

Research Article

Implications of Illegal Streaming of Football Matches on the Broadcasting Rights in South Africa

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Abstract

This qualitative study expounds on the ramifications of illegal football streaming on broadcasting rights. The subscribers of pay-per-view television networks such as SuperSport International, Sky Sports, TNT, Fox Sports, ESPN, Bein Sports, etc., are the backbone of the broadcasting rights. The study sought to explore the implications of the illegal streaming of football matches on the broadcasting rights. Also, it dissected the affordability and accessibility issues concerning streaming of the same events. Further, the research underscored the convenience of football streaming in the digital era. Theoretically, the media economics theory is adopted as the analytical lens in this paper. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the managers of the international broadcasting entities in South Africa. Data from the football fans were collected through three focus groups. Additionally, reflexive thematic analysis anchored the data analysis component of this paper. The findings suggest that illegal streaming has been part of the broadcasting landscape in South Africa for decades. Also, the study discovered that the broadcasting entities were compelled to introduce streaming services to curtail illegal streaming services. We, therefore, recommend that the rights holders should rethink the packaging of their streaming services to mitigate the affordability conundrum. Also, we recommend that the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) should introduce a new model of controlling and regulating streaming services to circumvent monopoly and unfair competition in this sector. The exploration of the new trends of content consumption should be critically analysed. This would stimulate discussion and further research on the adoption of new policies to address the ramifications of illegal streaming as well as new media regulation in the digital era.

Keywords

Implications, Broadcasting, Rights, Illegal, Streaming, Football, Video Streaming, Subscribers

1. Introduction

The streaming of football matches has been a new pattern of football consumption in the South African broadcasting market. This pattern is common as far as streaming other me-

dia content is concerned. Often, media consumers stream different content in the form of music videos, music, movies, reality shows, current affairs, news, documentaries, and podcasts [4, 10, 25, 28]. In addition, the streaming of different

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services demonstrates that the consumption pattern of broadcast content has evolved over the years. According to Hutchins [12], video streaming has emerged as a new platform for sports broadcasting, but it has also created more opportunities for individuals to break the law and obtain unauthorised live sports broadcasts. Furthermore, this is a challenge to media entities that produce and broadcast content of this nature in terms of streaming football matches. In other words, this trend is rapidly emerging, and it supersedes the traditional consumption of football matches [11, 9]. This is a global phenomenon. In the South African context, media conglomerates such as SuperSport International and South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) broadcast live football matches to a plethora of audiences in South Africa [22]. It is worth noting that SuperSport International also broadcasts football matches across Sub-Saharan Africa in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Nigeria [22]. The crux of the matter is that these media entities are grappling with both legal and illegal streaming services that share the same content with their targeted audience. The focus of this study is to explore the implications of illegal streaming of football matches on broadcasting rights in South Africa. The broadcasting entities spend exorbitant fees to secure the rights of different associations [8, 24, 17]. In the South African context, SuperSport International, through its parent company Multichoice, secures the rights from different associations, including the Premier Soccer League, the Confederation of African Football (CAF), Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), and Ethiopian Football League [22]. Similarly, the SABC secures the rights from the same associations.

The football broadcasting rights market for securing and distributing football matches is exorbitant. In other words, these broadcasters depend on football broadcasting rights to attract a large audience. According to Bailey [4], football is the most popular sport in the South African television market. Also, broadcasting entities such as SABC and SuperSport television dedicate more channels to broadcast football matches. This, therefore, indicates that the South African sports broadcasting market dedicates millions in terms of investments towards football broadcasting and its development. Accordingly, on the one hand, DSTV has invested in grassroots football development in South Africa through competitions such as DSTV Diski Challenge, Ekasi Diski, and School sports [24, 14, 9]. On the other hand, SABC is also making a salient contribution through the coverage of the South African Women's Football League. These developments of football upliftment from the grassroots level demonstrate that the broadcasting rights of football events are a huge investment for broadcasting conglomerates in South Africa. There is a dearth of scientific research that studies the impact of illegal streaming of football matches on the broadcasting rights in South Africa. Thus, it is cardinal for this study to expound on the nuances and nexus of illegal streaming and the broadcasting rights.

Some South African football followers do not have the resources to subscribe to the pay-per-view sports networks. Also, the lack of infrastructure harms the accessibility of the football matches that are mainly beamed live on pay-per-view platforms, particularly on SuperSport television. This model is conspicuous in the international broadcasting market, where broadcasting entities such as Bein Sports, TNT, Fox Sport, ESPN, and SkySport dedicate myriad hours of live sporting events to football matches [10]. As far as Sky Sports is concerned, it covers most of the English Premier League live matches and broadcasts the same event to a plethora of football followers in the United Kingdom [12]. Similarly, an entity such as ESPN covers most European football competitions on behalf of the American audience [13, 15]. Thus, football followers from the American market follow football matches in Europe and other parts of the world through ESPN. In the Middle East, Bein Sports covers large sporting events, particularly football matches, for the Arabic audience in North Africa as well as mainly areas such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar [15]. All these entities are facing a conundrum of illegal streaming services. Recently, in the United Kingdom, three individuals were apprehended for running a network of illegal streaming of football matches targeting the live broadcast of the English Premier League [13, 20]. This type of illicit broadcast would allow people who are reluctant to officially subscribe to legitimate broadcasting rights holders to access the live football matches on their mobile phones, laptops, tablets, as well as on their smart TVs, free of charge. In addition, some of these illegal streaming networks charge a cheaper fee to allow their target audience to access their feed. In recent reports, the illegal streaming services use the same feed of the media entities that legitimately acquired the right from the football leagues [16, 3]. This, therefore, means that illegal streaming services disrupt the sports broadcasting markets. To some extent, this trend harms the development of football. In the context of media economics, illegal streaming services directly affect the profitability of broadcasting entities. This is because the same audience that is accessing football matches through illegal streaming services was meant to subscribe to the same services as the legal broadcasting rights holders. In this study, the focus is on the implications of the illegal streaming of football matches on broadcasting rights. Also, it captures the different trends and developments in the streaming of football matches. Additionally, this study expounds on the strategies that are used by media entities such as SuperSport International and SABC to mitigate the illegal streaming of their broadcasting services [9, 16]. The study sought to answer the following questions: a) How does the illegal streaming of football matches affect the broadcasting rights? b) What are the dynamics of affordability and accessibility of football streaming in South Africa? c) How do the convenience and regulatory issues affect the broadcasting rights market? In pursuit of addressing these questions, the researchers employed semi-structured interviews and focus groups within a qualitative research approach. Additionally,

the data were deconstructed through reflexive thematic analysis, observing all six stages to identify the key themes. The next section focuses on the theoretical component of the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

Media economics theory is adopted to analyse the implications of illegal streaming of football matches on broadcasting rights [20]. This theory deals with the economic aspect of the media, particularly how different media entities explore and exploit business opportunities in the industry. It also expounds on the audience market in terms of how the audience responds to different media markets [2]. Moreover, the economic impact of sports media on society is reflected in the substantial audience ratings for sports programming [7]. In terms of traditional media, the main canon of the theory is the supply and demand of media products. These media products are mainly print media content, broadcast media, and digital media. Over the years, the media economics theory informed various media conglomerates about decent and relevant strategies to ensure that their media entities are financially sustainable. Historically, media entities have been grappling with sustainability issues. There is a plethora of case studies in the American context, as far as financial sustainability is concerned, in the media fraternity. In the African context, the struggles of various media entities for financial viability and sustainability are well documented [24]. Thus, this theory is applied to highlight and dissect issues of media sustainability. It is worth noting that issues of media sustainability are complex. This is because new technologies have challenged the media in terms of how the content is produced, packaged, and distributed to the target audience. In this study, media economics theory zooms in on the ramifications of illegal streaming on broadcasting entities in South Africa. It has been emphasised that studies of this nature do not cover the aspect of streaming services. In the South African context, streaming services are a relatively new phenomenon. As such, it is cardinal to dissect and explore this phenomenon through media economics theory. This theory has been tested for many years as the best theoretical underpinning to extrapolate the relationship between economics and media. Studies in the United States of America and the United Kingdom used media economics theory to expound on the economics of the media, particularly during the emergence of the Internet as the new hub of information, entertainment, and education [19]. This study accentuates the canon of supply and demand concerning the streaming of football matches among South African football followers. The same canon is also engaged to explore the impact of illegal streaming of football matches on the broadcasting entities. This theory is used to dissect the nuances of the illegal streaming of football matches in South Africa. Thus, the canons of the theory are analysed and synthesised in the findings and discussions section. The next section focuses on the key components of the literature review in the context of the study.

3. Literature Review

The existing literature demonstrates that issues of illegal streaming of football matches are anchored by two pivotal components, i.e., affordability and accessibility of football matches, and convenience and regulation of streaming football matches online.

3.1. Affordability and Accessibility of Football Matches

In a study conducted in Nigeria, football fans prefer to watch matches in groups [23]. The study also focused on issues of accessibility and affordability for watching football matches live on television. It was highlighted that some football fans in Nigeria do not have access to live matches, especially the English Premier League, which is popular there [23, 22]. As a result, they rely on group viewing, which sometimes involves illegal streams hosted to allow some people to watch these matches publicly. Some fans cannot afford to subscribe to or buy a television with a subscription to access these matches. In the United Kingdom, most of those who illegally stream matches are impacted by issues of accessibility [4]. The study also noted that many football fans in the UK are affected by the afternoon blackout of English Premier League matches [4]. The league authorities control the timing of the afternoon matches to encourage fans to attend in person at the stadium [28, 18]. This shows that affordability and accessibility influence illegal streaming. The same fans often cannot afford tickets to attend matches live at the stadium, leading them to illegal streaming. In South Africa, the challenges of accessibility and affordability for watching football remain complex [12]. This point is also emphasised by various researchers and media commentators. In a study by Malatji, Mphaga, and Baloyi [24], the focus was on the cost of legally accessing football matches. They found that many South African fans cannot afford DSTV subscriptions, so they turn to illegal streaming services. The study also pointed out that some people who illegally stream matches are unaware of the legal consequences. A few mentioned that illegal sites are not always easy to spot [11, 9, 21]. As a result, it is difficult for viewers to recognise that these streaming sites are not authorised by the proper rights holders. Unlike the other three studies in Nigeria, the UK, and South Africa, this one does not directly explore the link between accessibility, affordability, and illegal streaming. The accessibility of the professional football matches is a conundrum for most football fans in Africa. Often, most of the matches are unavailable on free-to-air platforms. This is detrimental to universal access, which advocates for free access to media content. According to the South African regulatory framework, accessibility of football matches is a matter of public interest and should be accessible to all citizens. In this case, the majority of the live football matches are exclusively available on pay-per-view platforms. This, therefore, means

that the football followers should pay for the services to access the matches. The economics of the media dictate that the content creation and distribution should be economically viable. Since the media entities secure the broadcast rights through exorbitant deals with the football leagues. In this case, they use a pay-per-view or subscription model to generate revenue. As such, in the South African context, the fans find it difficult to pay for the services due to a high unemployment rate, which is over 30% [24]. Thus, most of the football fans resort to illegal streaming to access the exclusive football matches. Further, they also watch some of the matches in the public viewing areas. The public viewing areas are not prone to illegal streaming. However, some of the public viewing areas, such as malls and beer halls, are not authorised to offer public viewing services. It is worth noting that in some instances, the football lovers share the legal streaming credentials. In other words, the streaming services have an option of extra streams, which allow users to use one subscription to watch exclusive matches. This option is not always accessible because the cost of internet service is high in South Africa. Thus, this makes it difficult for some users to stream the matches online regularly. The affordability of the internet services in South Africa is well-documented. In terms of streaming, users are expected to pay extra money to use internet data from various service providers. As such, it is costly for football followers to pay for both the internet and the streaming services to access football matches. As a result, some fans opt for illegal streaming to avoid paying extra costs.

3.2. Convenience and Regulation of Streaming Football Matches Online

As far as convenience is concerned, some individuals stream on different platforms inadvertently to watch live football matches on the move [10]. The emphasis is that it is convenient for them to watch these football matches online, which does not propel them to sit at home and watch the same event [12, 14]. Some of these studies highlighted that sometimes people resort to streaming because they prefer to watch live football events while they are away from home. Football followers, like other sporting fanatics, stream football events using their phones, tablets, and other mobile devices [13]. The same study recommended that broadcasting entities should ensure that they integrate online streaming into their services to ensure that they exploit the online market [13]. The other recommendation explained that this kind of integration would mitigate the use of illegal streaming services among football audiences. In a study conducted in India, it was discovered that most people prefer to follow live sporting events on their smartphones [26]. Although this study was not focused on football matches, it discovered that the audience accessed different sporting events, including Formula One, the cricket World Cup, and the Indian Premier League, on their smartphones. The emphasis of this study is that most young

television audiences prefer watching live sporting events while browsing other sites on their mobile devices [26]. In the same study, it was discovered that most of the online audience double-screened their content [26]. This consumption pattern does not give them sufficient time to filter and verify whether some of these streaming services are legitimate or not. Furthermore, this research demonstrated that the culture of online streaming is complex. The two facets that are raised in this literature review demonstrate that more research should be conducted in this area. Undoubtedly, the issues of illegal streaming have severe ramifications on the sustainability of broadcasting entities [10, 13]. Thus, this study expounds on the implications of the illegal streaming of football matches. As highlighted by the reviewed literature, football has an overwhelming audience across the globe. As such, media entities cannot afford to lose the revenue generated through live football subscriptions. Also, in the same study, the extrapolation is on how broadcasting entities introduce new strategies to mitigate illegal streaming services. In the South African context, it is illegal for any individual to package and distribute content owned by a broadcasting entity with the sole intention of generating profit. The same legislation prohibits any individual from sharing a live sporting feed with an unsubscribed audience. Accordingly, this is an interesting phenomenon as the emergence of online technologies and streaming services has challenged entities to reposition how they package, share, distribute, and present content to their target audience. The media economic theory is relevant to dissect issues of this nature. This is because, over the years, traditional media have been threatened and disrupted by new technologies. Nonetheless, broadcasting entities should rethink how they generate revenue through subscriptions. It is worth noting that the convenience of illegal streaming is riddled with a plethora of irregularities for both the broadcasters and the users. There is a thin line between illegal streaming and legal streaming in the South African context. Unlike the United Kingdom, where regulation of illegal streaming is strictly prohibited [10]. The South African government has a weak regulatory framework to protect the broadcasting market against unlawful broadcasting services. Although the digital communication policies stipulate copyright regulations, it is silent about the streaming component, which is detrimental to the future of broadcasting. In other words, the South African laws are outdated as far as regulating digital media, including streaming services. The future of broadcasting services is digital, particularly through over-the-top (OTT) services. Often, the distribution of the streaming services is intercepted by illegal streamers to broadcast the same event through other channels. Some of these illegal streamers use YouTube to distribute the content. This trend perpetuates piracy as well as the violation of copyright laws. Often, the culprits of this public piracy are not brought to book by the authorities. In most cases, the SABC streaming services are shared by other users on YouTube. This, therefore, demonstrates that South Africa has a weak policy to mitigate illegal streaming. There is free access to different streaming

services from other parts of the world that are accessible in the South African domain. Unfortunately, the illegal streaming syndicates erode the financial viability of the media entities. The subsequent section outlines and explicates methodology, including research design as well as data analysis.

4. Methodology

In this methodology section, the study focuses on the research method, research design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis. These methods and approaches are expounded in the context of the identified phenomenon in this research, which is the implications of illegal streaming of football matches on broadcasting rights. Thus, the methods zoom in on how human beings are investigated, particularly the perceptions of the football viewers in the South African context. In addition, the upside of the qualitative research approach is that it allows researchers to investigate without tempering its natural characteristics, such as behaviour, views, culture, creed, and social identity [3, 21]. In this case, this approach is concerned that they are consumers of football matches through orthodox and unorthodox platforms. Furthermore, this aspect is critical in this research as it extrapolates the phenomenon without deviating from its natural setting. This, therefore, means the participants in this study were not selected to suit the underlying agenda of the study. This approach is essential in this study as it dissects critical components of media economics that have not been largely exploited by previous researchers. In this study, the qualitative research approach is characterised by semi-structured interviews, a non-probability sampling method, and reflective thematic analysis.

4.1. Research Design

The consensus among scientific researchers is that research design is a blueprint of any scientific inquiry that informs the researcher of the appropriate and efficient approaches, techniques, and tools to conduct a study [1]. A study without a robust design is susceptible to the ill-informed way of pursuing a problem [5]. The research design plan execution expounds on how the researcher should approach it [6]. The exploratory research design is apt for this study to gather new facts. This design is relevant in this study as it attempts to explore how illegal streaming of football matches affects the broadcasting rights in South Africa. It is worth noting that studies of this nature have not been exploited by these scholars as far as media economics and broadcasting are concerned. Thus, the current study attempted to highlight, expose, and explore how issues of illegal streaming affect the broadcasting market in South Africa. Also, it demonstrates and extrapolates the relationship between streaming services and traditional media platforms. Therefore, this study used an exploratory research design through relevant approaches, techniques, and tools to explore this phenomenon.

4.2. Sampling

The sampling process is the cornerstone of the data collection process of any scientific inquiry [27]. In terms of Media and Communication research, human participants play a cardinal role in giving relevant investigations credible and meaningful information to produce new knowledge. Population and sampling are the mainstay of any scientific investigation [29]. Without this process, the study is susceptible to poorly conceived findings. A non-probability sampling method is applied in this study through the purposive sampling technique to meticulously sample relevant participants. The first phase of this procedure is informed by the population of this study, which is 27,000,000 football viewers, both on SuperSport platforms and SABC Sports. The sample of this study is drawn from this population through a purposive sampling technique. It is worth noting that this paper seeks a sampling technique that is applied through a dual process. Firstly, the research has targeted individuals who comment about football issues on Facebook and X. Subsequently, these individuals were requested to participate in this research. This initial phase yielded positive results as 15 individuals responded to the request, and the researchers requested them to complete the consent forms. Secondly, the same group was contacted through telephone to avoid including parody accounts and robots in this process. As such, 15 participants were verified and were eager to participate in this research. Also, data saturation was considered during the data collection process. On the other hand, the researchers contacted two participants from both SuperSport International and SABC to gather data about the implications of illegal streaming of football matches on their market. These participants were recruited through browsing the websites of the two media entities. Subsequently, they were contacted via email, and they agreed to be part of this study. It is worth noting that both participants completed the consent forms, consenting to participate in this research. This aspect was undertaken as the researchers are familiar with relevant individuals who can provide facts about illegal streaming and how it affects SABC and SuperSport International. The 15 football followers participated in the focus groups, and an interview guide was applied. The SABC and SuperSport employees were interviewed through semi-structured interviews.

4.3. Data Collection

Generally, an exploratory study needs empirical evidence to support the insinuations and findings of the study. Thus, qualitative research without empirical evidence from the field cannot yield positive results [3]. In this case, focus groups were used to interview 15 football followers to gather their views about the culture of streaming football matches and the legitimacy of the platforms they use for the same purpose. Accordingly, the researchers moderated three focus groups of five members and guided them by the study's objectives, which produced questions that were listed in the interview

guide. It is worth noting that these focus group sessions were conducted online through Microsoft Teams. The researcher ensured that the data saturation point was identified during the sessions to avoid redundant data. All members of the groups were given equal opportunity to answer the questions to gather different perspectives. In the second group, there were signs of data saturation. Moreover, the third group continued to ascertain the initial sign of data saturation. Thus, it was not necessary to add another session after the third group because the saturation of data was exceeded. With the consent of the participants, sessions were recorded, and the researchers downloaded the recordings for transcription. The transcribed data was stored in an electronic device, and the file was encrypted to adhere to ethical principles of scientific research. The three focus group sessions offered the participants a platform to share their views about their experience of streaming football matches using different channels. On the other hand, the interviews with the SABC and SuperSport International employees were conducted online using Google Meet. These interviews were also recorded on the same platform, and they also generated the transcribed data. Nonetheless, to verify the accuracy of the digital transcript, the researchers contacted the two participants to double-check the inaccurate texts. The researchers know that the system can misinterpret some of the words shared during the interviews. The researchers applied for ethical clearance before embarking on data collection. It is worth noting that the ethical clearance was granted by the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limpopo. This is the recorded reference number (TREC/119/2024: PG) on our ethical clearance certificate. As such, all ethical principles were observed in the study to respect, care for, and anonymise the participants of the study.

4.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis is one of the salient steps of scientific research. According to Leedy and Ormrod [29], incorrectly interpreted data has a great potential to weaken any study. Also, Creswell and Creswell [6] postulate that scientific researchers should embark on robust data analysis. They further indicated that data analysis should be informed by correct and apt methods and tools to avoid errors [6]. In the context of this paper, reflexive thematic analysis was used to dissect data collected through focus groups and online face-to-face interviews. The process of analysing these sets of data was informed by the key principles of reflexive thematic analysis. First, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data. This step was followed by the generation of codes. Second, the researchers had to generate themes. Third, the fourth step included reviewing themes from the same set of data. The last two steps allowed the researchers to define and name themes, as well as to encapsulate all pertinent points. The following section deals with the findings and discussions with incorporated theoretical analysis.

5. Findings and Discussions

The results of this paper were gathered from two sets of data, which were face-to-face online semi-structured interviews with the SABC and SuperSport employees. Also, the other set of data was collected through online focus groups, as highlighted in the data analysis section of the research methodology. The research applied reflexive thematic analysis to dissect the data and identify themes emerging from the data itself. The identified themes that emerged from the SABC and SuperSport interviews were, i.e., Management of legal streaming services, and implications of illegal streaming of football matches. In terms of the interviews with the football followers, the researchers identified these themes, i.e., accessibility of football matches and subscription affordability. In this section, the discussion commences with the analysis of SABC and SuperSport results. Subsequently, the focus group interview data are dissected.

5.1. Management of Legal Stream Service

According to the collected data, the SABC employee indicated that the public broadcaster had to introduce streaming services to broadcast some of the football matches to its audience. These streaming platforms are accessible free of charge. In addition, these streaming services under SABC are meant to ensure that football followers have access to different content, including the CAF Champions League, Africa Cup of Nations, and CAF Confederation Cup. These events are broadcast live on different platforms. As much as SABC broadcasts some football matches on the traditional platform, other matches are available on their streaming services.

[P2] As the public broadcaster, we always try to strike a difficult balance between public interest and financial sustainability. As you know, the corporation is facing financial woes, and we introduced streaming services such as SABC+, which are freely available to all South Africans. Our over-the-top offering is free of charge. In other words, our customers do not need to pay to watch football matches on the OTT platforms. However, some of the users abuse these streaming services by disrupting and redistributing the streaming services on other digital platforms such as Facebook and YouTube.

The study also gathered that the streaming services are accessible through the SABC website, and there is a category for sports where football followers can watch some of the football matches, including CAF Champions League matches and Betway Premiership events, free of charge. This discovery correlates with the assertions expounded in Oparaugo's [23] study. The data also stipulates that it is the responsibility of the SABC to ensure that all sporting events of national interest are accessible to the public without any subscription fee. It was also reported during the data collection process that the SABC always strives to ensure that the public has access to different sporting events, particularly football matches that are in high

demand. According to the media economics theory, the accessibility of media content is cardinal towards activating other streams of revenue such as sponsorship, partnership, and advertisements, for the media entities. This aspect is one of the key components of media sustainability in the digital era. The downside of the SABC's streaming service is that viewers can access the live football matches free of charge. In this case, the public broadcaster is missing out on an opportunity to generate revenue. Thus, the SABC's financial woes are compounded by this cumbersome way of content creation and distribution on digital platforms. In other words, the issues of accessibility and public interest should not supersede the cardinal aspect of media sustainability. In Bailey [4], it was discovered that broadcasters endeavour to meet the demands of the consumers. It was also discovered that SABC views football as a flagship sporting commodity. As such, they always make it their priority to ensure that different events are accessible to South Africans without paying a cent [24]. The data also shows that, in addition to the traditional sports channels that are accessible for free, the public broadcaster introduces over-the-top channels (OTT) to broadcast some of the international football matches, including the CAF Champions League and the German Bundesliga. This model gives the audience a variety of football events without disrupting other programmes on SABC TV. However, the broadcast exclusivity disrupts the public broadcaster's attempt to broadcast football matches free of charge. This is because the private entities, such as DSTV and Showmax, charge exorbitant fees to broadcast more football matches on their platforms. These companies invest over R300 million to secure the rights. The media economics theory tenet underscores the nuances of exclusivity and affordability. Most South African fans struggle to subscribe to these streaming service platforms due to high subscription costs as well as other socioeconomic factors. The report from Oh and Kang [22] is aligned with this finding. Also, the data show that previously, SABC used to grapple with the scheduling of other shows due to football matches; most of the time, the other shows would be rescheduled. Most of the show would be rescheduled to allow the broadcast of football matches, particularly during international competitions such as the Africa Cup of Nations and the FIFA World Cup. The emphasis was on ensuring that the SABC has a decent capacity of streaming services to ensure that the football competitions are not adversely affected by other competitions, such as the Cricket World Cup and the Olympics. The accessibility of a variety of sporting events on conventional broadcasting platforms is elucidated by Goldman and Hedlund [10]. It was also extrapolated during the data collection process that SABC is in the process of improving and uplifting its online streaming services to ensure that its audience has a variety of sporting events online to add to the existing SABC Sports channel. It was also highlighted that due to exorbitant Internet fees in South Africa, there is a decent number of football followers who still prefer to watch these matches on SABC 1, 2 & 3. The other aspect that was raised during the interviews is that

SABC is striving to prepare for the future by ensuring that it also taps into the online market, since most of the streaming services have a plethora of subscribers. The interview also highlighted that the SABC can use OTT and other streaming services to ensure that the audience has access to different events. Also, it opens an economic window to ensure that the public broadcaster generates profit through these streaming services.

Concerning SuperSport International, this international media entity can manage and ensure that most of its football channels are streamed online. Unlike the SABC, SuperSport football content is subscribed to for a fee. The audience should subscribe and pay for the streaming services. The theory highlights that the content creation is an exorbitant process. Thus, SuperSport secured the broadcasting rights of football matches, investing hundreds of millions in these deals. As such, they use the subscription model to cover the costs. This model ensures that they cover the production and other related aspects of football coverage. The results also demonstrate that SuperSport is a profit-based entity under the auspices of Multichoice. In addition, the interviewee stated that the streaming services are available at no extra charge to their customers who have subscribed to one of their traditional brochures. It was stated that to watch football matches on SuperSport, the subscribers are expected to pay a monthly fee of R250. Also, those who want full football packages with access to international leagues, including UEFA Champions League, English Premier League, Italian Serie A, and the Spanish La Liga, have to pay more than R500. Furthermore, the Betway Premiership is the flagship local football content that resonates with most South Africans. Similar to the SABC OTT offerings, SuperSport uses OTT channels to broadcast some matches, particularly when they are broadcast simultaneously. However, the exclusivity of their football content has its own limitations. The media economics theory demonstrates that the exclusivity aspect is susceptible to illegal procurement of the services. As such, those who cannot afford to pay subscription fees to access the different football leagues on SuperSport resort to illegal streaming services. Some of the illegal streaming services allow free access to the same matches that are exclusive to SuperSport television. This trend has adverse ramifications for the business of broadcasting rights. First, the illegal streaming services devalue the expensive football content that is secured at high costs by media companies. This disruptive factor erodes the broadcaster's business model of generating revenue through subscription fees. Second, the illicit streaming of exclusive football events discourages advertisers from partnering with the broadcasters to cover the production costs. It is common for big companies to foster partnerships with media companies and invest in the coverage of live football matches. This business deal is often disrupted by the illegal streaming of the same events that cost them a lot of money to cover. Third, this conundrum harms the relationship between football associations and the media companies. The football associa-

tions and leagues are strict about the distribution of their content to third parties without their consent. The leagues have different regulations concerning the coverage and distribution of their live matches. The illegal streaming services devalue the broadcasting rights business, including the sustainability of the media entities.

5.2. Illegal Streaming of Football Matches

According to a SuperSport employee, the illegal streaming of football matches has become a pervasive issue in the modern era of sports entertainment. With the rise of online platforms and social media, it has become increasingly easy for individuals to access and share copyrighted content without permission. This finding is aligned with the discovery made by Bailey [4]. This illegal activity not only harms the financial interests of football leagues, clubs, and broadcasters but also undermines the integrity of the sport itself. The participant added that one of the primary concerns with illegal streaming is the loss of revenue for legitimate broadcasters and rights holders.

[P1] At this moment and time, we can say we are the leading commercial broadcaster in South Africa. As DSTV, we honestly view or see this illegal video streaming of football matches as a major threat or a big problem to the sustainability of the broadcasting industry. Remember, we invested a million rands in acquiring the football broadcasting rights both locally and internationally. With this being said, these unauthorised video streaming broadcasters severely disrupt our financial model. We are not happy with the current system of broadcasting because when an individual or unlicensed OTT platforms stream football matches for free, it diminishes our subscriber base and also leads to revenue losses that directly affect our ability to continue purchasing the football broadcasting rights in the near future.

According to Grow and Shackelford [11], cybersecurity issues harm broadcasting entities. Football leagues and clubs invest significant resources into producing high-quality broadcasts, and the illegal streaming of matches deprives them of the revenue they need to sustain their operations. In the case of SuperSport, the Premier Soccer League benefits from selling the rights to this entity. Similar deals benefit CAF and the Ethiopian Premier League. Thus, illegal streaming of football matches can have a ripple effect throughout the entire football ecosystem, impacting everything from player salaries to stadium maintenance. The results show that illegal streaming often involves poor quality and unreliable streams, which can be frustrating for fans and damage the overall viewing experience. In contrast, legitimate broadcasters invest in high-quality production values, commentary, and analysis [26], which enhance the fan experience and provide a more immersive and engaging experience. As far as SABC is concerned, an issue with illegal streaming is the potential for piracy and copyright infringement. Football leagues and clubs have exclusive rights

to broadcast their matches, and illegal streaming violates these rights. This can lead to legal action, fines, and even criminal prosecution [12].

[P2] Let me give you a context, the OTT platforms, I think it erode the value of the national sport broadcasting. SABC, as the free-to-air public service broadcaster, relies heavily on advertising revenue and government funding. Normally, we face an increasing challenge when advertisers lose confidence in our audience reach due to unappreciated online alternatives. Not that I am attacking you, but some of you guys who interview us are also using these OTT platforms. As you can see, the unemployment rate in South Africa, this practice will eventually result in the SABC's financial strain and the potential loss of jobs for those working in the broadcasting sector with the SABC.

The data from the SABC highlights that illegal streaming can also facilitate other illicit activities, such as online fraud and malware distribution. Unscrupulous individuals may use illegal streaming sites to phish for personal information or distribute malware, putting fans' security and privacy at risk. According to the SABC participant, to combat illegal streaming, football leagues, clubs, and broadcasters must work together to implement effective anti-piracy measures. Similar aspects are underscored by the findings from a study conducted by Hutchins and Rowe [12]. This includes using advanced technology to detect and block illegal streams, as well as collaborating with law enforcement agencies to prosecute individuals and organisations involved in illegal streaming. SABC posits that football followers can play a crucial role in combating illegal streaming by choosing to support legitimate broadcasters and rights holders. By subscribing to official streaming services or purchasing tickets to attend matches in person, the followers can help ensure that football leagues and clubs receive the revenue they need to thrive. The illegal streaming of football matches is a serious issue that undermines the integrity of the sport and harms the financial interests of football leagues, clubs, and broadcasters. Fans, leagues, clubs, and broadcasters need to work together to combat this issue and promote a culture of respect for intellectual property and legitimate broadcasting rights. By doing so, we can ensure that football continues to thrive as a vibrant and exciting sport for generations to come.

5.3. Accessibility of Football Matches

During the three focus group sessions with the football followers, the accessibility issues dominated the discussions. First, some of the followers indicated that they cannot access the matches involving their favourite football clubs, as pointed out by Malatji et al [24]. The major hindrance is that most of the matches are accessible on pay-per-view platforms such as SuperSport International. Sometimes these matches are aired late at night, which does not allow them to be watched in the public viewing areas. In addition, some football followers stated that in some of the public viewing areas, people prefer

to watch European football leagues ahead of the South African premier league.

[P2] As a football fan in South Africa, I would mention football teams because you will judge me. I honestly find it really hard to keep up with matches through the official OTT platforms because they're just too expensive. These things of yours are expensive, and again, DSTV is not even asking if we still can afford it or what, no, it's wrong. You see, platforms like DSTV Stream and Showmax Pro really charge us high fees that most of us cannot afford, especially when we want to watch specific games or matches. Okay, let's stop generalising. For me, it feels unfair to pay for an entire package when we are only interested in a few big matches. You see, in South Africa, with the cost of living going up all the time, these prices are becoming impossible to justify. With me, I won't lie, will continue using these illegal platforms to watch my favourite football matches and also the Springbok, by the way. And for clarity, not because we want to, but because they let us watch the same matches for free that would otherwise cost hundreds of rands.

Sometimes they are forced to watch EPL and La Liga since most of the other followers prefer to watch these leagues at restaurants or malls. According to Oparaugo [23], group watching is common among Nigerian football audiences for various reasons, including socio-economic factors. One participant mentioned that it is convenient to watch some of the football at the mall because SABC broadcasts Ladies' football on Saturday afternoon. This participant also stated that SuperSport broadcasts most of the football matches on different channels, and those are accessible at the malls or local restaurants. The other participant stated that loadshedding and load reduction are affecting the accessibility of football matches. This assertion was corroborated by other group discussions. They indicated that sometimes they must travel long distances to watch football matches in areas unaffected by load-shedding and load reduction. Most participants stated that SuperSport subscriptions are expensive, particularly the ones with football offerings. The literature review highlighted that the accessibility of football matches is a major conundrum [22]. As such, they resort to public viewing of the football matches. One participant mentioned that he visits households with a bigger DSTV package to watch football matches. He also highlighted that SABC does not air all matches on SABC 1, 2, and 3. He added that SABC OTT channels are not accessible because internet access is also a problem due to affordability. Some football events, such as the Africa Cup of Nations, are not always accessible to all South Africans [23]. However, six participants across the three groups stated that SuperSport channels offer the best viewing experience. They indicated that SuperSport provided different viewing options, including the catch-up platform. One of them stated that the highlight package on SuperSport allows him to catch up with the late-night matches in the morning and is conveniently available online. The other DSTV subscriber posited that the catch-up

offerings are expensive. The other football followers mentioned that they hardly stream the matches online. One of them stated that they only stream the matches when they are in areas where internet access is free. They also added that the experience of streaming matches is not decent since the pictures are delayed and the sites keep buffering. They further aver that the streaming services need strong internet connectivity.

5.4. Subscription Affordability

The participants highlighted that the affordability of watching football matches is two-fold. First, they indicated that monthly subscriptions are expensive, and they cannot pay to watch football matches, as pointed out by Mpofu et al. [25]. They stated that the DSTV brochure with international football content is exorbitant. The other participant highlighted that it is expensive to watch Betway Premiership on SuperSport, hence he resorts to watching these matches at the tavern in his neighbourhood. Furthermore, some of the participants mentioned that SABC is the best platform to watch football free of charge. He said, unfortunately, SABC does not broadcast competitions such as the UEFA Champions League and most of the EPL matches.

[P4] Honestly, I find it is really hard to keep up with matches through the official OTT platforms because they're just too expensive. These things of yours are costly, and again, the DSTV is not even asking if we still can afford it or what, no, it's wrong. You see, platforms like DSTV Stream and Showmax Pro really charge us high fees that most of us cannot afford, especially when we want to watch specific games or matches. Okay, let's stop generalising. For me, it feels unfair to pay for an entire package when we are only interested in a few big matches. You see, in South Africa, with the cost of living going up all the time, these prices are becoming impossible to justify. With me, I won't lie, will continue using these illegal platforms to watch my favourite football matches and also the Springbok, by the way. And for clarity, not because we want to, but because they let us watch the same matches for free that would otherwise cost hundreds of rands.

Bailey [4] discovered that some sports consumers cannot afford to subscribe to streaming services. The ardent follower of European football agreed with this assertion. He said it is worrisome to watch one EPL match on SABC, and sometimes they do not broadcast matches involving big teams such as Manchester City, Chelsea, Manchester United, and Arsenal. They aver that they recently missed the UEFA Champions League encounter between Manchester City and Real Madrid because it was not available on SABC. One of them mentioned that he also checked SABC OTT, but the match was unavailable on this platform. The participants emphasised that it is unfortunate because most of them miss these matches due to affordability issues. The Orlando Pirates Football Club fanatic posited that all these matches should be available for free on SABC. The participants strongly disagree with the availability

of football matches on streaming services. They posited that one needs to subscribe to the television network to watch these matches online. According to Goldman and Hedlund [10], the accessibility of the streaming service has multifaceted challenges among consumers. Further, they said the major hiccup of streaming these matches online is that they are charged twice. First, they are charged for a subscription, and second, they pay for the internet service. One participant mentioned that it is cheap to watch the matches on Showmax, but the internet service is the problem. In addition, most participants stated that they can share the subscription credentials, but the problem is that these online subscriptions limit the number of devices. The same challenges were reported by Kadi [14]. In contrast, one football follower highlighted that streaming football on a smartphone does not provide a great experience. He purports that football is enjoyable when you share the experience with family and friends. This assertion was supported by other participants who added that watching football matches is part of socialisation, unfortunately, which cannot be experienced through mobile streaming. The last section concludes and recommends the critical aspects of illegal streaming services in the digital era.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The argument in this study postulates that the implications of illegal streaming of football matches on broadcasting rights are a multi-faceted conundrum. This multifaceted conundrum is reflected by several issues. Primarily, the sports broadcasting market is a key component of media economics. Globally, most media entities depend on sports broadcasting rights to generate revenue. Thus, this aspect demonstrates that broadcasting entities should ensure that any disruptive elements, as far as streaming of the broadcasting rights is concerned, are managed to ensure that the generation of profit is not adversely affected. In other words, this study points out that issues of illegal streaming are multipronged. The media economic theory highlights the issue of demand and supply, which is a cardinal pillar of media sustainability. Accordingly, the two broadcasting entities in South Africa acquire football broadcasting to generate profit, which is cardinal for financial sustainability. The same theory assumes that the media strategies target the football audience to exploit based on the demands of certain products to achieve their commercial goals. This means that the main argument in this study correlates with the main assumption of media economics theory. It is worth noting that some of the salient issues that affect the illegal streaming of football matches are well emphasised in the literature. According to some findings in the literature, most studies do not zoom in on the issues of illegal streaming in South Africa. However, illegal streaming of broadcasting services is a major hindrance to the economic viability of the broadcasting entities in South Africa. Against this background, this study recommends that the broadcasting entities should develop strategies to mitigate piracy, copyright, and illegal

streaming of football matches. Also, the broadcasting fraternity should use advanced technologies to block any attempts to illegally stream football matches. In addition, broadcasting entities should develop public relations strategies to educate the public about the ramifications of illegal streaming. This kind of information should be accessible. To some extent, broadcasting entities should partner with the football leagues to educate football followers about legitimate streaming services and their advantages. In the same process, the two sectors should explain the ripple effects of illegal streaming services. Furthermore, the study recommends that the broadcasting market should revise the pricing of its online football offerings. This is due to the unaffordability of the subscription among football followers in the South African market.

Theoretically, this study expounds on the critical facets of media economics, which expose tensions that exist due to media convergence. Thus, it is imperative to dissect these tensions to demonstrate the impact of new technologies on traditional media operations. The complexities of media economics are challenged by the emergence of new media, particularly digital media. This is reflected in how media audiences adopt new platforms to access the same content that was exclusive on certain traditional media platforms. The other tension is that media entities are no longer competing with the other role players in the mainstream media. As such, these new patterns of media content consumption erode the main streams of revenue for the traditional media entities. In other words, the hegemony and gatekeeping attributes of the traditional media are disrupted by independent individuals who use digital media to distribute content. This suggests that mainstream media should consider a new model to generate revenue. This is because the traditional way of content creation and distribution is susceptible to illegal streaming. As a result, their market is no longer offering exclusive content that attracted a large audience in the form of subscribers. Further, the same audience is exposed to new platforms that offer the same services at an affordable rate. However, some football followers resort to illegal streaming services because such platforms offer free access to football content. It is noteworthy that some of the individuals who disrupt and redistribute the same content sell it at an affordable rate. This, therefore, suggests that the media economics theory is outside the nuances of the new trends of content distribution. These trends demonstrate that new tenets of media economics should be integrated to acknowledge components of the over-the-top media market. The business model of traditional media entities needs a new lens to dissect the nexus and nuances of the streaming market. These trends eliminate the monopoly of the media content and jurisdiction that dominated the media market for many decades. The new lens should expound on the functions of different role players in the media market outside strict regulations. However, the policies of the future forms of media should protect the rights of the rights holders of sporting events, including football. The policies should be revised to eliminate ex-

clusivity and monopoly of the broadcasting rights of the football matches. Also, the plurality of the media should be at the centre of the new policies to ensure that different role players play an integral role in the multifaceted media market. In other words, the traditional model of media sustainability and streaming services can co-exist in the revised media market. Nonetheless, this needs the cooperation of various role players to ensure that all facets of digital media are regulated in the interest of the audience. The current trend of illegal streaming and other OTT mechanisms shows that the new regulatory framework should be multifaceted to ensure all role players thrive in the digital media market. Future studies should zoom in on the extrapolation of streaming services and their impact on traditional media models. Additionally, these studies should investigate the impact of OTT services on content consumption patterns. Otherwise, multiple concepts should be problematised in the online streaming market.

Abbreviations

CAF	Confederation of African Football
DSTV	Digital Satellite Television
EPL	English Premier League
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
OTT	Over-the-top
ESPN	Entertainment and Sports Programming Network
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
PSL	Premier Soccer League
TREC	Turfloop Research Ethics Committee
TV	Television
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations

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