



Research Article

Undergraduate Students' Viewership of the English Premier League on Supersport: Study of Undergraduate Students in Anambra State

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated undergraduate students' viewership of the English Premier League (EPL) on SuperSport in Anambra State. It is built on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Play Theory, the research examined viewing patterns, the gratifications sought and derived, as well as the extent to which SuperSport's EPL coverage meets the information, entertainment, and social interaction needs of students. A survey design was adopted, with structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate students across selected universities in Anambra State. Findings revealed that the majority of undergraduate students regularly watch EPL matches on SuperSport, with high preference for games involving top clubs. English and Nigerian Pidgin English were the most preferred languages of commentary, reflecting cultural and linguistic realities of the Nigerian audience. Results further indicated that undergraduate students seek gratifications such as entertainment, identification with favourite clubs, social bonding, and stress relief through EPL viewership. In addition, most respondents derived these gratifications, including pleasure, excitement, pride in club loyalty, and opportunities for peer interaction. The study also established that satisfaction with SuperSport's EPL coverage is generally high, though varying across viewing frequency. The study recommends that broadcasters enhance content diversity, incorporate localised commentary, and design more interactive platforms to sustain youth engagement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Historically, sports have been with man as he advanced with time. It may not be wrong to say that every sport exhibited in a society reflects the way of living of that society because sporting event is unscripted and live. There is no doubt that the regular and detailed coverage of sporting events through the mass media, amplified an already broadening public interest in the major sporting league. One of the famous sporting activities that has gained global prominence is football, it can be referred to as the world's most popular ball game in numbers of participants and spectators. Simple in its principal rules and essential equipment, the sport can be played almost anywhere, from official football playing fields (pitches) to gymnasiums, streets, school playgrounds, parks, or beaches. Prominent among the football league in the world is the English Premier League (EPL).

It has the largest fans all over the world and the media coverage which are combined to exert tremendous effect on audience globally, even at the detriment of other local leagues around the world. The EPL is at the highest level of the English football league system. It is contested by 20 clubs each season and it operates on a system of promotion and relegation with the English Football League (EFL). The seasons of the EPL typically begin from August to May with each team playing 38 matches against all other teams, both home and away. EPL, according to Marc (2017), was founded on February 20, 1992, when the First Division clubs broke away from the English Football League.

The mass media and new technologies have made the world a global village. These they have done by letting people living across different geographical frontiers participate in

what is happening in faraway countries right at the comfort of their homes. The EPL's influence is amplified by satellite broadcasters such as SuperSport, which holds exclusive rights to live broadcasts across Sub-Saharan Africa.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the uses and gratifications of SuperSport's EPL coverage among undergraduate students in Anambra State. It examines the specific motivations driving viewership, the extent to which SuperSport meets students' needs, and how they get gratified through their viewing habits.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study was to ascertain the viewership pattern of SuperSport's EPL among undergraduate students in Anambra State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. examine the viewing patterns of undergraduate students in relation to SuperSport's EPL coverage.
2. assess whether EPL viewership on SuperSport meet the needs of undergraduate students in Anambra State
3. identify the factors that motivate undergraduate students in Anambra State to watch EPL on SuperSport.
4. determine the gratifications undergraduate students in Anambra State derive from watching English Premier League on SuperSport.
5. ascertain the implications of EPL viewership on students' academic routines

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories are bodies of knowledge tested overtime and having a universal acceptance. Theory is not yet a system of law-like proposition, but rather a set of idea of varying status and origin which explain realities. This study adopted two theories of Mass Communication: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Play Theory.

3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is a communication theory that explains why and how individuals actively seek out specific media to satisfy particular needs or desires. Unlike earlier media effects theories that viewed audiences as passive recipients of media messages, UGT assumes that audiences are active, goal-directed, and selective in their media use. The theory was first introduced by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1973. They argued that people use media based on the gratifications they seek; meaning that media users are aware of their needs and choose media that best fulfil them. In their view, the power lies not in the media itself, but in the audience's ability to interpret and utilise media content to meet personal and social goals.

Unlike other theories concerning media consumption, UGT gives the consumer power to discern what media they consume, with the assumption that the consumer has a clear intent and use. This contradicts previous theories such as mass society theory, that states that people are helpless victims of mass media produced by large companies; and individual differences perspective, which states that intelligence and self-esteem largely drive an individual's media choice.

3.2 Play Theory of Mass Communication

Play Theory of Mass Communication emphasizes that mass media consumption can be understood as a form of play, a leisure activity undertaken for enjoyment, relaxation, and self-expression rather than for utilitarian or purely informational purposes. Play Theory was propounded by William Stephenson in 1967. According to Stephenson, people engage with media as a way to experience pleasure, escape routine pressures, and interact socially within a symbolic “play world.” This postulates that people use mass media more as play than for work, for pleasure and entertainment than for information and improvement. William Stephenson cited in Folarin (1998) asserts that people use mass media contents more as play than for work, for pleasure and entertainment than for information and improvement.

This explains why print and broadcast media give more attention to comics, sports, fashion angle etc. than they do to hard news. It is grounded in the idea that media consumption functions primarily as a form of play. Unlike information-centered theories that emphasize persuasion, education, or surveillance, Play Theory stresses the recreational, pleasurable, and self-gratifying aspects of media use. Several basic assumptions underpin this theoretical framework. Play Theory assumes that media consumption is a form of play rather than work. Stephenson (1967) argued that individuals engage with mass media primarily for enjoyment, relaxation, and escape from daily routines. In this sense, media use is conceptualized as an activity that provides fun and pleasure, similar to games and leisure pursuits, rather than a productive or obligatory task.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Sources of Literature

There are two major sources of literature for this research; primary and secondary sources of literature. The primary source of literature is the information obtained through personal means such as observation, interview and participation. On the other hand, the secondary sources of literature refer to those pieces of information sourced through second hand means such as the use of original books, journals and article and any other scholarly work done by previous scholars in the area under investigation. Sources of literature for this study were based on both primary and secondary sources.

4.1 Summary of Review

Scholarship on sports media in Nigeria consistently shows that EPL viewership is central to youth leisure and identity work, with television (especially SuperSport on DSTV/GOtv) as the dominant access point. Studies outside Anambra, but within the Nigerian university context, report high exposure to EPL and mixed academic implications. For instance, Kente and Lucas (2020) find that undergraduates in Keffi sometimes prioritize EPL fixtures over coursework, while Archibong and Ogande (2023) describe viewership as habitual and embedded in campus life. Beyond academic effects, viewing centres serve as social hubs that can foster integration yet occasionally generate interpersonal tension (Dogari, Apuke, & Shadrach, 2018).

From a uses-and-gratifications (UGT) perspective, students watch EPL to meet needs such as entertainment, social bonding, information, and tension release (e.g., Ali, Ilmas, & Hassan, 2019; Leo, Aniebo, & Uduot, 2016). Foundational UGT work (e.g., Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974;

summarized in McQuail, 2010) frames viewers as active agents pursuing specific gratifications. Complementary lenses, Play Theory (Stephenson, 1967) and entertainment-enjoyment research (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004), help explain the recreational, identity-affirming, and affective qualities of football viewing.

5.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey research method was adopted in this study. The study was conducted in Anambra State and among undergraduates of selected universities in the State. The sample size for the survey was determined by referring to the sample sizes for various population ranges as worked out by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size for this study is 382. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used for study. A pre-tested questionnaire was used to gather the responses of the respondents that were studied. Thereafter, the collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables, simple percentages and weighted mean).

5.1 FINDINGS

The five research questions asked to direct the study were interrogations through responses obtained in the valid copies of the questionnaire in the used survey method. Five research questions were set for this study. The findings are presented below.

Research Question 1: What are the viewing patterns (frequency, match selection, language preference, group vs. solo viewing) of undergraduate students in relation to SuperSport's EPL? Questionnaire questions 5 – 8 were used to answer this RQ1.

Table 2: Frequency of English Premier League matches viewership on SuperSport?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	217	59.6
Weekly	94	25.8
Monthly	9	2.5
Rarely	7	1.9
Never	37	10.2
Total	364	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents watch EPL on SuperSport. Most of the majority watch EPL every day and few of the majority watch once in a month or rarely do. A very minor percentage had never watched

EPL on SuperSport. The above table reflects that most undergraduate students watch EPL on SuperSport though with different viewing frequency.

Table 3: Respondents' preferences of EPL matches

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Matches involving top clubs (e.g., Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Man City)	311	95.1
Matches involving smaller clubs	4	1.2
Any available match	12	3.7
Total	327	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents watch matches that involve top clubs during EPL viewership. A very minute number of the respondents watch matches that involve small clubs and others watch any available match whenever they tune in to SuperSport. This

data indicates that most undergraduate students in Anambra State watch EPL matches that involve the top clubs which might be the reason for the popularity of these top clubs among undergraduate students in Anambra State.

Table 4: Commentary language most preferred when watching EPL on SuperSport

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
English	207	63.3
Pidgin English	81	24.7
Nigerian Local Language	11	3.4
No particular preference	28	8.6
Total	327	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

From Table 4 above, a large proportion of the respondents prefers the EPL commentary in English language and pidgin English which can be termed a Nigerian English language because it is only spoken in Nigeria. This implies that undergraduate students in Anambra State prefers

the EPL commentary in English language whether it is foreign or local English language. This may be due to the fact that English language is the lingua franca in Nigeria used in tutelage in Nigerian universities and better way of expression in over 250 ethnic diversities.

Table 5: Respondents' form of companionship during EPL matches viewership on SuperSport

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Alone	11	3.4
With friends/family	61	18.7
At public viewing centres	73	22.3
Both alone and with others	182	55.6
Total	327	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Majority of the respondents watch EPL on SuperSport both alone and with others followed by the number of those who watch on viewing centres. Data on table 5, indicate that most undergraduate students in Anambra State watch EPL matches on SuperSport alone and in the company of others whether in their places of residence or viewing centres.

Research Question 2: *Does SuperSport's EPL viewership meet the needs of undergraduate students in Anambra State?* To answer this research question, questionnaire questions 9 – 11 were analysed in the table below.

Table 6: Respondents' needs that are met by SuperSport's EPL Viewership

Variables	Frequency of Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
SuperSport's EPL coverage provides me with useful football information	218	109	0	0	0
Watching EPL on SuperSport entertains me	303	24	0	0	0
Watching EPL on SuperSport helps me socialize and interact with others	182	134	6	4	1
Mean	234.4	89	2	1.3	0.3

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Evaluating the needs of undergraduate students SuperSport's EPL viewership meet as shown on table 6 above indicates that majority of the r strongly agree and agree that SuperSport's EPL viewership meets the various needs of undergraduate students in Anambra State. This implies that undergraduate students in Anambra State uses SuperSport's EPL to meet their needs

on entertainment, information, socialization and interaction.

Research Question 3: *What are the factors that motivate undergraduate students in Anambra State to watch English Premier League on SuperSport?* To answer this research question, questionnaire question 12 was analysed in the table below.

Table 7: Factors that motivate undergraduate students in Anambra State to watch English Premier League on SuperSport?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Get football information/updates	46	14.1
Be entertained	108	33
Relax/reduce stress	44	13.4
Connect/socialize with friends/family	21	6.4
Identify with my favorite club team	96	29.4
Participate in football conversations	12	3.7
Total	327	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

From table 7 above, it can be deduced that most respondents are motivated watch EPL on SuperSport to get their entrainment craving gratified through SuperSport's EPL viewership. A large number also are motivated by identifying with their favourite club. The above table reflects that there are various factors that motivated undergraduate students in Anambra State to watch English Premier League on

SuperSport.

Research Question 4: What gratifications do undergraduate students in Anambra State derive from watching SuperSport's English Premier League.? To answer this research question, questionnaire question 13 was analysed in the table below.

Table 8: Gratifications Respondents derive from watching SuperSport's EPL

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Deriving pleasure, fun, and excitement from watching matches.	57	17.4
Reducing stress from academic work and escaping daily challenges.	41	12.5
Bonding with friends, roommates, and peers during group viewing.	33	10.1
Feeling less lonely while engaging in a communal activity like watching EPL on SuperSport.	11	3.4
Expressing loyalty and pride in supporting favorite clubs.	54	16.5
Enhancing social status among peers through football knowledge and club support.	6	1.8
Expressing joy, anger, or sadness through football outcomes.	6	1.8
Connecting with diverse groups of people across religious, ethnic, or cultural lines.	6	1.8
Engaging in discussions, arguments, or banter with fellow fans.	42	12.8
Enjoying the skills, creativity, and beauty of football play.	47	14.4
Watching EPL as a routine or ritual part of student life.	7	2.1
Others	17	5.2
Total	327	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 8 shows the various gratifications respondents derive from watching EPL on SuperSport which include the following according to the majority of the respondents: Deriving pleasure, fun, and excitement from watching matches; Expressing loyalty and pride in supporting favorite clubs; Enjoying the skills, creativity, and beauty of football play; Engaging in discussions, arguments, or banter with fellow fans; Reducing stress from academic work and escaping daily challenges; Bonding with friends, roommates, and peers during group viewing;

and other gratifications. This data reveals that undergraduate students in Anambra State derive varying gratifications from viewing EPL on SuperSport.

Research Question 5: What are the implications of EPL viewership on students' academic routines, social relationships, and lifestyle. The fifth and last research question dwelt on the relationship between viewing frequency and level of satisfaction with SuperSport's EPL coverage. Questionnaire question 14 was used to answer this RQ5

Table 9: Implications of EPL viewership on students' academic routines.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Missed lecture/coursework because of EPL	0	0
I stay awake late at night to watch EPL	8	2.4
Postponed assignment to watch EPL	67	20.5
Watching EPL has no negative influence on my study	221	67.6
I plan my weekend schedule around EPL matches time	31	9.5
Total	327	100

Sources: Field Research, 2025

From table 9, majority of the respondents rated their viewership of EPL on SuperSport as not having any negative influence on academic routine, while a large number attested to postponing assignment to watch EPL. An insignificant number planned their weekend around EPL matches time. This indicates that significant population of the undergraduate students are not influenced negatively for watching EPL on SuperSport.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate undergraduate students' viewership of the English Premier League (EPL) on SuperSport in Anambra State, Nigeria, focusing on their viewing patterns, the needs met by EPL coverage, the gratifications sought and derived, and the relationship between viewing frequency and satisfaction. Drawing on the Uses and Gratifications

Theory (UGT) and Play Theory, the study affirms that students are not passive recipients of media but active, purposive consumers who select EPL broadcasts on SuperSport to satisfy diverse needs. The findings revealed that most undergraduate students regularly watch EPL on SuperSport, with a stronger preference for matches involving top clubs, and that English and Pidgin English commentary resonates most with their linguistic environment. SuperSport's EPL coverage meets critical needs for entertainment, information, and social interaction, while also offering deeper gratifications such as club identification, stress relief, peer bonding, pride, and opportunities for playful engagement through banter and debates. The majority of students expressed satisfaction with their EPL viewership, confirming the positive relationship between viewing frequency and gratification.

By integrating UGT's emphasis on need-fulfillment with Play Theory's focus on recreation and enjoyment, this study demonstrates that EPL broadcasts on SuperSport serve as both a functional and symbolic media resource for Nigerian undergraduates. Beyond football as a sport, EPL viewing represents a cultural, social, and recreational experience that helps students navigate academic stress, affirm group identities, and sustain social networks.

In conclusion, this study underscores the centrality of sports broadcasting, particularly EPL coverage, in the media lives of Nigerian undergraduates. It

contributes to media and communication scholarship by showing how global sports content, localized through SuperSport, simultaneously fulfills informational, social, and playful gratifications among young audiences in Nigeria.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following are made;

1. SuperSport should continue to localize EPL coverage by providing commentary in both English and Nigerian Pidgin, as this resonates with undergraduate audiences and reflects the country's linguistic diversity.
2. Broadcasters should consider creating student-friendly EPL packages that make subscriptions more affordable, especially for undergraduates who face financial constraints.
3. Beyond live matches, SuperSport could invest in interactive programmes (e.g., fan debates, polls, highlights, and behind-the-scenes shows) tailored to student viewers, enhancing their sense of participation and playful engagement.
4. Universities can leverage EPL's popularity by creating structured viewing spaces or student clubs that foster safe, collective viewing. Such initiatives can enhance peer bonding, social cohesion, and even stress relief from academic pressures.
5. Student associations can organize EPL-themed events, discussions, or quizzes that combine recreation with

educational outcomes, tapping into the motivational value of football culture.

6. The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should encourage inclusive sports broadcasting policies that ensure affordable access to EPL matches for young audiences, given the strong cultural and recreational role of football in Nigerian society

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