Racism in Football & Digital Media Amplification

A CRITICAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

Why This Issue Matters

- Football is a global cultural system shaped by identity and community
- Social media amplifies racist incidents in seconds
- Digital racism reflects deeper cultural narratives
- Harari: fan “tribes” form around shared stories, as a result, online conflict intensifies
- Understanding racism requires examining digital culture, not just sport

Case Study: Saka, Sancho & Rashford (EURO 2020)

- Thousands of racist posts appeared within minutes of the final's consclusion
- Abuse included slurs, monkey emojis, and edited images
- Platforms failed to remove most hateful content quickly
- Triggered national debate on racism, football culture, and platform accountability
- Players responded publicly, using their platforms to reclaim the narrative

Case Study: Vinícius Júnior

- Faces repeated racist chants in stadiums and targeted online as well.
- Racist memes and edited videos spread widely on Twitter/X and TikTok
- Incident forced La Liga, FIFA, and governments to respond
- Hashtag campaigns showed both global solidarity and persistent hostility
- Demonstrates the merging of on-field racism with digital amplification

Spreadability (Jenkins)

- Racism circulates because users share, react, and comment
- Algorithms prioritize emotional or controversial content boosts hate
- “Spreadable media” explains how messages travel through networks, not broadcasters
- Outrage posts generate engagement, platforms unintentionally reward them
- Racist content becomes part of the wider conversation, not isolated incidents

Participatory Culture

- Fans actively create content: memes, edits, commentary, hashtags
- Participation can mobilize support or encourage harassment
- Digital fandom blurs line between joking, banter, and hate
- Online micro-communities normalize racist stereotypes as “banter”
- Shows how participation is both empowering and dangerous

Digital Citizenship & Social Justice (Costanza-Chock)

Digital spaces require active, responsible participation

Costanza-Chock: platforms are not neutral → inequality is built into design

Marginalized groups (e.g., Black footballers) face disproportionate harm

Fans' actions contribute to digital cultures of justice or harm

Digital citizenship = accountability, responsible sharing, anti-racist engagement

Individuals, Citizens, Consumers

Individuals:

- Players face psychological harm, threats, and global scrutiny

Citizens:

- Online racism sparks political debates about race, identity, and justice
- Hashtags function as digital activism (#NoRoomForRacism)

Consumers:

- Fans pressure clubs, sponsors, and leagues to respond
- Public backlash affects corporate reputation and brand loyalty

Implications for Media & Communication Practice

- Platforms must improve moderation and accountability systems
- Journalists must avoid framing players with racist stereotypes
- Clubs need transparent anti-racism policies + public responses
- Social media managers must monitor abusive trends in real time
- Highlights need for ethical digital citizenship among fans

Conclusion

- Racism spreads through tribal identity + digital circulation
- Harari: tribal behavior + myth-making drive conflict
- Jenkins: spreadability accelerates harmful and helpful narratives
- Costanza-Chock: digital citizenship + platform design shape justice
- Combating racism requires cultural, technological, and structural action

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