not smarting under the regalia of his team. He stressed:

P9: I am very crazy about football but when you see me coming to the stadium, I’ll be wearing my favorite blue and white jersey to display my loyalty to the club and be part of the support base of my team in the stadium. I always want
to adorn myself with my team colors and watch them play at the stadium and of course cheer them from start to finish.

Another respondent-P3 added: “You wouldn’t want to be left out of the action when the team you love so much is playing, and wearing the club replica jersey adds to the stadium experience.” To belabor the earlier standpoints of the respondents, participant P1 whose team was having a run of poor form declared, “One should go to watch the match of your team even if they are dabbling in the relegation zone. That’s the time to show your affinity and commitment to the cause and also wear the club jersey in defiance,” he stressed. The respondents dismissed the idea that their team loyalty that is manifested in match attendance is mediated by team performance. The participants were clear in their responses that, a fan’s team affiliation should stand the test of sub-par performances. The researcher pointed to the reality that teams that suffer a slump in form and are languishing in the bottom rungs of league rankings have fans attendance downsized and fans wearing of team diminishing. The respondents disagreed and affirmed that, a fan’s affiliation to a club will guarantee continuous attendance and continuous patronage of team merchandise in defiance of blip in team form.

Master Theme 2: Sportscape

Sportscape constitutes internal and external physical designs of stadiums where athletes engage in competitive contests but its level of influence on fans attendance to stadium remain unexplored (Dhurup et al., 2010). Gleaning from the submissions of the participants, the sub themes that emerged from sportscape covered car parks, cleanliness of washrooms, scoreboard, tidy seats and green turf in the stadium. scoreboard.

Car Parks

Four of the respondents who possessed cars underscored the important role that the stadium facilities play in their desire to watch football matches. The four participants who were all interviewed at the Accra sports stadium were satisfied with the spacious lorry parks but bemoaned the lack of official security at the lorry parks. In their view, the unofficial gentlemen who provided security were untrained and lacked the professionalism and integrity to protect the vehicles. One of the participants- P2 was particularly scathing in his opinion about the unofficial guards stating,

P2: They also go to watch the match. They don’t provide any security. They themselves, em, em, can’t be trusted. At times I even fear they may be potential source of insecurity themselves. Then they will run back to the car parks when the match is over and coerce you for money as if it’s by force you must give them.

Cleanliness of washrooms

The participants could not vouch for the cleanliness of the facilities at the stadiums. Two of the participants were eager to take me to the washrooms “to see things for myself.” We had full knowledge of the deplorable and insanitary conditions in the washrooms. Cleaners are not deployed during matches and the heavy patronage of the washroom leaves it wet, perilously slippery and an overpowering stench seething through the washroom. One respondent was singularly displeased with the irregular flow of water in the washrooms, which makes the washrooms unusable, leaving fans stranded in their attempt to respond to nature’s call.
Scoreboard

Seven of the respondents narrated how a functioning scoreboard stimulates their desire to attend matches and even to return during subsequent match days. Most of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction over malfunctioning conditions of scoreboards at the stadiums. Indeed, the scoreboards of the stadiums were not working at the time of these interviews. One of the stadiums did not have a scoreboard anyway. I probed to obtain insights about why the fuss about scoreboards. One respondent-P8 put to me:

P8: Don’t you see the round of excitement when a goal is scored and shown on slow motion on the scoreboard? When the scoreboard is not working, it makes me regret coming because if the match is being broadcast on live television; viewers can watch replays, but we pay and come and watch and yet we don’t get all these we deserve.

Funk et al. (2018) underlined the need for functioning scoreboards and tidy washroom amenities and concluded that stadiums with poor infrastructure will adversely impact on numbers at the stadium.

Seats

Some respondents pointed to the availability of seats as part of sportscape that entices them to stadiums to watch matches. A couple of respondents were however not enthused about the dirt they have to clean before they sit when they come to stadium. One participant- P6 stated, “Can’t the workers at the stadium clean the seats? I got my pair of trousers stained with dust when I forgot and sat down without cleaning the seat. Yet they say they want to bring back the love!” The “bring back the love” campaign was launched by the Ghana Football Association to motivate fans to the stadium following years of decline in fans attendance at the various stadiums during competitive matches.

Green Turf

According to the participants, watching matches at the stadium with green turf breeds excitement adding that, some of the stadium has grassless pitches, which dissuades fans attendance. Three of the participants raised concern about the grass in the pitch at the stadiums. One participant described the withered grass as “an eye sore” adding that, “It makes play unattractive because the grasses are not well kept which makes performance difficult. Maybe you will need to interview some players too,” he suggested. The researcher closed this part of the interview with the question, “So do you think the stadium facilities motivate you to attend?” The common sentiment was “They need to make the stadium more attractive,” but four respondents were quite emphatic in their viewpoint that sportscape influences their decision to attend live day games at the stadium.

Master Theme 3: Team Quality

Team quality is the capability of a team to display exquisite performances over an appreciable time resulting in middle to top positions in the league table (Yusof et al., 2008). From our participants’ responses, the common sub theme that surfaced from the participants’ responses on team quality is the presence of star players in the team and who have rare capability of exuding exquisite play during matches.


Super Stars

This factor received resounding endorsement as an element that influenced fans to attend matches. A respondent remarked, “When your team is having players that can perform magic, you will always want to attend. In fact, when the opposing team is having star players, you’re forced to attend to enable you catch a glimpse of their sublime play.” A participant- P5 noted: “When my team has galaxy of stars, attending a match becomes like compulsory for me because you want to see them perform especially when they hit form.” All the participants emphasized the influential role of star players in invigorating fans attendance and participant P8 posited “We pay to watch good players, isn’t it.”

Good performance

A team that displays good performance and posts high winning ratio normally attracts fans to the stadium. One of the participants- P3 was unequivocal when he stated, “When my team quality improves, my level of attendance increases. When teams in good form visit our home grounds during a league match or friendly encounter, am likely to attend.” A respondent- P5 recalled how he never missed a match when his team became an all-conquering side and defeated top club sides that dominated the league for decades.

P5: Look at my team, Ashgold. When they were able to call the bluff of teams like Kumasi Asante Kotoko, a side that dominated not just Ghana club football but the African continent, the Len Clay Stadium, the home base of Ashgold was always full but now that they are almost always struggling and battling to avoid relegation, the stands are always empty, why? They win a match and they lose the two that follow. No more star players, no more performances we can be proud.

Discussion

Fans are critical to the game of football with some scholars and pundits describing football fans as the number 12th man in the field of play. So important are fans to the football game that when football resumed after lockdowns in the wake of coronavirus outbreak, the tradition of showing gratitude to fans was exhibited by players in the Bundesliga in Germany in-spite of the absence of fans at the stands (Oltermann, 2020) and when the curtain was lifted and fans were permitted to watch live matches at the stadiums, fans latched onto the opportunity with relish as evidenced in the rush to book and purchase match day matches despite some caution from some quarters (Corsini et al., 2020). What was then the undercurrents that drove fans to the stadium? This study sought to provide answers from fans focusing on three factors; team affiliation (Heere & James, 2007), sportscape (Correia & Exteves, 2007) and team quality (Yusof et al., 2008)

Team affiliation

Lock et al. (2012) opined that fans with strong affinity to a club will attend their matches. Such fans attend matches to cheer their team and also contribute to the kitty of the club to fund cost of operations. It is not uncommon to see clubs thank their supporters for their role in energizing their players and providing an intimidating atmosphere for the opposition that results in favorable scores. Our study revealed that stout fans are more motivated to attend matches to lend a hand of support to their team. They harbor a sense of responsibility to
contribute their quota to the development of the club by paying for tickets and also filling the stands to revitalize their athletes. This standpoint finds agreement with Ferreira and Bravo (2007), who stipulate that a fan’s affiliation to a team will lead to sustained attendance to matches, a fall in the league standings, notwithstanding (Bee & Havitz, 2010). The role of team affiliation in driving fans to stadiums as affirmed by our study also jells with the findings of Dhurup et al. (2010) whose study regarded team affiliation as a formidable influencer of fans attendance.

**Sportscape**

Sportscape includes physical infrastructure of stadiums such as the arena, car space, canteens and scoreboards. Fans attend football matches at stadiums and expect to have ancillary activities such as car parks, restaurants and security that will assure their health and safety before, during and after matches (Athanasopoulou et al., 2012). Contrary to Pilus et al. (2010), only four of our respondents established sportcape as an influential factor in their quest to attend football matches. The rest of the seven respondents equivocated on the weight they put on sportcape in determining their motive to attend and chose to be critical of stadium facilities in Ghana. The standpoint of our participants in discounting the role sportcape plays in influencing stadium attendance surprised us because it represents a departure from several studies that have established sportcape’s dominant impact in fans motivation to attend (Aminuddin & Lee, 2008; de Carvalho et al., 2015; Dhurup et al., 2010; Yoshida & James, 2010).

**Team Quality**

Team quality deals with the ability of a team to display superior performances and having a better win to lose ratio thereby enjoying good standing on the league table. Our respondents believed that team quality is a dominant factor in influencing fans to attend match day games citing the case of Accra Hearts of Oak, the champions of the 2020/2021 Ghana league season, that enjoyed big crowds at the stadium each time Hearts of Oak was featuring in a match. Our study outcome is in tandem with Oh et al. (2017) who examined the impact of team quality and established that team quality is central in fans motive to attend live matches at stadiums. Our study also found fans fixation on attending matches when a team is star studded. All the participants showed their passion in attending matches at the stadium when talented players are on parade. Overall team performance and the presence of a spearhead in a team whose single exploits combined with team play can get fans on their feet cheering is a major motivation for live football attendees. A team that exudes quality and plays at high tempo excites the crowd and keeps fans on edge. Such teams attract immense media spotlight, which further enhances team attendance (Gitter & Rhoads, 2010).

The results and discussions lead us to a number of conclusions and policy implications for football practitioners and football administrators. Team identification plays an influential role in motivating fans to attend matches. Teams need to build a grounds swell of loyal fans to fill the stands at the stadium. When fans identify with a team, they are likely to withstand the shocks of match day defeats and when the team is destined for relegation following series of defeats, loyal fans are predisposed to attending to show their love and fidelity to the club. A key policy implication of this study is that sportcape should have facilities like washrooms, car parks, scoreboards and public address systems to serve as an attraction to get fans to the stadium if sportcape is to stand any chance of attracting fans. Per the outcome on sportcape, team owners and administrators are better off in initiating and investing in fans loyalty schemes rather sinking colossal amounts in building stadiums because without loyal fans, the stands will
remain empty. Clubs should also nurture and keep budding stars and where they have the financial muscle, they should secure the services of talented players to boost fans attendance.

We urge caution in attempts to interpret and replicate the study outcomes because this study has some notable drawbacks. Participants were drawn from four major league centres out 16. Future studies should consider expanding the domain of participants to include other league centers. Besides, no participant was included from fans of second tier football leagues which narrows the scope of insights drawn from the study. These limitations notwithstanding, the study provides fertile grounds for future research, especially in quantitative research which will afford the use of hefty samples to ensure representativeness of participants and replication of study outcomes.

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