MEDIA LOGIC AND THE PREMIER LEAGUE[36]

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Abstract: Mediatization of sport implies the adoption of media's modus operandi, the infiltration of media logic into sport realm. The paper discusses whether sport has become a form of "media theater" and sport clubs "media entertainment companies". I analyze the influence of four constituents of media logic on the case of Premier League of England.

Economic logic of the media assumes Premier League has to adapt to a different model, that shifts priority from stadium and merchandise revenue to TV rights and digital fan engagement. Symbolic logic of the media adapts entertainment media formats to integrate sport into culture industry.

Fan communitization is now primarily digital, and techno-logic of the media implements new technologies in all spheres of sport phenomena, from training to match oversite and, finally, datafication of both players and consumers. Social media logic changes the whole structure of fans, from local and national to global and multicultural.

Keywords: Premier League, football, mediatization, media logic, media culture

Introduction

The relationship between sport and media opens the fundamental questions: what is sport and what is media? Can we differentiate the two? Sport existed and functioned without media for decades. Can we actually register changes in this relationship that we could call mediatization of sport? Mediatization is concerned with media related changes in culture and society in many realms (Hepp, 2013). It adheres to the idea there is a specific modus operandi of the media, its media logic, the logic of functioning, that shapes the sport and other phenomena (Hjarvard, 2013).

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Media studies usually examine the production and consumption aspects of the media, which we can refer to as economic logic of media companies, on the one hand, or social logic of audience and fan behaviour. They are increasingly related to one another through the media, whether it is the television media formats and content we as viewership are accustomed to (symbolic logic of the media), or the digital technologies that shape both players' and team performances and engages the users on social media fan profiles (techno-logic of the media).

In this paper I will analyze these four aspects of media's modus operandi that sport clubs and Premier League as such is adapting to. The same question is discussed in all four sections: would Premier League and football as such be any different without the media logic that infiltrates an increasing number of aspects of sport?

Economic media logic of Premier League

Football clubs' finances are deeply connected to the fans. The way it is connected has changed, though. In the past, it was the tickets that brought the profit, and even today this is very important for second tier of English football. The Premier league is also concerned with the stadiums' revenue, but not as much as before. New stadiums are being built and this is a very important aspect of clubs' bussines. But it is not central for clubs as much as before. It was Arsenal in 2006 that was still thinking about building a stadium rather than creating a media organisation that will multiply club's finances. New seats and clean toilets for the local fans were priority, although other clubs have already shown this is not the future business model (Robinson & Clegg 2019). Even in the nineties, Liverpool as the most succesfull English club expected to be the Premier league's priority in the eve of its establishment in 1992, but it was actually Manchester United with the management experience from American NHL, that brought the right, new kind of merchandise.

In 1998 United's source of finance was 34% spectators, that is stadium's revenue, but this has fallen to 13% in 2017; merchandise and sponsors brought 47% of revenue in the last decade of twentieth century, but in 2017 fell to 26%; it was 61% TV rights revenues now (Andreff, 2021: 282). The spectators that United was chasing were not on the stadium in Manchester, but all over the world in front of their screens. In 1992, BSkyB established a £304 million 5-year deal for broadcasting rights, but in 2016 it was £2.9 billion per year (Falcous, 2021: 326). Sports was the foundation for BSkyB, because it brought popular and not so expensive media content to gain viewership, and the ratings have become the focus of both the media companies and football clubs. Even the new corporations, like Amazon, who wanted to boost its Amazon Prime platform, acquired the rights for streaming Premier league to get viewership. This marriage of

sport and media were based on efficient production of hours of content, followed by TV marketing sales.

According to European Champions Report 2025, United's rival Manchester City did not rely that much of broadcasting rights in recent years. The matchday brought them 88 million euros of revenue from stadium spectators, while TV rights brought 343 million euros (Sartori, 2025). It was clear that old school approach to managing footbal clubs is history, because stadiums alone cannot bring that much profit. In Premier league, there is a struggle about the share of TV rights revenues, because all the clubs get the equal share, which is a topic of discussion whether bigger clubs should be getting a larger share or creating their own European league to collect the broadcasting rights.

At this point, Manchester City rose from 548 million in 2019 to 838 million euros in 2024, based on sponsorship deals and player transfers, but commercial revenue was 406 million compared to 343 million euros for TV rights (Sartori, 2025). According to the report, total operating revenues of largest footbal clubs in Europe, such as Real Madrid or Paris Saint-Germain, follow the same pattern of slightly larger commercial compared to broadcasting rights revenues. But already on the level of Internacionale Milano we can see the dominance of media-related finances, although it is not entirely clear whether those sponsorship deals can also be seen as media-related. For example, organising events is considered a commercial revenue, but organising events is a media activity. After all, Robinson and Clegg (2019) defined Manchester City as "media-enter-tainment company". It is safe to say football clubs have to adress its media presence as part of its business.

However, media has changed the approach to the whole game and the league. If you want global broadcasting revenues you have to have a global audience, not the local one. You have to play Asia Cup in pre-season or friendly matches in North America to enter-tain fans overseas. More so, you have to import foreign players and if they do not play, like in the case of Park Ji-Sung in Manchester United or Lee Chung-yong for Bolton, Kor-ean viewing figures will drop (Millward, 2017: 38). "The trends suggested that the Pre-mier League might become the first national sports league where overseas bro-adcast rights are more lucrative than those in the domestic market" (Millward, 2017: 40). The league led by global media and global corporations had to become transnational.

In some parts of the world, like North America, it is not broadcasting but streaming that is central for media sports. NBC Universal has acquired the rights but chose to stream it direct-to-consumers on many platforms, including ESPN+, Premier League Pass or just NBC Sports app (Kuntz, 2020: 137). It is still unclear how will this develop the fan base in the United States. On the one hand, pay-per-view probably provides more profit for the corporation, although fans struggle to adjust to different schedules and streaming platforms, now that they have to pay 64.99$ per season. On the other

hand, there is a question does this prevent the increase of viewership and the consolidation of football fans in America. Although these two aspects should be connected, as more fans and more viewers would imply more profit for the media corporations, it is questionable whether some companies will follow this logic. "Perhaps the League may choose to launch its own subscription-based channel at some point" (Elliot, 2017: 188).

The social media logic of Premier League

In 1992 there was a widespread fear that once the games are broadcast no one will come to the stadium. At the beginning, only the second half was televised, because the managers thought that the first half will sell the tickets at the stadium. At some point they understood stadium will bring more revenues than TV rights or merchandise never again. Today, without a question, communication with fans and/or consumers is mediated. This idea of globalization and communitization of fan communities (Hepp, 2013) is entirely known and still entirely paradoxical. The fans are mostly not the ones that live in the city where the club resides. Most of Manchester United fans, whole half a billion of them, do not even live in England. Local fans and their historical, intergenerational communities, are not central for the club's business any more. These media-and-sport organisations "feature global social media audiences in the tens of millions across multiple social networks, increasing brand value for those organizations while also exposing other social media audiences to both marketing and communications content" (Clavio & Meisinger, 2025: 184).

Communication of the club with its global fan base is not just virtual, it has to be accompanied by friendly matches abroad, to actually engage with the intercontinental fans overall. Clubs also use their presence over social media accounts and reproduce the brand's value in the digital realm. This is changing the usual relationship of club and its fans. Fans were historically tied to their towns and cities, and several generations saw themselves as fans of the particular club. It was historically rooted, and related to the ethnic and local identities, that in the case of Premier league were primarily English. Even today there are practices that imply some promotion of nationalism, even militarism (Kelly & Woo Lee, 2021 :298), where "Remembrance day" is utilised as paying homage to British military, world war, sometimes even contemporary wars.

Yet the core fans historically tied to the club do not see traditions being kept for long, but replaced by postmodern global identities of transcultural football clubs of Premier league. Even though the number of viewers increases, the local fans, the most traditional ones, are in stark tension with the establishment of today's Premier league. For example, Liverpool supporters strongly disagree with the mainstream interpretation

of Hillsborough disaster in 1989 and still insist on their side of the story. "Liverpool FC's anthem 'You'll Never Walk Alone' remains vital to the community's remembrance and tribute to the lives lost... Liverpool supporters organized a 6-minute rendition at the beginning of an FA Cup match in 2007. The song accompanied a fan-generated stadium mosaic that simply read 'The Truth' – intended to draw attention to the ongoing distortions and inaccuracies perpetrated in the media about the cause of the tragedy and those involved.... Accordingly, Liverpool supporters performed an essential identity that challenged the historic unjust national discourse about the events and the inaction by subsequent administrations to address them properly" (Kassing, 2025: 421).

This conflict of space of places, historically rooted identities, and space of flows, the new flows of capital and global consumers (Castells, 2010), tends to change the overall social logic, that is the structure of viewership, fans and their practices, tension between the traditional and the commercial. Instead of pubs, local communities and stadium itself, the club lives on social media, through betting organisations and television networks. Fans are often sceptical to the technological advancements and do not fully support the changes brought to the sports, like VAR or any other new technology, as it creates the further development of commercialised product and not the historical phenomenon of local football clubs (Frandsen & Landgrebe, 2022).

There is the rise of "protest against the perceived corporatisation of the game which continues to exclude and alienate its 'traditional' fan base"(Turner, 2017: 112). Fans are unhappy with the price of tickets, especially on the away games, the foreign ownership, globalisation and neoliberalisation of the game, but also modern football's transformation overall. This implies there is an authentic fandom, on the one hand, and commercialized consumption of football, on the other hand. Traditional football fan is male, working class, local, not weary of a bit of "hooliganism", while the new fans include women, ethnic minorities, a global audience.

However, one should not just see the old fan identity as conservative, because what new formula brings is the new patterns of consumption and the game's transformation. For some, it is even a question of cultural, symbolic capital, because the historical fans belonged to the lower classes and now going to stadium became a middle-class leasure, not the expression of someone's identity. Fan protests therefore may be nostalgic and romanticized but they are also participatory. They wanted to have a say in the decisions about the functioning of the club and its further development. The argument is sound from the symbolic capital perspective, after all, the clubs that are becoming transnational corporations still rely on the local environments and regional cultures, the historical generations of local fans that actually created the product that is now being sold (Turner, 2017: 126). It is a question whether that can just be taken away from them and sold as a global media product.

Symbolic media logic

What are the changes when it comes to content production? How is this content shaped by media formats and journalist practices? What is sport news? Unlike "hard news" about politics and economy, sport is a popular subject that frequently boosts readership. According to Guy Hodgson (2023: 42), British national newspapers increased its pagination by at least 50% from 1984 to 1994, and Sunday Express even tripled in size, while coverage of sport increased even further. The Sun and The Times are paying millions of pounds to broadcast only Premier League highlights on tablets and phones. For decades now, British newspapers increased the percentage of sport coverage, mainly to 20 to 30% of the paper. This included not just the rise of sport section within the whole edition, but in terms of editorial and columns inches it rose to 46-50% of the edition (Hodgson, 2023: 43). Even on 22 June 2016, the last campaign day for Brexit, Daily Mirror had 9 pages about the EU referendum and 20 pages about sport (ibid).

You cannot - not talk about sport. But what is sport and what is sport media or sport news? Media covers only what is considered "newsworthy", while other information remains unpublished. There is an assumption that newsworthiness is audience-driven (Hjarvard, 2013: 26), in terms that journalists do not choose what is going to be published but fans do, with their decisions about what kind of sport news is important. Why are some players often sources of information and which quotes journalists publish? Even though sport is a humane activity where people can improve their physical performance, it is not portrayed as such by the media. You always got to have either a frame of conflict or a human interest dilemma in order for the information to be newsworthy, and also competitors have to be perceived as if in the horse race, meaning trailing one another in pursuit of excellence (de Vreese, 2014).

Bradshaw and Minogue (2020) have a list of what can become newsworthy, or more likely to get published: the power elite, relevance, bad news, good news, surprise, celebrity, exclusivity and conflict. The sport news has to be about powerful individuals or organisations, about heros and antiheros, winners and losers (Penezić, Bajić and Selenić, 2024). Some clubs will not be considered that relevant, while some will constantly be in the focus of media. Arguments, controversies, break-ups, scandals, these are more important than regular day's work of an athlete. What we see on the TV screens is not just different in terms of replays, statistics, close-ups, and many other cinematographic methods to create a mega-event sport spectacle. It is about provoking emotional reactions of just amusement. This way certain kind of behaviour is emphasized over others and you can expect stereotyping like in the terms of "Englishness" represented by domestic players, and foreign players style of play.

There is a question whether the audience want news or infotainment, or in other terms, does the audience want sport news or sportainment, and can this be seen as

sport journalism at all (Bradshaw & Minogue, 2020). Nevertheless, journalists often cover these kinds of stories, which bring the sport sphere closer to the realm of popular culture, and in the case of tabloids, even sensationalism. As Wayne Rooney states, reporters "love building you up, and love just as much kicking you when they think you are down" (in Birkner and Nolleke, 2015: 11). Athletes are treated just as any other celebrity, like in the case of John Terry who had to portray the ideal "Englishness" while having extramarital affair with a former partner of his teammate, and some racial controversies against one Queens's Park Rangers player. "On the one hand, his style and his qualities of on-pitch leadership are illustrative of the restorative nostalgia of the re-nationalization narratives outlined above, positioning him as the heir to former England captains such as Bobby Moore. However, on the other hand, his lifestyle, his celebrity and his off-pitch antics represent the ambivalence in English football culture wrought by neoliberalism: he is seen as a product of a culture that lacks taste and self-control, and as representative of the replacement of the noble working class by the 'chav'" (Ewen, 2013: 483).

The commercialisation of football changed the working-class masculinity and "hooligan" symbolism of English football, but is increasingly being replaced by celebrification of society and a culture of consumption. Many today do not remember what has David Beckham done on the football pitch but a lot of them know about his marriage with a pop music star. Sport celebrities are still mostly "meritocratic", that is they are celebrities because they are successful athletes. But there is a striking change between the relationship of previous football players to the club. Players were connected to their local communities and club's fans, and today's sport celebrities are in fact more distant from the fans than ever before. We can read about their diets, and private aspects of their lives, their social media usage, but their relationship with a local community is further and further appart and less visible (Harris, 2017: 109). This way athletes are increasingly becoming mediated figures rarely seen in real life but through the lens of the media. And there they are the close-up shot and not an athlete from previous eras.

Techno-logic of the Premier League

Does technology change sport and, if so, how? I have shown that in many aspects clubs and athletes adjust to the media logic, but is there something specifically technological that brings major changes to the sport landscape? We could categorize it as certain changes that are in the making when it comes to what is happening on the stadium itself, among the players and referees (like in the case of VAR technology); second, how does social media relate to the treatment of fans; third, does new technology, like big data or AI interfere in the management of players, even acquisition of players, based on calculated performance?

Implementation of the video assistant referee (VAR) challenged the authority of individual human referees on the stadium. Refereeing is becoming much more complex and creates more dilemmas for the team of referees, but what should not be forgotten is that VAR is simply and implementation based on historical relationship with television. From replay technology of the past, that relativized the authority of the referee when it comes to decisions about goals or offsides, VAR makes it official: technology will interfere and make a decision that will overturn the human perspective. On top of that, it seem there is a whole range of questions when it comes to what decision-making technologies affect in sports (Frandsen & Landgrebe, 2022: 813): tactics and structures in the game, key actors' performance and behaviour, fans, referees.

"Not surprisingly, such controversies are also provoked by the increasing use of media technologies to make performances more transparent for referees and audiences. In principle this happens from the beginning of sports: Lines, goal nets, or finish line photography can all be considered "decision aids" that enhance visibility to support the referee's decision" (d'Andrea & Stauff, 2022: 837). The team of referees use mobile communication system and VAR technology, and are becoming more important players in the game itself, all the while being broadcast as important for the TV narrative of the game. The expectation is more rational and less emotional decision, but the relationship between referees and fans are more complicated, as fans get to demand to scrutinize referees right there and right now. VAR seem to be just a new tool for analyzing the game, shape our understanding and experience of the game, and these new tools are further developed and negotiated.

Second, what is happening with social media? Live event reporting by the journalists is now suplemented with real-time communication, or chatter, on the social networks (McEnnis, 2023: 125). Social media are now publishing platforms, a place for user interactions, gathering fan opinion, and maybe some source for stories and news. But social media is often not interested in facts or ethical standards, but foster conversation, debate, interaction, that are more emotional than objective. Subjectivity and partisanship seems to be on the increase as journalists tweet opinions rather than information, just like fans, that they engage with and are the source of media organization's income. Other digital technologies had already impacted the business model of sport media organizations, because they require investment (Penezić, Bajić and Selenić, 2023). Many of these organizations dedicating increased amounts of content to controversy and opinion at the cost of fact-based analysis, all while the size of traditional newsroom staffs decreased. But social media accelerated this. The sport media industry has become encumbered with 'hot takes'—illogical or uninformed opinions meant to engage and/or inflame the audience" (Clavio & Meisinger, 2025: 180).

There is also a phenomenon of fan TV on the rise, where fan congregate and interact on certain platforms like Youtube, where they provide their own reflections about the clubs and sport they support and follow. There are special fan zones, online fandom structures, that find their own ways of supporting the club, and the social networks of fans are becoming transnational, multicultural and global. That is all increasingly becoming very important for the clubs' business. "Analysing fans' social media practices can yield an insight into fans' consumption habits and patterns" (Woods & Ludvigsen, 2021). Clubs rely not just on classic survey, but on data processing to analyse the fans' behavior. There are Twitter analytics, Youtube data tools and other means of scraping and data mining, that are now becoming more important for the clubs themselves.

Finally, a peculiar thought is occuring when it comes to another authority on the field, namely coaches. Should computers regruit players and contemplate tactics? The use of big data is now a trendy practice, that became popular with the film Moneball (2011), starring Brad Pitt, where the baseball club started relying on the computer analysis, the "sabermetric" scouting of players and assembling a competitive team. In the case of Premier league, this has first happened in a not so succesfull fashion, with Liverpool acquiring Andy Carrol based on the data processing of different game features, but it carried on to this day (Robinson & Clegg 2019). Many physical and technical performance parameters are observed and become a part of the tracking system, where the data is processes. The results can impact the evolution of the game, such as the demonstration that wide players and central defenders are valued for the physical demand (high-intensity running) and the central players for their technical requirements. "More specifically, ball possession, number of shots, shots on target, number of passes and pass completion rates are all associated with team success" (Bush et al, 2015).

Some even develop a network approach, where the high level of interaction and orchestration of the group is valued, but also low level of centralization or the "distribution of network positions and roles" (Grund, 2012: 688). In general, this is percived as objective measures of individual performance, related to assists, tackles, off-sides and other individual behaviour that can be examined as a contribution of the network position and individual performance. But that clearly interferes with the work of the human managers and their view of the game. Even if they gladly accept datafication in their everyday tactical and strategic decisions, it is still that organization of the club and players' performance getting more related to techno-logic than manager's decisions or worldview.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the Premier League's transformation from a locally grounded sporting competition into a global media product reflects a shift toward broadcasting, digital platforms, and data-driven management, redefining both club organization and the spatial imagination of fandom.

Media logic reshapes supporter communities by privileging transnational, digitally networked audiences, while generating tensions with historically rooted local identities and traditions. The Premier League thus becomes a site of conflict between the "space of places" and the "space of flows", where traditional identities, memories, and participatory claims clash with corporate governance and commercial rationalization. Clubs have effectively become hybrid media-entertainment companies whose financial stability depends less on physical attendance and more on the ability to generate continuous mediated content for dispersed global audiences.

Symbolically, football is increasingly produced and consumed through media formats that emphasize spectacle, celebrity, and emotional drama, blurring the boundaries between sport, journalism, and entertainment. Journalistic formats, tabloidization, and infotainment frames align football with popular culture industries, transforming players into mediated personalities and matches into serialized drama.

Technologically, innovations such as VAR, performance analytics, and social media platforms intervene directly in decision-making, authority, and experience of the game. These developments promise rationalization and transparency, yet they also deepen the dependence of sport on media infrastructures and computational systems.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the Premier League is not merely influenced by media, but constituted through media logic. Without these logics, contemporary football—as a global spectacle, a commercial enterprise, and a cultural industry—would be fundamentally different. The Premier League thus exemplifies how sport today functions as a mediatized cultural form—one defined not only by athletic competition, but by continuous negotiation between commercial imperatives, technological rationality, and enduring social meanings.

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