

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Department of Sociology

Shaping a "Glocal" Premier League in Distinct Markets: Localisation and Hybridisation

A dissertation in fulfilment of:

MPhil in Sociology (The Sociology of Media and Culture)

At the University of Cambridge

Anonymised Number: 000129

Word Count: 19538 words, excluding references

04 June 2024

Acknowledgement

If my current self were to present this completed dissertation to the person that freshly arrived in Cambridge in October of 2023, he would have thought of it as some sort of wind-up: there is no discernible possibility that this dissertation could be my work in 8 months' time. Yet here we are.

I do not like to dabble in cliché excessively, but the striking likeness of my learning journey with the phrase "blood, sweat and tears" is too good for me to refrain from its usage. It has been like the FA Cup Final with 120 minutes played, the Fourth Official holding up 10 minutes of additional time for good measure. All along this Final, you are constantly aware of the jeopardy of the situation: that you'll fall short of giving the best account of yourself, and that all your efforts could have been for nothing—that last minute opposition goal at the death driving a dagger into your heart.

To run this analogy into the ground, will I end up lifting that trophy? I don't know. It is not for me to decide. But whatever ends up happening, I could leave the playing field happy that I have done the best I can. After all, maximum effort is the only guarantee you have in the uncertainties of football, Cambridge, and life. That and the people you embark on this journey with. I would like to thank my manager in this FA Cup Final—my supervisor—for all the time he spent guiding me and challenging me throughout the research processes of this dissertation. I have been unruly to coach, which makes me appreciate him more. I would like to thank my teammates—the MPhil cohort—for being there for me when I need them, especially Andrew, with whom I shared programme and college membership. It is a pity that his American nature would probably compel him to call this entire analogy under the ludicrous name "soccer". I would also like to thank those watching me take the playing field in the stadium as invested spectators, who might not be expert in what I do, yet stick with me through thick and thin. The comradery at Hughes Hall gave me a lift on many an occasion. I would specifically like to thank my good friend Ben, although he supports Liverpool, who has been a lighthouse in academic discipline and work rate.

This is not the end of my research journey. No matter the result in this particular game, to quote playing legend and subpar manager Steven Gerrard: "we go again".

Abstract

The modern English Premier League (EPL) has become an institution with global reach. EPL has achieved substantive global success since its inception in 1992, bringing significant revenue from overseas markets. Given EPL's worldwide market footprint, this dissertation focuses on the processes of EPL's global market development, primarily in the distant locales of South Korea and China. These processes will be situated in the existing sociological framework on the nature of neoliberal globalisation/glocalisation as a "two way flow" model between the global and the local. This dissertation identifies that existing literature on football globalisation possesses significant distinctions in patterns and analyses pre and post 2010. It will demonstrate these thematic differences by organising existing literature into two waves of globalisation/glocalisation. Though existing literature has identified glocalisation as the primary framework of understanding contemporary EPL overseas market development, the actual mechanisms of the market encounter and "captation" processes remain unestablished and unconsolidated. This dissertation selects prominent case studies on English, Chinese, and Korean social media that demonstrate these mechanisms. It collects social media discourses and uses multimodal discourse analysis to concretise the mechanisms of EPL glocalisation. This dissertation argues that EPL clubs use social media localisation strategies through virtuality, products and values to cater to local market preferences in market encounters. It further argues that EPL clubs hybridise themselves with local spaces, personalities and symbolisms to facilitate market "captation". These strategies of glocalisation bring with them new implications for the status of local UK supporters and the images of EPL clubs. These new findings result in the proposition of a further specified model of neoliberal glocalisation with layered, detailed dynamics between market actors, and contribute towards an up-to-date sociological understanding of the globally expansive contemporary EPL and neoliberal glocalisation.

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1. Introduction

A modern English Premier League (EPL) observer would undoubtedly highlight its global nature. Its clubs employ people from diverse nationalities, with players from roughly 70 nations taking the pitch each week (Elliott, 2017; EPL, 2024a; Penn & Penn, 2020). It is broadcast in 188 countries to millions of households, bringing in billions for EPL clubs through license fees and commercial income. Moreover, observing the English stadiums in EPL broadcasting, one would see supporters from nationalities as diverse as Korea, Ghana and the US. Thanks to its global propagation, the EPL has become a commercial giant, contributing an estimated £8 billion to the UK economy (EPL, 2024b). Such global reach and success, however, do not automatically come to fruition. In order to reap the benefits of global support and global market, EPL clubs reach out to distant supporters and convert them into "concrete" supporters that contribute to club income financially. As I will set out in this dissertation, these processes of market development and intensification, understood as an expression of neoliberal globalisation/"glocalisation", transform diverse local preferences and communities into diverse markets with distinctive structures, patterns and impacts.

There have been significant works outlining the sociological understanding of EPL's market expansion. Scholars like Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) have related the concept of neoliberal globalisation with the behaviours and strategies of market intensification conducted by EPL clubs, arguing for the recognition of local market agency through the framework of "glocalisation". However, the applicability of "glocalisation" in a concrete sociological analysis of contemporary EPL remains untested. Its sociological contributions are also unestablished. Hence, this dissertation contributes to this sociological theory of "glocalisation" in football by identifying and documenting EPL clubs' strategies of social media localisation and local football hybridisation. These discoveries support the validity of employing a sociology of globalisation approach, specifically "glocalisation", towards understanding EPL market expansion. This dissertation further identified a new thematic pattern of existing literature, which indicates a distinct "two wave" process of EPL globalisation. This dissertation will argue that sociological literature documenting EPL from 1992 to 2010 demonstrates the primacy of homogenisation, and those after 2010 demonstrate the rising importance of local preferences and heterogenisation. Hence, this dissertation will make this distinction when approaching current literature and justify its theoretical structuring by identifying tendencies of market encounter and "captation", unexamined previously, where market agents interact and customers are captured.

Beyond football "glocalisation", a significant body of work on EPL in relation to social media also exists: EPL clubs now possess large and diverse virtual followings. However, there has yet to be a concrete connection between literature that considers EPL clubs as manifestations of macro economic neoliberal "glocalisation" and those that consider the micro interactions between clubs and their virtual supports on social media. Therefore, the contribution of this dissertation would be the bridging of this theoretical gap by uniting the macro and the micro approaches to the EPL into real-world dynamics of interactions and contentions between the "globality" of the EPL clubs and the "locality" of various distant markets. The processes of market materialisation and intensification would illuminate the influences and implications of neoliberalism "glocalisation" in EPL football marketisation, and develop the sociological understanding of football in adherence to the new patterns of support and engagement observed from the EPL today.

This dissertation conducted a systematic review of EPL clubs' market materialisation and intensification strategies to achieve market encounter and "captation" through EPL clubs' social media profiles and official websites, with most empirical cases coming from South Korea and China. It collected 367 EPL club social media posts and 36 club website articles on both Western and local social media platforms. It then employed multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to identify the central themes and dynamics of EPL neoliberal "glocalisation". This dissertation has three key findings. First, EPL clubs accommodate local preferences on social media by catering to host languages, internet platforms, product needs and values. Second, it identifies dynamics of hybridisation of football discourses with local spaces, personalities and symbolisms as EPL clubs attempt to materialise and intensify their virtual supports. Finally, this dissertation has found significant implications and effects of such "glocalised" market development strategies, primarily on the status of local UK supporters and the images of EPL clubs. These new developments require a more nuanced framework of EPL neoliberal "glocalisation", which this dissertation will provide in the discussion section.

The dissertation is structured as follows: the first chapter will establish the theoretical basis of this dissertation through a discussion of the sociological concept of neoliberal globalisation and "glocalisation", as well as the analytical tools of marketisation, before going over the historical patterns of EPL's global expansion to establish the research gaps and this dissertation's research questions. The second chapter will discuss case selection, data collection, and multimodal discourse analysis. The third chapter will be divided into three

subchapters, each answering one of this dissertation's research questions: market encounters through social media localisation, market "captation" through hybridisation, and the implications of such neoliberal "glocalisation" strategies on UK supporters and club image. The fourth chapter will discuss these findings with existing literature, and propose a new neoliberal "glocalisation" model. The final chapter will provide an overview of the major arguments of this dissertation, discuss its limitations, and suggest future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Neoliberal Globalisation and Diverse Markets

To understand the global behemoth that is today's EPL, one needs to identify a starting point for its rapid expansion and globalisation: the reach of the modern Premier League today results from distinct practices wedded with neoliberal globalisation and its pursuit of profits. The phrase neoliberal globalisation has two constituent parts: the principle of neoliberalism and the propagation of such principles via globalisation. Neoliberalism is underlined by an attitude towards the accumulation of capital and material wealth in social processes as an expression of modern capitalism (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Kim, 2023). In terms of its social impact, Appadurai (2016) argued that neoliberalism promises a combination of the egalitarian, progressive social impetuous of liberalism with functions of advanced capitalism through market competition. Neoliberalism operates under the school of thought that human well-being can be best advanced by opening up more spheres of social life to the mechanisms of market competition (Kim, 2023; Ortner, 2016), with some scholars critiquing the actual effects of neoliberalism as exarcerbating inequality (Appadurai, 2016; Ortner, 2016). The exercise of neoliberalism is discursive, since the channelling of competitional forces requires engagement with concrete semiotic meanings that allow sense-making of social reality (Peck, 2013). The EPL emerged from the specific expression of neoliberalism in the UK, where market reforms placed football supporters' needs, preferences and experiences as market participants and consumers front and centre (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016). Such an emphasis on growth and expansion in the UK through catering to consumer preferences, and the resultant behaviours of EPL clubs as market agents sensitive to consumer demands, would express themselves through EPL's global market development. Bringing in the concept of globalisation, neoliberal globalisation is underlined by neoliberalism's propagation from the West towards other locales, and its variance in distinct markets. Neoliberal globalisation takes many forms due to the vast distinctions in local conditions, creating hybrid forms of local neoliberal markets (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Peck, 2013). The importance of these theorised influences of neoliberal globalisation in developing markets, catering to market preferences and contributing to progressive social change will become pertinent in this dissertation.

Moreover, through these discussions on the nature of neoliberal globalisation, one could observe the essence of neoliberal globalisation as that of market formation or

marketisation—establishing new market structures where commodities could be defined, prices could be set, and exchanges could take place. Thus, sociological literature on marketisation could provide important analytical tools. The primary concept relevant to EPL's global market development is that of market encounter and its subsequent "captation" of potential customers (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010). Market encounter is the process through which market agents interact with each other to exercise their actual participation in the market. Market encounters are theorised to be mediated through the specific set-ups, processes and capacities of the mediator devices, like a physical bazaar or an online shop (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010). Within such arrangements of market encounters, captation is theorised as the transformation of potential customers into concrete market participants, where marketisation agents "attract to oneself, or retain those one has attracted" (Cochoy, 2007, p. 214). It requires specific knowhows of the target customers of captation, and the employment of specific techniques to capture those customers (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010; Cochoy, 2007). These analytical tools of market encounter and captation would provide sociological grounding for the analysis of this dissertation.

Having established the neoliberal and market-forming nature of EPL, this dissertation will delve further into the sociological discussions surrounding globalisation/"glocalisation". Though the emergence of globalisation has long been a subject of study, Robertson (1992) is arguably the first sociologist to underline the distinctness of its dynamics and phenomena by coining the term globalisation. He argued that global forces and institutions constitute human perceptions to provide a basis for economic and social structure. Globalisation brings increased interconnectedness and, thus, interactions between local differences. It creates a set of globally dominant institutions that construct homogenous tendencies while simultaneously providing new opportunities and building blocks for each local community to enact distinct meanings and patterns (Robertson, 1992). Sociologically, these two processes—convergence and divergence—are understood to be simultaneously at work, with differing emphasis on the primacy of homogenisation and localisation (Ritzer, 2016; Watson, 2006). Ritzer (2016) argued that globalisation could homogenise and standardise cultural and economic forms. He underlined the imperative of *growth*, embodying the interests of dominant nations, institutions and corporations, through the interactions between the global and the local. This growth-based globalisation, or "grobalisation", produces social forms devoid of actual meaning and distinction, as they are defined and controlled by external entities through

uniform standards, producing “nonplace”, “nonservice”, and “nonthing” (Ritzer, 2016, p. 196).

The concept of glocalisation is proposed as a counter process of the homogenising influence of globalisation. Glocalisation demonstrates individual and social groups’ agency and flexibility when navigating the global structure (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). Through adaptations and innovations, the global market is transformed into distinct local forms and practices rather than uniform, permeable structures of grobalisation, which drives the subsequent heterogeneous creation of social forms and meanings with substantive, local meaning beyond the agendas of control by dominant global institutions and interests. These heterogenising local patterns are also recognised by Ritzer (2016), who accounts for the potentiality of glocalisation theoretically by delineating the processes of its generation: in a world where global homogenisation is omnipresent, the maintenance of the distinctiveness of the local can only be done through navigating global structures to produce glocal social forms. Robertson’s (1992) conception of hybridisation further demonstrates this emerging dynamic. Glocalisation is conceived by Robertson to be the encounters of previously separate cultures and their combinations into new structures. This formation of “hybrid culture” indicates the agency of the local in shaping and expressing agencies in a globalised society. The importance of employing the lens of glocalisation to the global EPL football market lies in its delineation of the “glocal” as a “two way flow” model, theorised by both Ritzer and Robertson, that enables an analysis of the dynamics and motions integral to the empirical formulation of distinct market practices and structures (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). Through a review of existing literature, these dynamics of glocalisation in football, where the global and the local act in tandem to create diverse market forms, will provide the groundwork for a further specification of the dynamics of neoliberal glocalisation through the empirical observation made in this dissertation. Furthermore, this dissertation has discovered theoretical and empirical distinctions in thematic patterns in existing literature on EPL globalisation/glocalisation pre-2010 and post-2010, not previously identified in the field of study. Hence, the rest of the literature review will be organised in this dissertation’s identified “two waves” of academic understanding of EPL to illuminate the differing patterns of EPL’s expansion in the sections below.

2.2 The First Wave of Premier League *Globalisation*: 1992-2010

The English Premier League was established in 1992, marking the transformation of EPL from a predominantly domestic phenomenon to a new era of global expansion, bringing the league closer to the orbits of finance and media. EPL is an independent entity regulated by its clubs. This relative independence from external regulation enabled the emergence of new modalities of ownership that treat clubs as legitimate mediums for profit generation (Millward, 2013), corresponding with the wider opening up of social life to market competition in the UK (Elliott, 2017). During this period, the EPL clubs experienced an extensive neoliberal transformation towards market competition and privatisation with the introduction of modern football executives who run EPL clubs as businesses rather than sports teams (Elliott, 2017). These new directors increasingly leveraged sporting success for profit generation (King, 2002; Millward, 2013) and market expansion (Elliott, 2017; King, 2013). As such, the first wave of EPL's globalisation, prior to the expansion of social media in the 2010s, demonstrated primarily homogenising globalisation, where clubs focused on leveraging their sporting merits per se (Carmichael et al., 2011; Hill & Vincent, 2006; Hinson et al., 2020; Lee, 2022). This first wave EPL expansion was dominated by established sporting powerhouses like Manchester United (Man Utd) and Arsenal (Hill & Vincent, 2006; Lee, 2022). During this first wave, the general principle of market expansion was exportation—the wholesale introduction of football as an established western set of products into overseas markets through TV broadcasting and foreign player purchases, which will be detailed below.

2.2.1 TV Broadcasting

Historically, EPL has been mediated by radio and television to give virtual audiences a sense of "being there" (Claussen, 2007; Dixon, 2012). The establishment of EPL is underlined by a drastic expansion of TV broadcasting, with TV revenue steadily solidifying its status as the primary income avenue for EPL clubs, reaching £560 million per year in the UK in 2010 (Connolly, 2018; Koutroumanides et al., 2019). This exponential growth of TV revenue was also pronounced beyond the UK in EPL's bourgeoning overseas markets (Bishop et al., 2021; Evens et al., 2013; Koutroumanides et al., 2019). By the end of 2010, the EPL has achieved near-universal global broadcasting, with an estimated global audience of 450 million (Koutroumanides et al., 2019). With the rise of EPL's reach and revenue beyond the UK, the League saw new opportunities for market encounters and captation. The

establishment of a global market for EPL TV rights provided a constant supply of TV broadcasts and media coverage (Claussen, 2007; Kuzma et al., 2014) that enabled clubs' captation of distant supporters (Hinson et al., 2020). However, such sustained exposure remained the remits of a few clubs: those with preexisting sporting prowess to compete at the top echelon of EPL—Man Utd, Liverpool and Arsenal—achieved dominance in these emerging markets (Carmichael et al., 2011; Harris, 2012). Just like neoliberal globalisation at large, the expansion of the EPL TV market resulted in the further entrenchment of existing monopolies in the new arena of TV and the new locales of overseas consumers (Hill & Vincent, 2006; Lee, 2022).

2.2.2 Strategic Player Purchases

The globalisation of the EPL market is accompanied by another profound shift in the EPL. Its players and staff transformed from predominantly English to multi-national (Penn & Penn, 2020). On EPL's opening fixtures in 1992, only 13 players were foreign (Bate, 2022). By 2010, foreign players amounted for 60% of EPL's player base (Jackson, 2010). This unprecedented influx of foreign talent provided the clubs with a new resource towards the captation of overseas potential consumers: by purchasing players with specific nationalities, EPL clubs were presented with a conduit of entry into distant, previously hard-to-break-in markets.

Therefore, EPL clubs considered their player recruitments more strategically in their decision-making through considering both their signings' sporting merits and commercial potential (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Hill & Vincent, 2006). The most pertinent examples of this dynamic came from China and South Korea: countries without established football cultures and thus difficult to break in. For instance, Man Utd's signings of Chinese player Dong Fangzhuo and Korean player Park Ji-sung resulted in the club achieving significant market captation in China and Korea in revenue and market share, demonstrating the potentials and the affordances of utilising strategic player purchases for market development (Bang & Amara, 2014; Heffernan, 2019; Kay, 2019; Pilger, 2019). However, the effectiveness of this strategy is considered limited. The lack of actual sporting success experienced by the East Asian players put an air of cynicism onto the target market (Kim, 2023; Qing & Yang, 2022). When players do succeed, like Park Ji-sung did at Man Utd, the impacts were not as long-lasting as business executives had hoped—Man Utd's influence in South Korea was quickly overshadowed by that of Tottenham Hotspur (Tottenham/Spurs for

short) (Barlow, 2022; Fordham, 2022). Further, the utilisation of such players was limited to existing dominant clubs (Hill & Vincent, 2006; Lee, 2022). However, this inroad of marketisation and football globalisation does indicate a trend that will become more pronounced in the second wave of globalisation: the emergence of nation-specific market niches and divergent local football market forms beyond the predominantly homogenising influences EPL had on distant markets so far.

2.2.3 Impact of the First Wave

The sections above outlined the primary methods of market globalisation conducted by EPL clubs during the first wave of globalisation, with its predominantly homogenising influences adhering to Ritzer's "grobalisation" thesis. This growth of the EPL into global markets also alters the structures and organisations of the EPL. TV licensing has injected unprecedented income into the League (Ireland et al., 2022). Resultantly, the competitive balance of the EPL became increasingly associated with sustained spending in the transfer market to acquire better players for sporting results (Iorwerth et al., 2017). In turn, sporting results contributed to the allure of consumption and market expansion, increasing clubs' profit-generating potential (Hill & Vincent, 2006; Hinson et al., 2020). Powerhouses like Man Utd, Liverpool and Arsenal, behaving as football clubs and transnational corporations in market competition, became monopolies in the sporting and commercial sense, dominating the global football market (Carmichael et al., 2011; Lee, 2022). In other words, the transformations of the economic structures of the EPL have: "made football beholden to the commercial drivers of neoliberal market economics" (Haynes, cited in Cashmore & Dixon, 2016, p. 124).

Despite this complete transformation of the competitional structures of the EPL that reinforced the dominance of select clubs, such patterns were short-lived. Through existing literature, this dissertation identifies a distinct second wave of glocalisation from 2010 on, with the emergence of a new competitive environment that saw the rise of disruptor clubs, re-regulation such as the Financial Fair Play and new marketisation capacities brought by social media.

2.3 The Second Wave of Premier League *Glocalisation*: 2010 on

2.3.1 EPL's New Challenges

The first decade of the 21st century marks a new level of foreign investment in the Premier League, as struggling clubs were acquired by wealthy foreign benefactors that propelled them to unprecedented sporting heights. Roman Abramovich, a Russian oligarch, purchased Chelsea in 2003, immediately investing more than £100 million on transfers in his first season as owner (BBC, 2004), enabling Chelsea to compete with the dominant powers of the EPL. Chelsea shattered Man Utd and Arsenal's grip on the EPL title, winning it three times by 2010. This relationship between astronomical investment and success was further demonstrated by Sheikh Mansour of the UAE Royal Family, who took over Manchester City (Man City) in 2008. Since the UAE takeover, Man City has invested north of £1 billion on transfers, dwarfing any other EPL club (Richter, 2023). It won its first EPL title in 2012 and plenty ever since. Over a short period, the financial-cum-sporting advantages of the "old guard" of Man Utd, Liverpool and Arsenal were washed away by the stupendous financial capabilities of the "new rich": with the old guards having one League title between them since 2010[1].

Such investment sprees by disruptor clubs triggered regulation changes within the football industry. Financial Fair Play (FFP) was introduced by UEFA in 2010 to curtail excessive spending (Francois et al., 2022). FFP entails a break-even requirement that links a club's allowed spending directly with its revenues generated (UEFA, 2015): EPL clubs must generate income "organically" beyond relying on owner investments (Alabi & Urquhart, 2024). This gave new impetus for EPL clubs to persist with expanding the global EPL market, as clubs' domestic market potentials are fairly limited due to long-standing geographic and cultural connections (Carmichael et al., 2011; Elliott, 2017; King, 2002). Resultantly, clubs have to look beyond the UK to increase their money-pull and competitive advantage (Elliott, 2017; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). This strategic need for market expansion was timely, as new affordances and capacities for marketisation had taken shape by 2010 with the proliferation of social media. It is under such contexts that the second wave of EPL globalisation took place as neoliberal glocalisation, introducing the emergence of

[1] Liverpool in 2019

nation-specific marketisation strategies aimed at developing market niches of football support and consumption (Choi & Lee, 2020; Riordan, 2007; Williams & Peach, 2018).

2.3.2 TV Broadcasting

From 2010 on, TV license fees continued to witness monumental growth. Domestic TV revenue tripled in the 2010s, before plateauing at roughly £1.6 billion per season (Connolly, 2018; MacInnes, 2023; Rojas, 2021). Hence, revenue growth from TV licensing has to come from overseas markets. In 2010, the EPL received roughly £300 million per year from overseas broadcasting rights (Koutroumanides et al., 2019). This figure has since ballooned fivefold, surpassing domestic TV revenue by 2022 (Elliott, 2017; Geey, 2022; Llewellyn, 2024). This growth of overseas TV revenue is an effect of the unprecedented width and depth of EPL's consumption. As TV revenue became the most important income source through the continued "marketisation of broadcasting" (Elliott, 2017, p. 72; Evens et al., 2013), the increasing weight of the overseas market resulted in the emergence of new strategic focuses of EPL clubs on expanding their presences overseas.

2.3.3 Strategic Player Purchases

If the previous first wave of EPL globalisation underlined a mentality of tactical utilisation, where the commercial influences of specific foreign players overrode their relatively limited sporting abilities, the picture after 2010 could not have been more different. A select few hard-to-break-in markets, like Korea and Japan, started producing world-class players, who rose to national prominence due to their exploits in the EPL (Bang & Amara, 2014; Kim, 2023). As of 2024, 4 Japanese and 3 South Koreans ply their trade in the EPL, featuring for top teams like Arsenal, Liverpool and Spurs (Soccerway, 2024). This increased footprint of foreign players in the EPL, especially those from Asia, reinforces and redefines the strategic marketisation through EPL players. It reinforces the logic of market expansion in the EPL, providing fresh demonstrations of sporting merits towards the captation of distant markets (Kim, 2023). On the other hand, it also redefines the possibilities and structures of globalisation as glocalisation (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). The wider availability of EPL foreign players means that the monopoly on distant markets, previously held by dominant EPL clubs, is undermined. Clubs can no longer expect a healthy increase in market share based purely on having a player of a particular nationality, but must try to actively demonstrate their connections with the country in question (Hinson et al., 2020). The emergence of global superstars hailing from historically non-dominant football nations as

club and national heroes, like Son Heung-min at Spurs and Salah at Liverpool, means that EPL clubs could connect with distant supporters through the shared unique importance of these superstars, enabling EPL clubs to cultivate nation-specific market niches in ways not possible before. However, while recognising this potential development, current literature has yet to establish the specific mechanism of such player-based marketisation through pertinent examples. This dissertation will attempt to close this knowledge gap.

Despite this significant gap in understanding, current literature indicates a shift in EPL's global expansion as glocalisation, using fundamentally localised assets based on the specific resources clubs possess to develop specific local markets. The expansion of EPL shifted away from the West-to-East impetus of the first wave. Instead, it has enabled a convergence of club actions and local preferences in orchestrating diverse market forms. Such dynamics correlate more closely to the sociological understanding of glocalisation as opposed to globalisation (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). The possibilities of glocalisation in the second wave of EPL market expansion are also further facilitated by the new infrastructures of social media available at the clubs' disposal, which will be detailed below.

2.3.4 Social Media and Beyond

The emergence of new communication technologies of the Internet and social media added an extra dimension of engagement and participation (Gibbons & Dixon, 2010). Beyond the passivity of radio and television audiences, the internet and social media enabled a new sense of supporter ownership as they can now interact with fellow supporters and the clubs virtually beyond geographic restrictions through social media (Gibbons & Dixon, 2010; Gong, 2015; Han, 2020; Hinson et al., 2020; Kuzma et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2014). Clubs can now sustain larger and more diverse overseas fandoms through these increased opportunities for market encounter and captation without being subjected to the patterns of limited exposures brought about by big club dominance in TV broadcasting.

EPL clubs began tapping into the potential of this new infrastructure intensely since 2010. In 2014, the average subscriber count for the 20 Premier League teams on YouTube was less than 50,000 (Kuzma et al., 2014), with Man Utd and Arsenal not even having YouTube accounts. By 2020, the average was over 1.2 million subscribers per team, with every EPL team having a YouTube presence (Han, 2020). On Twitter (now known as X), the clubs averaged 900,000 followers in 2014. By 2022, the average follower figure stood at over

6.5 million per club, with five of the League's "Big Six"[2] pulling in more than 10 million followers (Statista, 2022).

Within this new pattern of growth due to social media, diverse strategies were employed by EPL clubs to utilise their respective advantages. Social media provided unprecedented access to myriad foreign markets through increased conduits of product distribution and engagement (Penn & Penn, 2020; Solberg & Turner, 2010) as the facilitation of market encounters. Despite the shadows of dominance from the big clubs, with Man Utd, Liverpool and Arsenal leading the pack, followed closely by relatively new market forces like Chelsea, Man City and Spurs, social media enabled more EPL clubs to engage in the competition of marketisation. As a result, product availability, supporter captation, and market expansion became more potent for a greater number of clubs (Han, 2020; Iorwerth et al., 2017; McCarthy et al., 2014).

The inception of social media has also changed the fundamental manners of market development, as market expansion strategies can now be specifically catered to groups of supporters with differing habits and preferences online without these accommodations affecting other target markets (Hill & Vincent, 2006; McCarthy et al., 2014). These accommodations are based on the existing structures of sports consumption (Dixon, 2012; Elliott, 2017; Hill & Vincent, 2006) or the differing symbolic meanings attached to football (Bang & Amara, 2014; Kim, 2023). The various contexts and social organisations of supporters' home societies result in the transposition of football into discourses of class (Gong, 2015), gender (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016), race (Bang & Amara, 2014; Cashmore & Dixon, 2016; Kim, 2023) and social networks (Lee, 2022). These virtual interactions between EPL clubs and the specificities of the market in question informed a new era of EPL glocalisation strategies, where the principles of increased personalisation and localisation in EPL access and market cultivation inform all avenues of market development including social media. In turn, the practices of distant fandom have been solidified as standalone entities of market. They are steeped and rooted in national/regional values and habits (Bang & Amara, 2014; Gong, 2015; Kim, 2023), structured through the socio-cultural repertoires of their home societies (Gong, 2015; Lee, 2022), and constitutive of plethora local, national and transnational identities (Gong, 2015; Hinson et al., 2020; Kim, 2023; Tapp, 2004). Under these fandoms, new forms of support emerged, like virtual engagements (Kuzma et al., 2014)

[2] Arsenal, Liverpool, Man Utd, Man City, Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur

and fan tourism (Tobar & Ramshaw, 2022). These "transnational fandoms" (Lee, 2022, p. 4), hence, indicate the empirical existence of a new pattern of EPL glocalisation, as the EPL now contains the mutual existence of global homogenising pressure and local adaptations and innovations (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009). This establishment of football as the glocal incorporated various components of homogenisation and heterogenisation tendencies that coexist in glocalisation, or "a duality of glocality" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009, chap. 2, p. 3).

From a review of existing literature, one could identify the themes and patterns of EPL's global expansion. Throughout the two waves of EPL expansion and marketisation, the actions and behaviours of the EPL clubs were consistently contextualised by an opening up of the sphere of football to the increased primacy of market competition in determining teams' prospects, and the facilitation of growth within the EPL market. EPL clubs were attracted to the financial-cum-sporting "carrot" of participation in global marketisation by generating new revenue sources towards increased sporting competitiveness. Simultaneously, EPL clubs were beholden to the "stick" of the re-regulation of EPL competition through FFP rules that mandated a constant necessity for EPL clubs' participation in new market development, lest they fall behind their competitors in the ever-increasingly expensive arms race that is Premier League football. Given this double-bind of risk and reward, the Premier League clubs employed their full array of resources to expand overseas markets. Existing literature indicates that these marketisation resources have witnessed significant transformation. TV revenue has become more lucrative than ever. The League's foreign players have a more potent influence on their home markets. The rise of social media gave EPL clubs a new, powerful way to orchestrate market encounters and exercise strategies towards captation. These extensive changes in the mechanisms EPL clubs could utilise towards marketisation in distant locales informed a shift in the understanding of the nature of EPL's global expansion from a framework of homogenising globalisation towards one of heterogenising glocalisation. Given the consistent manifestation of competition, market participation, and growth in the processes of EPL's two-wave global expansion, EPL should be considered a pertinent case study of neoliberal globalisation/glocalisation processes. Its transformations from globalisation to glocalisation would illuminate the diverse processes and dynamics embedded in global market expansion that express global and local agencies.

However, significant gaps in understanding remain on the second wave of EPL glocalisation that this dissertation has identified above. There lacks a scholastic

understanding of the actual mechanisms and processes of marketisation concurrently. In existing literature, the exceptional ability of social media in facilitating market encounters and captation is mentioned either through the broad stroke analysis of EPL clubs' general business strategies (Cashmore et al., 2023; Han, 2020; Ireland et al., 2022; Kuzma et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2014; McLean et al., 2009), or through the documentation of virtual football fandom (Bang & Amara, 2014; Gong, 2015; Kim, 2023; Lee, 2022). There has yet to be a research approach that unites the potentials of the two tendencies in the concrete setting of marketisation, where virtual supporters meet EPL clubs, to fully demonstrate the potency of social media. Nor has there been a consolidation of other arrays of marketisation, like captation through players, within the set-up of social media. Through such unifications and consolidations, dynamics of neoliberal glocalisation could be illuminated through understanding the actual mechanisms and processes of EPL marketisation, which in turn test the validity of the "two way flow" model between the global and the local proposed as a framework to make sense of contemporary EPL. Specifically, there exists a sociological need to relate the validity of the glocalisation framework to the processes of marketisation—market encounters and captation—on social media. Firstly, it has been argued that EPL clubs create glocalised market encounters on social media in distant market locales. However, the concrete strategies and designs of virtual market encounters from the EPL clubs remain unestablished. Therefore, this dissertation's first research question would contribute towards the establishment of such an empirical picture. Secondly, the increasing revenue from EPL's overseas markets indicates the existence of captation mechanisms, yet such mechanisms have not been documented coherently in existing studies. The second research question, therefore, would set out the mechanisms of market captation by establishing how different virtual distant markets could be materialised and intensified into concrete yet diverse market behaviours or niches, as current literature has argued. Thirdly, the implications of concrete strategies and mechanisms of neoliberal glocalisation through market encounters and captation would also become part of this dissertation as an indication of the future direction of development for the EPL and the neoliberal globalisation dynamics EPL encapsulates. Therefore, the main research questions this dissertation seeks to address are as follows:

Q1: What are the existing strategies of market glocalisation from EPL clubs on their virtual social media presences in distant market locales?

Q2: How are these glocalised virtual markets materialised and intensified by EPL clubs into concrete yet diverse glocal actions of the market?

Q3: What are the implications of such market development strategies?

Through these research questions, this dissertation would attempt to materialise the framework of glocalisation in concrete mechanisms conducted through and represented by social media to test the validity of the theory of glocalisation in understanding contemporary EPL markets, and contribute to the understanding of neoliberal glocalisation through substantiating and clarifying the differing processes of the "two way flow" between the global and the local through the dynamics of real-world market expansion in distant locales. Towards this end, a breakdown of the research methods is provided below.

3. Methods

The understanding of the dynamics of neoliberal glocalisation through EPL clubs' marketisation in the distant markets would benefit from a holistic overview of the full array of EPL clubs' market development strategies. EPL clubs' overseas marketisation not only takes place on the virtuality of social media, but expresses itself as an overarching combination of online and offline actions that encompasses the capability of social media in capturing the market in tandem with other market inroads. Hence, this dissertation employs a qualitative approach to the subject of EPL glocalisation, employing multimodal discourse analysis (academically known as MDA or MMDA), a method that focuses on the combined discursive effects of textual, visual and audio elements, on online EPL club materials on social media, centred around major themes, to illuminate the diverse, glocalised strategies EPL clubs adopt towards market development.

3.1 Case Selection

This dissertation aims to capture and analyse a broad array of club actions in the processes of market glocalisation, given the diverse nature of EPL clubs' glocalisation strategies. Towards this end, a comprehensive review of such location-dependent accommodations made by EPL clubs was conducted. Through viewing the online presences and marketing attempts of EPL clubs on social media and club websites, this dissertation has categorised the main processes of distant market development: social media localisation and local football hybridisation, as well as patterns of the implications of such strategies. Pertinent features and patterns of glocalised market encounter and captation are discussed in the concrete context of specific cases or examples to position the theoretical arguments into the empirical landscape of real-world club actions. This dissertation selected thirteen pertinent examples, while describing the general pictures of EPL clubs' strategies when applicable, based on their relevance and prominence to illuminate the different dynamics of EPL glocalisation. A list of the cases is provided below, grouped by their thematic structures:

Table 1: Major cases selected

Processes	Major Theme	Cases	EPL Club Involved
Social Media Localisation	Virtuality	Twitter, Naver TV & Kakao Story	"Big Six" & Wolves
	Products	SpursPlay	Tottenham Hotspur
	Values	Rainbow Laces	Manchester City
Local Football Hybridisation	Football Experiences	City Challenge	Manchester City
		South Korean Preseason Tour	Tottenham Hotspur
	Market Personalities	Son Heung-min	Tottenham Hotspur
		Hwang Hee-chan	Wolves
		Lu Han in China	Manchester United
	Local Symbolisms	Chinese New Year	Arsenal
		Korean National Pride	Tottenham Hotspur
Implications of Glocalisation	Local Supporters	Spurs Stadium	Tottenham Hotspur
	Club Image	Mesut Ozil and Uyghur Advocacy	Arsenal
		Henderson and LGBT+ Rights	Liverpool

Ireland et al. (2022) argued that, due to the complexity of market actions in football, actions need to be condensed into discrete case studies to enable detailed analysis of features and patterns. Therefore, a wide selection of cases is needed given the immense diverseness of market development attempts made by EPL clubs, corresponding to the arguments of Hill and Vincent (2006); Hinson et al. (2020); and Lee (2022). Furthermore, the breath of case selection encompasses three distinct groups of EPL clubs: “old guards” of the first wave of globalisation (Arsenal, Liverpool and Man Utd); “new rich” of the second wave of glocalisation (Man City and Spurs); as well as new market arrivals like mid-table team Wolves. The distinctions in their statures and strategies illuminate the historical influences of EPL’s global expansion on current market development strategies. Roughly half of the cases discussed originate from North London outfit Tottenham Hotspur, due to their immense success in South Korea in localised market intensification. The selection of cases would illuminate Spurs’ market strategies as an archetype of successful distant market development, and an indication of the potential future direction of EPL’s expansion. Another primary feature of case selection is that all the cases referred to market development in Asia and the Middle East, with the majority of cases concerning Korea and China. As previously discussed, these emerging markets are distinct in local market structures and preferences compared with typical Euro-American markets, thus making the tensions and dynamics of glocalised EPL marketisation more visible and pronounced.

3.2 Data Collection

This dissertation underlined its data collection through a 3-month comprehensive review of dominant market development attempts of EPL clubs online to identify major themes and patterns. After establishing this understanding, this dissertation collected its data digitally through publicly available sources from EPL clubs' social media profiles and club official websites. Social media content was collected from three platforms: Twitter/X in English and Korean, Naver TV in Korean, and Weibo in Chinese. These platforms are extensively used by football supporters in their respective countries (Hong, 2023; Li et al., 2019), representing the extensive localised social media presences EPL clubs employ. The collected contents are multimodal, with textual, visual and audio elements. Since the discussions of major themes in this dissertation were organised through notable cases, a combination of keyword searches derived from the contextual understanding of the case through the comprehensive review, and date filters surrounding the natural courses of events were used to refine data collection. When referring to historical posts and profiles changes that are no longer available concurrently, the archive Wayback Machine was used to access potential data. Prior works from Arora et al. (2016) and Ben-David and Huurdeman (2014) have already corroborated this usage's validity. This overall selection strategy is further supported by the prior works on the glocalisation of football in Korea and China by Kim (2023) and Gong (2015). This led to a collection of 367 EPL club social media posts in English, Korean and Chinese, in a combination of textual, visual and audio form, as well as further discursive comments from supporters.

Such a substantial number of posts were collected due to the nature of the selected social media platforms as fractured, bit-sized information with enforced character limits (Benamara et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2012; Papacharissi, 2012): each collected post compose of no more than two or three sentences and a few photos or a video. Given this relative scarcity of discursive information on social media, saturation would need to be achieved through analysing a good number of posts. From this collection, significant posts were selected for further analysis based on their pertinent expressions of specific club strategies. When applicable, the textual, visual and audio elements of the collected posts were translated into English. To further overcome the scarcity of discursive information, 36 articles from websites of various EPL clubs were collected to contextualise the cases and provide denser discursive representations for analysis. Nevertheless, an average article from an official website has no more than 300 words. The collection of publicly online data adheres to the purpose of this

dissertation due to the primacy of social media in mediating marketisation in distant markets. Even when the market encounter and captation strategy refers to physical events and accommodations, they will also be covered on clubs' social media and websites to amplify their effectiveness. Hence, an online collection approach to data on EPL market glocalisation possesses concrete sociological validity. Moreover, this dissertation also referred to a good variety of grey literature, like news articles, to contextualise and supplement its understanding of selected cases. This triangulation of differing data could be supported by prior works from Bang and Amara (2014) and Ireland et al. (2022) to accurately represent the empirical subject of the glocal football market in its due complexity.

3.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Discourse is defined by Fairclough (2013) as the social construction of reality derived from the specific structures of society. Discourse analysis, therefore, is considered a connection between social structure and events. In the case of EPL glocalisation, discourses connect the structures of the "two way flow" glocalisation dynamics with the real-world interactions between clubs' market development attempts and local preferences. EPL's market expansion functions through these semiotic, meaning-making discourses, highlighting the need to focus on such discourses as the subject of study. Furthermore, since the expansion and maintenance of neoliberal globalisation/glocalisation discursively engages with semiotic meanings and representations (Peck, 2013), discourse analysis would fit with this dissertation's aim to further the understanding of EPL's neoliberal glocalisation. In the specific context of this dissertation, the discourses collected from the EPL clubs enable former "supporters-in-waiting's" market participation as a facet of action, represent market participation as an influence on perception, as well as interweaving football identities and local identities through hybridisation, reflecting Fairclough's (2013) theory of the functions of discourses. Therefore, analysing the discursive dynamics on social media would help illuminate the mechanisms of EPL's expansion. Furthermore, discourse analysis can potentially reveal the power inherent in such structures (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 1993). The extent to which global EPL clubs or local markets influence the processes of market encounter and captation, as expressions of power, would demonstrate the primacy of the agencies and affordances of the global and the local under neoliberal glocalisation. Given the primacy of social media for modern EPL's expansion, the discourses this dissertation analyses are decidedly "multimodal". Such discourses possess textual, visual and audio elements that Kress and Bezemer (2023) defined as "multimodality". Multimodality maintains that textual

representation of language is only one of many approaches to transforming semiotic resources from social structures into actual meanings. Kress and Bezemer (2023) argued that audio and visual elements and their discursive implications are distinct from the "partiality of language" that are textual discourses (p. 143). Hence, discourse analysis should consider the co-existence of multiple modes of discursive processes and move beyond the analysis of "language per se" into language as integrated with other multimodal discourses (Hyland, 2011, p. 120) to achieve a fuller understanding of the connections between social structure and constructed reality (Hyland, 2011; Kress & Bezemer, 2023; van Leeuwen, 2008). This dissertation's data collection on social media fits with the premise of a multimodal discourse analysis approach, as O'Halloran (in Hyland, 2011) explicitly argued for the suitability of MDA towards analysing the effects of digital technologies. Hence, in the case of EPL's glocalisation, the use of MDA in analysing the discursive implications of textual elements on social media in conjunction with other discursive mediums of glocalisation would be apt for the understanding of how discursive elements serve to produce and reproduce social structures vested with power and agency.

MDA has been employed sociologically on social media data towards the study of market image (Wang & Feng, 2021), social movements (Ahaotu & Oshamo, 2023; Chałupnik & Brookes, 2022) and nationalism (Tian & Ge, 2023). These works, while not related to EPL glocalisation per se, indicate the explanatory potential of MDA on processes of marketisation through the documentation of often emotive online discourses and their reverberations, sharing similarities with the established patterns of distant fandom from existing literature. Moreover, the demonstrated potency of MDA in indicating the implications of social processes would help this dissertation investigate the reverberation and impacts of EPL glocalisation strategies. While no work on football has employed MDA per se, there has been some precedence in employing the methodological promise of discourse analysis in the sociological investigation of football. Sahragard and Rahimi (2017) and Ireland et al. (2022) have used discourse analysis to demonstrate, albeit in a limited sense, the possibility of a qualitative analysis of internet-based materials to capture the incorporation of business interests in the online discursive processes towards market development. Similarly, Bang and Amara (2014), Kim (2023) and Gong (2015) have demonstrated the viability of employing a discursive approach to the matters of local market preference. Specifically, Gong (2015), Sahragard and Rahimi (2017) and Ireland et al. (2022) all positioned their analysis within the virtual sphere of the internet. Given this precedence, this dissertation would expand on

existing discourse analysis approaches by recognising the multimodality of internet discourses through MDA in its analysis and provide a viable demonstration of MDA's future use within the sociology of football. This dissertation's MDA is conducted through an inductive categorisation of thematic elements within the collected social media posts and website articles from its multimodal elements to identify the primary mechanisms of market glocalisation, followed by in-depth coding of materials in the thematically corresponding notable case studies to capture EPL clubs' concrete actions in distant markets and their reverberations. This analytical approach is supported by the prior similar approaches in MDA by Chałupnik and Brookes (2022) and Wang and Feng (2021), who organised data analysis through a structure of thematic patterns and qualitative coding. This dissertation will now move into its findings and discussions.

4. Findings

4.1 Social Media Localisation

This dissertation has identified the need to concretise the potential of social media as a medium of market encounter and captation through researching clubs' glocalisation strategies. This dissertation identifies a major thematic consistency in club strategies on social media to orchestrate market encounters: EPL clubs accommodate local preferences by orienting their social media presences in a localised manner. This dissertation presents the empirical patterns of social media localisation through three primary thematic aspects: virtuality, products and values.

4.1.1 Virtuality

Virtuality refers to the spaces and set-ups of social media where EPL's distant "supporters-in-waiting" interact with EPL clubs' social media in market encounters. EPL clubs conducted significant localisation of virtuality, due to the differing languages and social media platforms of distant markets. On social media, EPL clubs were found to provide localised engagement in the native languages of the potential supporters:

Table 2: Active foreign language Twitter/X presence of the "Big Six"

	ENG	FRA	SPA	POR	RUS	KOR	JPN	CHN	MSA	THA	ARA
Arsenal	✓		✓								
Chelsea	✓		✓							✓	
Liverpool	✓			✓			✓			✓	✓
Man City	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Man Utd	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓		✓
Tottenham	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	

KOR=Korean, JPN=Japanese, CHN=Chinese, MSA=Malay, THA=Thai, ARA=Arabic

(Source: Official website of the "Big Six"; Twitter "Affiliates" page)

Apart from the good provision of content in Spanish and Portuguese, the "hotspots" of competition, where multiple clubs are simultaneously attempting language localisation, are locations in Asia and the Middle East, in keeping with EPL's significant growth in the region. The state of the localisation of virtuality through foreign language content provisions reflects divergent club strategies. Amongst the "Big Six", Man City has the broadest range of language coverage, opting for a strategy in breadth, while other clubs are more selective, with

differing scales of language accommodation. Tottenham, for instance, focuses its localisation on Asia (Thai, Malay and Korean), while Man Utd and Liverpool pay extra attention to the Arabian market. Arsenal and Chelsea do not engage in substantial language localisations at all. Such distinctions in virtual localisation indicate that social media language localisation is strategic and specific to the planning and market focus of the club in question, with EPL clubs possessing different priorities in social media localisation.

Beyond the construction of virtual social media spaces in the familiar languages of distant markets, local platform preferences also come into play. A significant omission of Table 2 is localisation towards the Chinese market on Twitter, given its immense market size and potential. This is due to China's censorship policy preventing Western social media access (Griffiths, 2019). Instead, Chinese EPL supporters are approached through China's unique ecosystem of replacement social media platforms—Weibo and WeChat. Of the 20 current EPL teams in the 2023-24 season, 12 teams have a WeChat account, while 17 have a Weibo presence—a sign of widespread accommodation to the specific social media ecosystem of the Chinese market in social media localisation. Such trends are also found beyond an accommodation of "hard" government policies, as EPL clubs also cater for "softer" local habits. Despite the popularity of Twitter and Facebook in South Korea, domestic social media platforms such as Instagram-like Kakao Story and video platform Naver TV retain millions of users (Yoon, 2024). Some EPL clubs are mindful of these platform preferences and actively maintain a localised virtual presence on said platforms. Man City and Man Utd possess Kakao Story accounts, while Tottenham and Wolves have a Naver TV presence:

Table 3: Naver TV and Kakao Story follower numbers, 09/04/2024

	Naver TV	Kakao Story
Man City	N/A	10111
Man Utd	N/A	92436
Tottenham	107000	N/A
Wolves	7441	N/A

(Source: Naver TV, Kakao Story)

These four clubs in Table 3 that utilised local Korean platforms all had, or continue to have, South Korean players in their service in the 21st century, with Tottenham and Wolves currently employing South Korea's best players—Son Heung-min and Hwang Hee-chan. This is no coincidence, with both Tottenham and Wolves explicitly mentioning their Korean

players when announcing their forays into Naver TV. This observed leveraging of local players will be explored further later. These platform localisations of the South Korean social media virtuality, although small-scale in nature, nevertheless carry significant implications: EPL clubs, despite their uniform, global desires to develop overseas markets, employ differing local social media accommodations to differing degrees of success. The distinctions in club actions in orchestrating the set-up of virtuality towards market encounters indicate that global EPL clubs are negotiating and navigating the specificities of the local virtual clientele, validating the sociological framework of glocalisation.

4.1.2 Products

The primacy of social media means that EPL teams' products are now primarily marketed virtually (Kuzma et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2014; Molina, 2016). Hence, product marketing on social media, exposed to distinct local markets' different needs and preferences, is localised in its discursive representations. Such social media localisation of products will be explored through the example of Tottenham's pay-to-view streaming platform SpursPlay.

Across Spurs' social media communications, the central theme of the promotion of SpursPlay seems to be that of exclusivity. The club timed SpursPlay's launch with the preseason friendlies in South Korea in July 2022, providing match livestreams exclusively to supporters with a subscription. By situating matches behind a paywall, Spurs framed SpursPlay as the only solution to an artificial scarcity that itself has created:

> Just one week until our opening pre-season match in Korea. Don't miss a moment on #SPURSPLAY.
>
> -@SpursOfficial, X, 6 Jul 2022

The functionality stressed here is SpursPlay's ability to grant supporters exclusive access to preseason games. Since football supporters consume matches live through their exposure to TV broadcasting (Haynes, in Cashmore & Dixon, 2016), match access is paramount. To most distant supporters, such access is a concrete local need, now monetised by Spurs. Furthermore, the scarcity of tickets for these preseason games in Korea is not artificial, as the club has sold out the tickets quickly. This fact is not lost on Spurs as another discursive framing on social media to highlight this sense of exclusivity in the face of scarcity:

> …what a way to start [SpursPlay] … in a match that sold out to fans in Korea within 25 minutes of going on sale.
>
> -@SpursOfficial, X, 30 Jun 2022

The fact that the matches have sold out increases perceived exclusivity. However, this depiction of promised exclusivity is not entirely true. The club omitted that broadcasting rights to these preseason games in Asia have been given to Coupang Streaming, with Tottenham only revealing this on social media when users in Asia encountered problems accessing the game, with some supporters accusing the club of false advertisement and demanding refunds in the comments. This demonstrated the potential risks of such localised marketing, as Spurs' marketing failed to stand up to local scrutiny, resulting in negative supporter perceptions.

Beyond the utility of exclusive access that SpursPlay are marketed to be, another aspect of exclusivity is also at play. A subscription to SpursPlay gives online supporters a unique way to demonstrate their loyalty to the team. By watching the game on SpursPlay, fans can "get behind the team" (@SpursOfficial, X, 17 Jul 2022) and potentially self-classify as authentic supporters. Such play on authenticity by Spurs, important to football fandoms (McLean et al., 2009; Tapp, 2004), indicates market captation via fandom discourses, catered to the needs of the virtual overseas market with less access to express authenticity in other manners. This dissertation found that Liverpool and Man City's marketing of their streaming products were consistent with SpursPlay in their discursive framings. These attempts to monetise distant local supporters resemble the logic of TV broadcasting, where market captation transforms the local environment as one that is receptive to the consumption of exclusive content. Such emerging trends also indicate the deepening of neoliberal influences on EPL. Instead of cooperating in market captation as part of the League, as is the case in TV rights negotiations, EPL clubs now engage in captation competitions as distinctive entities through their respective localised products. Through clubs' efforts to cater to local product needs on social media, the sphere of digital content has opened to the mechanisms of market competition. Such development of the streaming market could potentially develop into a diversification of revenue sources beyond that of TV licensing in the future.

Beyond marketing towards a need for exclusive access on social media, clubs' priorities in product advertisements are also dependent on local preferences. SpursPlay has been consistently promoted on Tottenham's English X account up to the present day, yet its

promotions faded out rather quickly in South Korea: only 19 posts promoted SpursPlay on Tottenham's Korean X account, with the last one dated three months after SpursPlay's launch. This early curtailment could be attributed to the lukewarm responses Spurs received from its promotions of SpursPlay in Korea, with most promotional posts receiving very limited engagements. Thus, Spurs adjusted their localisation strategies accordingly. Such local adjustments could also be seen in China, where Tottenham only made 24 posts on SpursPlay on Weibo, as SpursPlay went against the internet usage preference of Chinese virtual supporters. When SpursPlay was marketed as a method of exclusive access to games and content, Chinese users resisted this attempt at captation by requesting the content to be hosted on domestic Chinese streaming platforms instead. Faced with these preferences, Tottenham instead livestreamed its preseason games and posted clips from SpursPlay on Weibo. These distinctions in how virtual exclusivity could be marketed (or not marketed) indicate the potency of the local in mediating the manners to which products can be promoted and revenues generated. As such, EPL clubs cater to the differing needs of different market domains in product localisation on social media to achieve better market materialisation and intensification, attempting to outcompete their rival teams in the newly opened market sphere of localised product competition.

4.1.3 Values

Another significant strategy of social media localisation is that of value representation. This dissertation identifies that EPL football clubs represent themselves on localised social media as advocates of different values dependent on the local societal, cultural, and political structures of preferences to reduce resistance to market development.

A prominent example of this tendency is EPL clubs' social media campaigns and representations of LGBT+ rights initiatives. In 2021, the Premier League, in cooperation with advocacy group Stonewall, launched an anti-homophobia awareness campaign called "Rainbow Laces" to highlight the League's endorsement of LGBT+ rights (EPL, 2024c). During this campaign, EPL team captains would wear rainbow armbands as a gesture of solidarity, with each EPL club putting out social media messages affirming their commitments against homophobia. For EPL clubs that target the Middle East and Asia markets, this constituted a significant concern, as these target markets are more socially conservative and regressive in terms of LGBT+ rights—in the Middle East markets of UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, homosexuality remains criminalised. Faced with the prevalent social

conservativism and homophobia in such target markets, EPL clubs are found to have localised their social media content by de-emphasising the LGBT+ rights campaign. In support of the Rainbow Laces campaign, Man City's English, Spanish and Portuguese Twitter account posted a picture of its captain, Ilkay Gundogan, sporting a rainbow armband to combine advocacy with Gundogan's sporting achievements. Yet its Arabic account, mentioning the exact same statistics, posted a picture of Gundogan wearing an ordinary armband:

Figure 1: Rainbow or not



(Left: Man City English Twitter; Right: Man City Arabic Twitter)

This pattern of the deliberate championing or omission of LGBT+ issues persists throughout Man City's localised social media. As a show of solidarity, Man City's English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese accounts all changed their Twitter profiles into a rainbow flag background. Once again, the club failed to do so on its Arabic account:

Figure 2: Man City's Twitter profile pictures in November 2021



From left to right: Man City English, French and Arabic (Source: Wayback Machine)

Through a review of all contents posted by Man City on its various social media accounts during the Rainbow Laces Campaign, no visual or written mentions of LGBT+ rights or symbolisms could be found on City's Arabic, Chinese, Japanese or Korean profiles, indicating a consistent, deliberate accommodation in value localisation to prevent local resistance and damage to commercial interests. In the case of Manchester City, its socially conservative UAE owners might have played a part. However, this dissertation has also found a consistent omission of social media mentions of LGBT+ campaigns across EPL clubs in locales like the Arabic nations, Indonesia, Japan, and Korea, establishing the commonality of such value localisations. Clubs attempt to portray themselves as matches to the values of the local market to gain proximity and intimacy to virtual distant supporters to materialise and intensify distant markets. On one hand, this facilitates a smoother marketisation process in most cases. On the other hand, the efforts through localised value representations on social media from EPL clubs to respect and represent differing value preferences from different locales bring new potentials of contention in neoliberal glocalisation. This dissertation will return to this tendency later.

Furthermore, such value localisations heavily involved the portrayals of EPL players as advocates for LGBT+ rights in European-language accounts. EPL players can be argued to have become the embodiment of captation through value localisations in the competition of marketisation by clubs in western locales, making them personal representations of neoliberal glocalisation. The repeated club portrayals of players as embodiments of specific social values have led to some players, like Jordan Henderson at Liverpool, becoming synonymous with support in LBGT+ issues due to him being an "ally" (Liverpool Official Website, 27 Nov 2021) during his time at Liverpool. This brings a novel aspect of risk in marketisation to EPL clubs, which will be detailed later as an implication of EPL glocalisation.

4.2 Local Football Hybridisation

Having established the first inroad for marketisation of localisation on social media, this dissertation will now move on to thematise the second major approach EPL clubs employ to cultivate distant markets—hybridisation. Localisation tackles EPL market development dynamics where "global" clubs navigate and accommodate local preferences. Hybridisation differs from localisation as it creates conceptual and practical "cross-cultural" and novel structures that take influence from both the global and the local (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Robertson, 1992). Such hybridisations in EPL distant market development bring new

opportunities for market encounter and captation, where the virtual, “low stake” online support can be transformed into commercially and symbolically meaningful market actions. This dissertation has identified three types of hybridisations: hybridisation of the football experience, hybridisation of market personalities, and hybridisation of football with local symbolisms.

4.2.1 Football Experiences

The EPL is increasingly considered an “experience industry”, where football actions on the pitch are bundled with the environs and atmospheres of football attendance by situating the supporter in an experience (Dixon, 2012; Williams & Peach, 2018). English football games take place in designated physical spaces of English stadiums. Therefore, the atmosphere and the experience of watching football are relatively distant and inaccessible to overseas supporters. As the geographically bounded nature of the EPL games restricts the propagation of the EPL experience to its virtual followings, EPL clubs were found to transform local spaces into hybridised experiences where supporters could experience football attendance locally.

EPL clubs often use themed experiences to cater to the needs for immersion by organising distant club-themed watch parties, fan zones and other activities in foreign countries. For instance, Manchester City opened an official merchandise store and a tourist attraction called City Challenge in UAE. In this orchestrated immersive experience, supporters can:

> Engage with your personalized avatar, tackle football-inspired challenges, and explore iconic locations like the dressing room and trophy hall, all designed to capture the essence of Manchester City football glory.
>
> -Manchester City Official Website

Such framings of immersion demonstrate the importance of such experiences in the market intensification strategies of EPL clubs to meet local demand. Given the physically distant nature of the market, ordinary local spaces were hybridised into locations akin to the physical stadiums in England. Inside the City Challenge, distant supporters can sing along to popular English stadium chants or watch Man City games in real time. On certain occasions, supporters could meet current players or see City’s trophies on display. There even exists a complete Man City’s first team dressing room:

Figure 3: City Challenge's complete replica of Man City's dressing room



(Source: Man City's official website on City Challenge)

Such attention in detail to match the local space of City Challenge with the immersive experiences of supporters in English stadiums demonstrates the elaborate hybridisation that occurred in the UAE local space, where a sense of authentic immersion is being deliberately maintained and cultivated to equate distant supporters' experiences in UAE with the promises of City's English stadium. In this sense, distant supporters are pushed into a space that takes them beyond the geographic restrictions of the UAE through extensive hybridisations that combine the local experiences with the discourses of English football spaces.

Another demonstration of the hybridisation of immersive experiences as a method of market development would be found in Tottenham with its 2022 South Korean tour, covered earlier in relation to SpursPlay. Two Tottenham preseason games were played in South Korea, enabling 110,000 people to experience a matchday in their home country (Fordham, 2022). Such a set-up is an attempt for Tottenham to recreate the otherwise distant immersion of football attendance to meet local demands, with more attention paid to hybridising local spaces to meet local preferences. The stadium announcer spoke Korean as well as English. The billboards in the stadium were primarily in Korean. Players displayed special banners to thank the supporters for attending, something that was not done for EPL games:

Figure 4: “Thank you for joining us” banner written in Korean



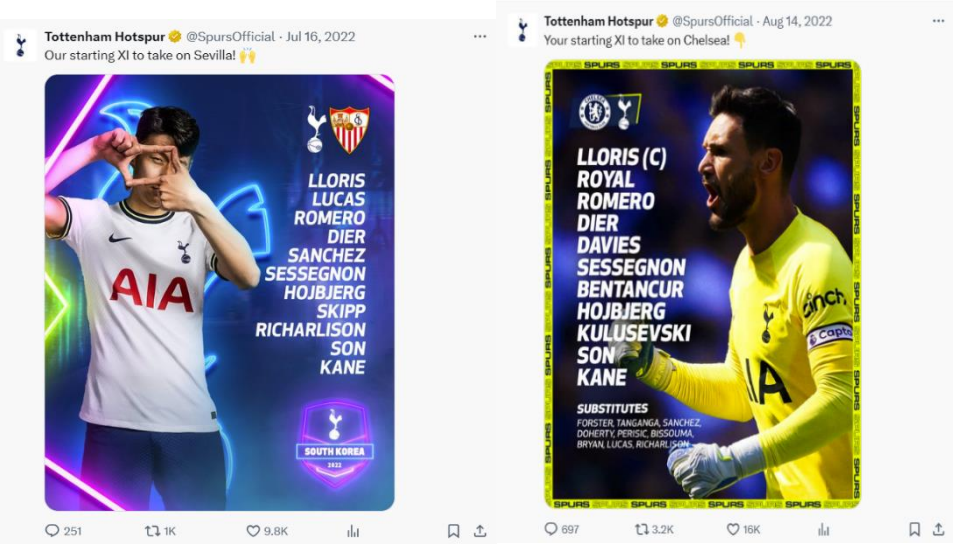
(Source: @SpursOfficial & @Spurs_KR on Twitter)

These accommodations are conducive to a sense of immersion for Korean attendees, where the physical Korean space is hybridised with club materials, players and atmosphere that constitute immersion in a locally conceivable manner. Tottenham were also found to hybridise other local spaces with football experiences through themed pop-up stores, fan gatherings and legend meet-and-greets. As a result, the previously predominantly virtual supporters in South Korea could immerse themselves in “Tottenham-mania” in hybridised local spaces vested with new meanings of authenticity and access, with diverse methods of physical participation and interaction with Spurs on and off the pitch. Market captation would occur both through the direct consumption of the themed experiences offered by the club, as well as through the increased affiliation distant supporters feel after said experiences: South Korean supporters responded to the preseason tour on Tottenham’s Korean Twitter positively, with responses combining positive phrases like “love” and “happiness” with the catchphrase of Spurs’ support “COYS”. Through the provision of hybridised immersion in local spaces through conscious club planning, virtual supporters on social media could be materialised into concrete consumers through the effects of market captation.

Though preseason tours are by no means a new mechanism of market development, the hybridised nature of such experiences possesses a new virtual aspect not seen previously. Beneath the success of these curated experiences lies a tension of authenticity: the proper EPL experience is still only available in stadiums in the UK. The preseason games have zero bearing on the competitive position of the team, nor is the team playing against its league rivals. Commercial games are widely perceived as “dead rubber”—trivial events beyond proper EPL action or experience. Tottenham attempted to dispel this potential air of triviality of the immersive products to its Korean following. The club covered the preseason games on

Twitter in the same manner as it would cover a proper EPL game, with press conferences, training photos, in-game live updates (Figure 5), as well as post-game celebratory content:

Figure 5: Spot the difference



(Left: Tottenham Preseason Line-up Post; Right: Tottenham EPL Line-up Post)

These framings that serve to maintain the authenticity of hybridised experiences indicate a new tendency in EPL market development, as clubs adopting such hybridisations were found to walk a balance between maintaining its "globality" of authenticity through framing its experiences as a representation of the English game, and the "locality" of specific accommodations and hybridisations in immersion. Another implication of such hybridised experiences is that they are marketed as accurate representations of English stadium spaces, setting the distant support's expectation. This would force EPL clubs to hybridise English spaces to cater to the demands of distant markets. This dynamic will be discussed in a later section.

4.2.2 Market Personalities

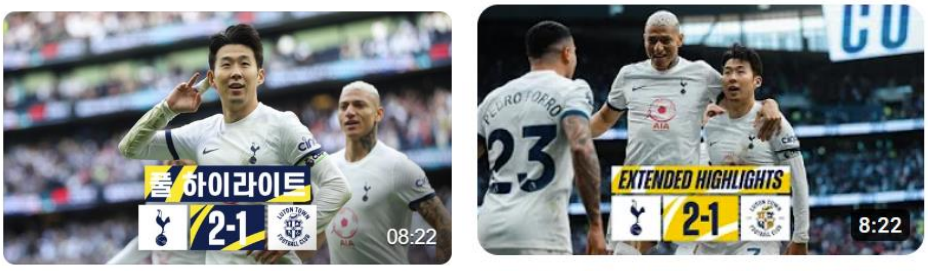
Beyond the hybridisation of immersive experiences, EPL clubs are found to be permeable in making local partnerships to develop markets. EPL clubs have, in their service, players of distinct nationalities through whom clubs can gain unique appeal. Such partnerships can also be forged with local celebrities. These alliances hybridise market personalities with EPL club affiliations, and, in reverse, redefine the appeals of the clubs in specific markets.

As the literature review has established, EPL has seen the emergence of superstars from emerging EPL markets, enabling alliances between EPL clubs and these superstar

players. These distant superstars engage in mutually beneficial hybridisations with their clubs, leveraging their sporting excellence into both the construction of their personal brands and the intensification of the virtual market for their clubs, enhancing players' influences in EPL's expansion. This dissertation will use the example of South Korean players Son Heung-min at Tottenham and Hwang Hee-chan at Wolves to demonstrate the effects of such alliances on market development.

Signed by Tottenham in 2015, Son Heung-min has since become a club icon. He is currently captain of Spurs and Korea. Given Son's sporting success, his business footprints were significant, with sponsorship deals from Burberry, Calvin Klein and luggage brand Tumi netting him millions from the South Korean market alone (Jeong, 2022). Thus, Son is a market entity on his own, capable of the captation of his support, especially in his native South Korea. Tottenham extensively hybridised its market development attempts in South Korea with the personality of Son to align their respective commercial interests. On Korean video platform Naver TV, Tottenham pushes weekly video content that focuses on Son's training footage, called "Sonny Cam", not found on Spurs' international social media channels. When other videos are copied from Spurs' English YouTube channel, changes in framing were made to put Son centre-stage on Naver TV to leverage Son's image in the South Korean market, indicating Spurs' deliberate efforts to use Son's great Korean presence as a sporting icon to their advantage.

Figure 6: Same moment, same video, different framing



(PL 30R) 토트넘 2:1 루턴 타운 / 전체 하이라이트 / 현지 해설
▷ 2.1만 · ♡ 39 · 3주 전

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR 2-1 LUTON TOWN // PREMIER LEAGUE...
493K views • 3 weeks ago

(Left: Spurs Naver TV; Right: YouTube)

Spurs' framing on localised social media put Son into a more prominent position as an avenue of market captation in South Korea. The familiarity of the market with Son is used to bypass and mitigate the unfamiliarity of Korea with English football. Therefore, the hybridisation of Spurs' appeal with Son's personality socialised virtual support in consuming

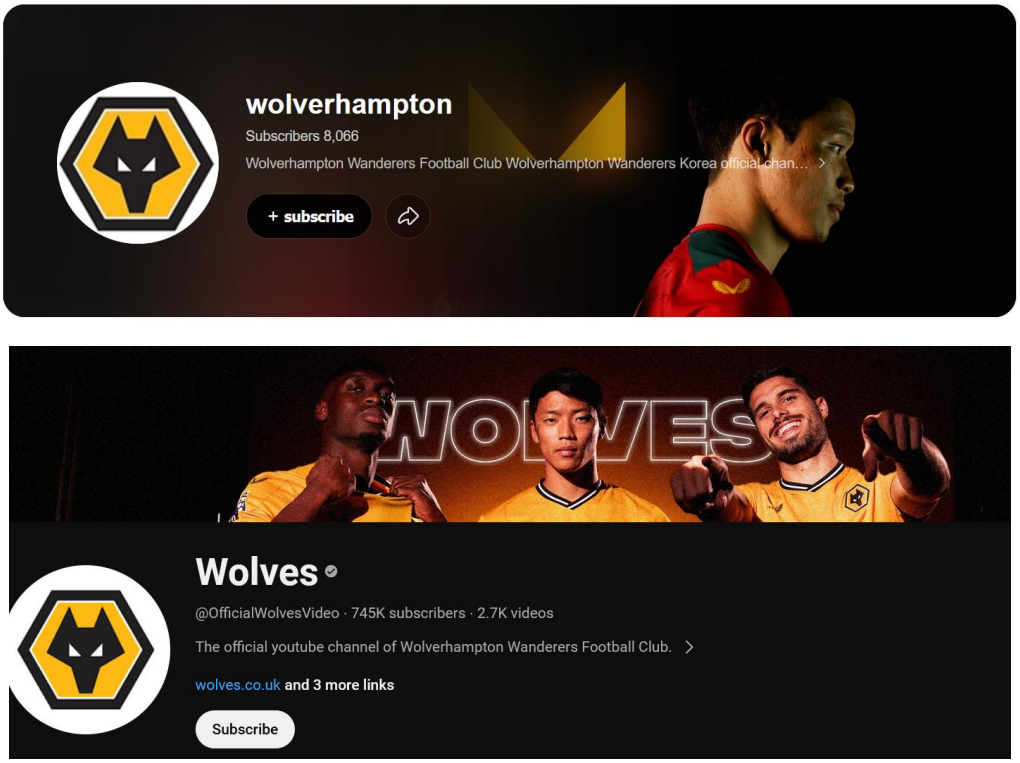
club content and products as “Son product”. Furthermore, Son’s extensive commercial relations in South Korea could be transposed into commercial cooperation with Spurs. For instance, Son has a sponsorship deal with luggage brand Tumi in South Korea, which Tottenham developed into a partnership with the club. This would not have been possible without aligning the club’s market interests with the player’s, corroborated by the statement of Tumi Korea:

> We [Tumi] …have been long inspired by Son’s unwavering dedication to be the best he can be, both for his team and representing his home country. We couldn’t be more thrilled to expand our partnership to support his full team…
>
> -Tottenham Official Website, 1 Jul 2022

This expansion of commercial partnerships also indicates another effect of player-based hybridisation, in that the presence of the player also experiences increased connotations of club affiliation. Through Spurs’ efforts to hybridise itself as a platform for “Son product”, Son’s personal brand also adhered to allegiances with Tottenham. The effects and promises of player-led market development attempts through mutual hybridisations demonstrate the potential of what this dissertation coins as “synergies” due to the emergence of hybridised local meanings of clubs and players. Through the alliances and hybridisations with players established in the destination market, virtual followings can be concretised through the personification of market development strategies to leverage local player presences towards monetised location-specific market actions.

Such strategies are not exclusive to the “Big Six”, with other teams also joining the hybridisation action. For instance, Wolves hybridises with Korean international Hwang Hee-chan. While Hwang’s stature is not as dominant as Son’s in South Korea, he nevertheless serves as an asset for personification through hybridisation. Wolves similarly present Hwang in a more prominent position on Naver TV when compared with YouTube:

Figure 7: Account profile of Wolves, Naver TV and YouTube



(Top: Naver TV; Bottom: YouTube)

Wolves further operates a "Hee-chan cam" on Naver TV, focused on Hwang's match actions, as well as producing feature-length content on Hwang, where he was filmed eating Korean food, responding to fan questions in Korean, as well as introducing Korean culture to Wolves' academy players (Figure 8).

Figure 8: A selection of Wolves' Naver TV exclusives



(Source: Naver TV, video titles translated from Korean)

Figure 8's feature-length content exists only on Naver TV and cannot be found on YouTube, indicating the club's strategic focus on hybridising itself with the attractions and interests surrounding Hwang in Korea. The striking similarities between how Wolves conduct hybridisation with Hwang and Spurs' efforts with Son indicate the recurrent dynamic of player hybridisation as a viable avenue of market captation. Furthermore, it demonstrates the

emergence of new EPL competition in South Korea. Spurs, having displaced Man Utd as the team with a unique connection with Korea due to its hybridisation with Son, now face a competitor for the attention and affection of Korean supporters using the same captation mechanism. This indicates a persistent opening up of more aspects of EPL for market competition as an expression of neoliberal glocalisation. The success of the personification of marketisation means that Spurs depend on the continued presence of Son in the team to maintain its dominant market status in Korea. If Son were to leave Spurs, Wolves and Hwang stand a real chance of displacing Spurs in the South Korean market due to their extensive hybridisation works with Hwang in Korea, just like how Spurs replaced Man Utd.

Such hybridisation strategies could also go beyond players into broader alliances with local celebrities. Clubs could hybridise the extensive market presence of celebrity personalities with EPL affiliations to generate similar "synergies" of familiarity and affection. Such "synergies" would be elaborated by analysing the partnership between Man United and Chinese actor Lu Han. In 2019, Man Utd appointed Lu Han as a "Red Devil Messenger", marking the start of an official relationship in China. Lu Han's market pull in China as an A-list celebrity with a large, dedicated fandom is evident from his 60-million-strong following on Chinese social media Weibo. The potential of Man Utd's market intensification efforts through hybridising the meaning of club support with Lu is further facilitated by China's established online celebrity economy. Chinese celebrities and internet personalities regularly promote various products online, bringing trust to the product at hand through the celebrities' personal recommendations (Dippner, 2018; Sullivan & Kehoe, 2019), making the Chinese virtual support highly receptive to making purchases through celebrity endorsement. On Weibo, Man Utd's official accounts regularly post videos and photos of Lu Han in Man Utd merchandise, aligning the environs of Chinese celebrity culture with the club. This framing of proximity with Lu is further seen through the annual birthday greetings Man Utd put out for Lu, where Man Utd players were seen wishing Lu Han a happy birthday:

Figure 9: Man Utd keeper De Gea wishing Lu Han a happy birthday



(Source: Man Utd's Weibo)

Furthermore, Man Utd also tap into Lu Han's fandom more directly through the specific set-up of Weibo. Weibo groups its users into "super topics"—akin to hashtags—where celebrity fandoms congregate and interact (Peng, 2023). Man Utd regularly uses the super topic "#LuHan" on Weibo to expressively market to his fandom. One example of this direct marketing can be seen in 2019 when Lu visited Old Trafford. The club arranged for Lu to meet with the Man Utd squad, posting those encounters on Weibo and receiving over 1 million reposts. Man Utd also pushed its other products to Chinese supporters on Weibo, where Chinese supporters could enter a raffle for a Man Utd shirt signed by Lu. These "synergies" of cross-marketing towards a celebrity's existing local support vest unique local meanings to football consumption. Man Utd could become the natural EPL team for Lu Han's fandom due to the portrayed proximity between the club and Lu. The materialisation and intensification of the Chinese market—facilitated through Lu's endorsement—would hence occur in a locally conceivable manner. Through alliances with celebrity presences specific to the nation in question through hybridisation with market personalities, Man Utd utilised the market resources unique to China—the established and elevated status of its celebrities in facilitating the materialisation of consumption—to the benefit of market encounter and captation. Furthermore, such "synergies" as a result of hybridisation also redefine the conceptions of Lu in China, as his fandoms increasingly affiliate Lu Han with Man Utd support. Lu Han's fandom routinely wears Man Utd jerseys to Lu's concerts. In clips uploaded onto Lu Han's "super topic", several concert-going Lu fans were seen holding signs that wished Man Utd good luck in the EPL to gain Lu's attention, which Lu promptly engaged with. These examples demonstrate the essence of "synergies" through hybridisation as altering the presence of both the club and the local personality to be mutually constitutive and reinforcing, echoing the hybridisation thesis.

Through the examples above, one could see how EPL clubs package themselves with established local presences to increase captation. These hybridisations of club support with local personalities are highly contextualised by the existing state of play in the local market. To conduct such hybridisations, clubs need to understand local structures and preferences, reflecting local agency in glocalisation. In these alliances, the clubs' local accommodations and alliances invariably come into contact with symbolic and emotive elements distinct to the specific locale. This tendency of association between local symbolism and club actions has profound implications, discussed below.

4.2.3 Local Symbolisms

Football support is emotive, steeped in histories of communities and rivalries (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016; Tapp, 2004). This explains the longevity and loyalty of English football support as market participants (Cashmore et al., 2023; Dixon, 2012; Tapp, 2004). However, such hybridisations between emotive elements and football market participation cannot be simply transplanted to distant markets with drastically distinct social contexts and identities beyond the remits of English fandom. EPL clubs were found to navigate the affective, emotive cultural repertoires and structures of the host societies towards hybridisation, associating club affiliation with the concrete, deep-rooted existing host culture and identity expressions, so that EPL support becomes an adjacent, natural and self-initiated aspect of the host market. The use of familiar symbolisms in the target market has already been identified in this dissertation through discussions on the localisation of values. The utilisation of such local symbolisms would now be expanded into the dynamics of hybridisation. EPL clubs were found to infuse local cultural elements into the daily activities and discourses of football to achieve a localised and hybridised infusion of specific cultural symbols to accommodate specific distant markets. The incorporation of local culture into the football routine is often centred around national festivities. For instance, EPL clubs spend significant efforts to hybridise the local festivity of Chinese New Year with football consumption in China. In 2023, Arsenal's fixtures against their fiercest rivals, Spurs and Man Utd, coincided with Chinese New Year. In turn, the club attempted to portray the regular fulfilment of fixture schedules as a celebratory gift for its Chinese supporters. In the game against North London rival Tottenham, Arsenal players were sent on the pitch before the game wearing tracksuits that incorporate elements of Chinese calligraphy:

Figure 10: The Arsenal tracksuit incorporating Chinese calligraphy



(Source: Arsenal Official Website)

Arsenal framed the tracksuit as “auspicious clothes for a new year” (Arsenal Official Weibo, 16 Jan 2023) to associate Chinese cultural symbols with their clothing product and football routines. The visible Chinese symbols on display in the player warm-up routines of an EPL game demonstrated the club’s focus on utilising local culture to foster perceptions of proximity with the Chinese market. This pattern is consistent in Arsenal’s Chinese coverages of their EPL fixtures. In their immediate next game against Man Utd, the date of the fixture coincided with the first day of Chinese New Year. On Chinese social media, Arsenal framed the fixture as an exclusive effort from the team for their Chinese supporters:

> Arsenal will be playing Manchester United at home on the first day of the New Lunar Year… We hope to welcome the new year through a victory against United.
>
> -Arsenal Official Weibo, 20 Jan 2023

Arsenal further used the hashtag “Arsenal accompanies you through Chinese New Year” in all of its Weibo coverages to normalise football consumption as a matter of routine during the locally important New Year period. This hybridisation of matches and festivities shares similarities with football consumption during Christmas in England, indicating the potential of local hybridisations as a strategy informed by the “globality” or “Englishness” of EPL clubs. Beyond these efforts, Arsenal also released exclusive videos to celebrate Chinese New Year. In one such video, Arsenal players were filmed interacting with Chinese cultural symbols like door paintings, speaking to their Chinese virtual support in Mandarin Chinese:

Figure 11: Arsenal player Bukayo Saka speaking Chinese



Translation: “Watch us play during Spring Festival”
(Source: Arsenal Official Weibo)

Such uses of local cultural symbols in association with the team and its players aim to create a sense of unique exclusivity in the Chinese market. To see Arsenal players speaking

Mandarin and interacting with auspicious Chinese cultural symbols would be an endearing experience that construes Chinese supporters as important members of Arsenal football club. Chinese Arsenal supporters responded positively to these posts, commenting under the posts Chinese New Year wishes ("Happy Year of the Rabbit"; "Happy New Year") along with expressions of club allegiance ("COYG/Come On You Gunners"; "Arsenal are the Champions"), indicating the effectiveness of Arsenal's hybridisation with Chinese local cultural elements. Such utilisations of local cultural elements hybridise the discourses of football with the local-specific emotive and affective repertoires of actions: football consumption becomes significant as a celebration of the passing of the year, shared between the Chinese support and Arsenal. Hence, Arsenal could cultivate belonging and loyalty in its Chinese virtual support, facilitating market captation.

The hybridisation between local emotive elements and the discourses of football goes beyond cultural references. EPL clubs worked towards the captation of supporters by facilitating fans' internalisation of club support through locally understandable identity hybrids that combine EPL support with local identity symbols. One of the most pronounced tendencies of hybridisation relates to that of nationalism. Specifically, in East Asia, sports are construed locally through the discourses of national excellence and pride through individual athletes as embodiments of the national spirit (Bang & Amara, 2014; Qing & Yang, 2022). Therefore, EPL clubs tapped into this importance of nationalism and used their distant superstars as vessels of hybridisation between football support and nationalistic identities. The most prominent example of this dynamic is Spurs' Son Heung-min. This dissertation has already established Son as a dominant power in the South Korean sporting scene. Hence, the challenge for Tottenham lies in transforming Korea's nationalistic sentiments, vested in Son, into forms that incorporate the status of being a Tottenham supporter into the emotive manifestations of local identity.

In practice, Tottenham taps greatly into the success of Son at his national team on international duty. The club would post updates on Son's performance across their social media channels in the same manner that it covers Tottenham fixtures. When Son was away on international duty for the Asian Cup in January 2024 in the middle of the EPL season, Tottenham dedicated significant coverage to the performance of Son, producing bespoke images to advertise his appearances and celebrate his goals:

Figure 12: Goal graphic from Tottenham's Twitter account



(Left: Korea vs Australia; Right: Spurs vs Arsenal)

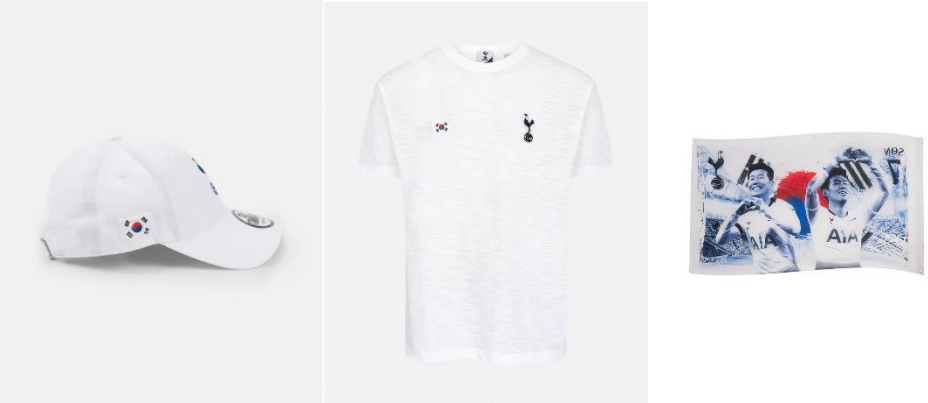
By stylistically equating Son's national team games as games of equal importance to Spurs' EPL games, the performance of Son at his national team was presented as something Tottenham fans should pay significant attention to. This might seem counter-intuitive: the coverages of Son, who was not available for EPL games, pulled the attention away from the club. However, such a view of these coverages is misconstrued. Firstly, when fixtures between Spurs and Korea come into conflict, the Korean local market, due to its nationalistic sentiments, would prioritise national team fixtures. The coverages of Son represent Spurs navigating the Korean market's preference on this matter. Secondly, through its official coverages of Son when he was on international duty, Tottenham constructed a new notion of authenticity. McCarthy et al. (2014) highlighted how social media has become a potent mechanism for EPL clubs to underline their ideal-typical supporter behaviour. Therefore, such continued reinforcement on social media would have an effect on the discourses of authenticity, crucial to the self-identification and self-classification of football supporters. Through persistent coverages on social media of Son's exploits with his national team, Tottenham was redefining an authentic supporter as someone who actively follows its players when they are representing their nations:

> It's semi-final day for @Sonny7 [Son's X handle] and @theKFA [Korean Football Association X handle] at the @afcasiancup! We're all behind you, captain!
>
> -@SpursOfficial, X, 6 Feb 2024

By incorporating the acts of supporting South Korea into the routines of authentic Spurs supporters, a new level of closeness could be achieved in the South Korean market, as the act of watching Son play for Korea is now framed by Tottenham as an act shared not just by its Korean supporters, but all of its supporters. This means that the act of expressing nationalistic pride, originally unrelated to the identity of being a Spurs supporter, now has an

aspect of club allegiance: to be proud of Son's performance is to act as an authentic Spurs fan, on top of one's national pride as a South Korean. In turn, any attention and consumption made on Tottenham are also hybridised into an expression of not just club affiliation, but Korean patriotism and nationalism. Such hybridisation of club and national identity is not limited to Son's international forays. In fact, the majority of Tottenham's hybridisation of nationalism and club support manifest in the day-to-day operations of the club, through the omnipresent Korean flags on club social media and the selection of products that infuse Korean symbols in the club shop. Such product offerings provide Korean supporters with concrete ways to express the hybridised identity between club association and nationalism:

Figure 13: Products for sale at Spurs' shop hybridising with Korean pride



(Source: Spurs Official Website)

Through the successful hybridisation between the emotionally powerful identity of Korean virtual support (nationality) and the discourses of football support (authenticity), Tottenham attempted to achieve market captation that intensify virtual followings into customers that spend on club-related products and experiences on their own accords. In turn, the specificities of the resources and strategies they employed to cultivate a glocalised local market niche in Korea shaped the features and behaviours of their newly acquired Korean supporters—the club now possess an overwhelming market share in South Korea, with Korean supporters flocking to its preseason games and home EPL games in London. Due to the club's hybridisation strategies, expressions of Korean nationalism through the vessel of Son could be observed both overseas and inside the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, with thousands of Korean supporters waving Korean flags in every EPL game as a support of their national icon Son and their EPL team Tottenham. The success of Spurs in South Korea is an ample demonstration of the potential of glocalised market development translating to actual concrete market actions and revenue—the fundamental incentive of EPL's continued global expansion and its clubs' glocalisation strategies.

4.3 Implications of Glocalisation

Through this dissertation's extensive discussion of the two primary inroads of EPL glocalisation in market development—social media localisation and local hybridisation—one could establish the dynamics of EPL clubs navigating, accommodating and incorporating local structures, preferences and symbols to achieve better market outcomes. To further substantiate the premise of employing a glocalisation framework on EPL market development as a "two way flow" model, this dissertation now focuses on the new opportunities and challenges of such messaging and strategies: as clubs cater for local preferences in pursuit of acceptability, "synergies" and emotive associations, the specificities of market locales could affect clubs' global operations. Local accommodations could transcend geographic locales and be incorporated into the very fabric of EPL clubs themselves. This section will complete the findings of this dissertation by illuminating the new impacts of such club strategies, in that by trying to localise and hybridise to the preferences of different markets, EPL clubs found themselves beholden to those very markets, bringing with them new risks and conflicts. These reverberations of the neoliberal glocalisation of the EPL, not documented previously, would have great influences on the future direction of the EPL.

4.3.1 Local Supporters

In most cases, EPL's virtual overseas market captation were roaring successes. EPL clubs were able to cultivate the emergence of distant fandoms, where monetisation is viable and sustained (Bang & Amara, 2014; Gong, 2015; Kim, 2023). As a result of such successful glocalisation of the markets, a new arena of EPL glocalisation has surfaced: the English stadiums. English stadiums have become destinations for overseas supporters to visit. Official Premier League data in 2021 shows that 1.5 million visits to EPL fixtures were conducted by foreign supporters in 2019, with 6 out of 7 top destinations being the respective home grounds of the "Big Six"[3] (VisitBritain, 2021). Specifically, visitor numbers from East Asia have been fast-growing, representing both an opportunity and a challenge for EPL clubs. With the rising number of foreign visitors, the captation of distant markets could also be conducted on home soil. However, this also means that more resources would be dedicated to the accommodation of overseas supporters who come from distinct cultural and national backgrounds different from the UK. For instance, Spurs, due to their significant South Korean fan base, focused on improving language access in their stadium and club shops

[3] The seventh being Wembley, the national stadium of England

through the hiring of Korean-speaking staff members and signages in Korean, in keeping with their "synergies" with Korean player Son Heung-min, as well as its extensive hybridisation of club support and Korean nationalism.

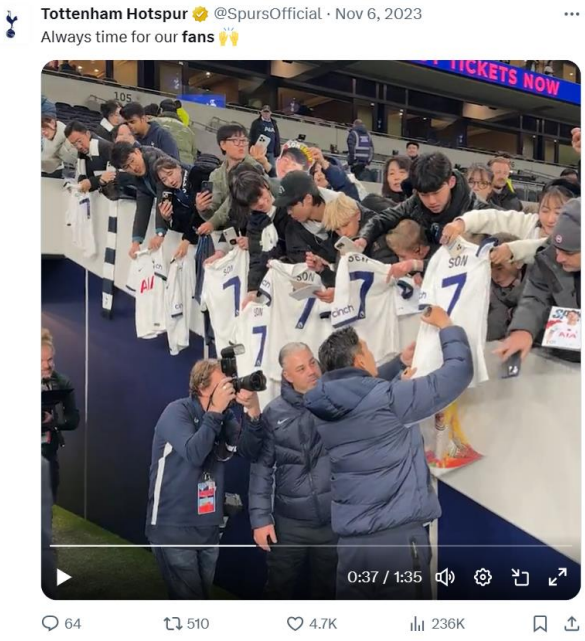
Figure 14: Korean signage at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium



(Source: Spurs Official Website)

As a result, Korean attendance and club income in the Spurs stadium has steadily increased (George-Miller, 2022), with Spurs reportedly selling up to 700 shirts to South Koreans on a typical matchday (Barlow, 2022). Such accommodations are different from the strategies discussed previously, since they affect not only the Korean local niche, but all other supporters generally. Tottenham appears to embrace the growing South Korean contingent of support on social media. It regularly posted photos and videos of South Korean supporters interacting with players and attending games in Tottenham Hotspur Stadium:

Figure 15: Spurs' Twitter account posting a video of Son signing autographs



(Source: @SpursOfficial, X, 6 Nov 2023)

One may see that, despite the supporters asking for Son's signatures on Figure 15 being primarily Korean, Spurs made no distinction between them and English attendees, folding them all as "our fans" with equal airs of authenticity. As the Korean presence in Spurs' EPL matches continues to be normalised through official social media on the global stage, the hybridisation between Korean nationalism and Spurs supportership is no longer a marketing expression restricted to South Korea. Instead, Tottenham's hybridisation of "Korean-ness" has been shown to the global audience, who will, in turn, identify Tottenham's identity as such, changing the nature of the "global" Tottenham support. However, this is not to say that Tottenham now caters exclusively to the Korean market in its stadium. Spurs aim to transform the physical EPL place to accommodate as many different markets as possible. It established a supporter's wall, where every official supporter club were listed regardless of its geographic location:

Figure 16: "Distance is just a number"



(Source: Spurs Official Twitter)

By framing all Spurs supporters as equal, and disregarding the association between authenticity and distance, Spurs framed itself as a truly transnational club, where it is equally natural for match-attending supporters to hail from the London borough of Haringey or 5,000 miles away in India, to substantial matchday profits, as foreign supporters tend to spend more in the stadium and club shop due to the rare nature of their attendance. However, such broad-stroke portrayals and accommodations of Spurs as a club for all supporters in the EPL physical space bring new potential conflicts that challenge the "universality" of Spurs. The increased attendance of overseas supporters brings questions about the status of local supporters. Due to the limited number of stadium seats and ever-increasing demands, Spurs raised ticket prices and scrapped senior concessions from 2024/25 season onwards, a move that disproportionately affected local UK supporters. On club social media, English Spurs

supporters expressed outrage by pointing out that they were being "priced out" in favour of revenue from foreign supporters:

> Current (UK) Spurs supporters are your life blood. Without them you have nothing but an empty shell of a stadium. Price them out of their seats and who will replace them? …Generational loyalty will be tossed in the rubbish heat.
>
> -Comment on Spurs' Twitter, 7 Mar 2024

Such contentions from UK locals who self-perceive as "authentic" supporters that "create the atmosphere" against "plastic" foreign supporters that "don't get it" were enabled by Spurs' attempts to be universally sensitive and accommodating to differing identities of different markets. By opening itself up to different priorities and agendas of diverse groups of support, Spurs put itself into a position of fragility, where its prior messaging of localisation and hybridisation to distant supports comes at the expense of English local supporters through the concrete processes of "displacement" physically in the stadiums and figuratively in club priorities. Instead of appearing to be sensitive to the demands and backgrounds of all, like Spurs portrayed itself to be, it is being accused of being superficial and greedy, making mockeries of generational loyal support for the sake of increased profits from foreign markets, with the very essence of EPL's global expansion being questioned by its home communities and supporter bases. In some sense, the balance between the "globality" of EPL clubs and the "locality" of the specific market now takes place also in the UK, with its English supporters relegated to just one of the many "local markets" that clubs cater for.

4.3.2 Club Images

The increasing universality of EPL clubs as representations of values and preferences of all walks of supporters from diverse nationalities due to their market developments also opens new avenues of challenges towards EPL clubs' images. As clubs attempt to be inclusive to all supporters, they incorporate the distinctions and conflicts between the preferences of distinct markets at the club level. The taking-up of such contradictory local meanings indicates the fragile moral groundings on which EPL clubs found themselves. The most prominent demonstration came in 2019, when then Arsenal player Mesut Ozil posted materials highlighting the treatment of the Chinese Uyghurs minorities, receiving the ire of Arsenal's Chinese market, where their nationalistic tendencies, so far catered to by Arsenal, come into direct confrontation with the political statement of an Arsenal player. The blowback was immediate. Arsenal's Chinese Weibo was swarmed by angry Chinese users

demanding Ozil to be sacked. The club's game against Man City was pulled from Chinese TV and the internet, with some Chinese Arsenal fans burning their club shirts to demonstrate their anger (Kuo, 2019). Given its significant market in China, Arsenal were compelled to make a statement on Weibo to mitigate the damage:

> The content published is Ozil's personal opinion. As a football club, Arsenal has always adhered to the principle of not involving itself in politics.
>
> -Arsenal Official Weibo, 13 Dec 2019

This statement did little to pacify incensed Chinese supporters. On Weibo, Chinese Arsenal fans celebrated Arsenal's defeat against Man City. The damage to the Chinese market was done, as supporters no longer perceive the club's market development attempts in good faith. In an Arsenal post on Weibo on the same day as the club statement that promoted an all-expense paid trip to London, instead of the expected buy-in due to the provision of localised exclusive access, Chinese supporters left comments that illuminated their perceptions of Arsenal's betrayal and hypocrisy:

> An all-expense paid trip? What trip? Where is your Twitter statement [on Ozil]? Get out [of China] if you [Arsenal] are playing with us.
>
> [Sarcastically] Excellent marketing, given the circumstances.
>
> -Weibo Comments, 14 Dec 2019

The point of note, beyond an expressed awareness from Chinese fans on Arsenal's localisation and hybridisation strategies, is that, despite Weibo being the primary localised social media in China for engagement with Arsenal, the commenters are aware of the lack of any club statement on Ozil on its other social media accounts like Twitter. This added to the sense of hypocrisy, amplified due to the exceptional length of consistent localisation and hybridisation Arsenal employed to develop captation in the Chinese market. Despite Arsenal's official statement being published only on Chinese social media, the implications were not limited to the Chinese market either. Just as the local Chinese perceived the club to be in the wrong due to its inaction on its main global social media accounts, other markets with different preferences and values also perceived Arsenal to be hypocritical and profit-seeking due to its refusal to take a stand on Uyghur issues in its local statement posted in China. Subsequent attempts for Arsenal to establish itself as a socially conscientious enterprise through social media postings have been met with scepticism and ridicule. Since

the Ozil incident, Arsenal has expressed solidarity with the BlackLivesMatter movement, LGBT+ rights, and Ukraine. Whenever they did so, its Twitter comments would feature prominent replies from supporters referring to the apolitical stance the club took on Ozil:

> [Solidarity] *Unless your conflict directly impacts our revenue.
>
> When Ozil defended the persecution of Muslims in the Uyghurs, you said that football should not enter politics? Now what happened?
>
> -Replies on Arsenal's Ukraine Solidarity Twitter, 6 Mar 2022

These reactions by primarily UK and European supporters reflect a conflict of preferences and values between the local market of China and the local markets of Europe in a process of value contention between EPL local markets. It also demonstrates the two-sided pressure EPL clubs now face from the UK supporters in the home market and distant supporters in host markets. As both the Ozil incident and the Rainbow Laces Campaign demonstrate, EPL's British supporters largely orient themselves with progressive social policies and representations. This comes into sharp contrast with the accommodations EPL clubs make in the Chinese market. The silence of Arsenal on Ozil reflects the value contention from the Chinese market towards home UK supporters' political values, and the potential of another form of displacement where UK fans can no longer interpret the EPL as fundamentally British institutions with British values. These dynamics of contention and displacement indicate the implications of EPL clubs' increasing reliance on market expansion and glocalisation in foreign markets, in that specific actions in one local market might come back and affect EPL clubs' standings globally in the UK and other local markets. As clubs become increasingly beholden to distant foreign markets, they progressively became the victim of their own success in market glocalisation, finding themselves catering to contradictory values to maintain their socially conscientious images, and struggling to do so. Instead, they could be revealed as calculating, hypocritical and inconsistent as different values from local markets come into contention.

This trend has been further complicated by EPL clubs' personality-dependent marketisation, where individual players become the vessels of localisation and hybridisation. As players have been empowered through EPL glocalisation, their actions, often beyond clubs' control, also have real effects on the images of the club, as seen from the reverberation from Ozil's personal action. For instance, when Jordan Henderson moved from Liverpool to Saudi Arabia, a country with repressive LGBT+ policies, his portrayed "ally" status for

LBGT+ people, discussed earlier, came into sharp contrast with his actions, with his move creating outrage in the UK. Given the extensive coverage from Liverpool's social media of Henderson as the representative of the club in championing LGBT+ rights, the personal action of Henderson to move to Saudi Arabia, beyond the control of Liverpool, had the effect of bringing the club's image into disrepute. When Liverpool posted in solidarity with an LGBT+ march after Henderson's move, sections of its support mocked the club on Twitter by associating the moral ambivalence of Henderson with Liverpool:

> Henderson just highlighted…it is called LGBT capitalism, it is not genuine.
>
> [Regarding the LGBT+ march,] you should fly in Henderson as an LGBT+ ambassador.
>
> -Twitter replies to Liverpool's post, 29 Jul 2023

While the majority of the scorn from supporters was focused on Henderson himself, from the comments above, one could see real damage being done to Liverpool's social messaging after Henderson's transfer as ingenuine and profit-seeking. Were it not for the extensive use of Henderson's persona in Liverpool's social messaging, these criticisms would not have had the effects that it had. In this sense, the maintenance of EPL clubs' images has become increasingly high-stake and difficult due to their glocalisation strategies in marketisation. As the financial rewards of neoliberal glocalisation become more readily available to EPL clubs, it is emerging that the concrete mechanisms employed towards marketisation could negatively impact these EPL clubs just as easily.

5. Discussion

The empirical picture has strongly demonstrated the plethora of approaches EPL clubs undertake in distant virtual markets towards market development. The major tendencies of marketisation displayed by EPL clubs—that of social media localisation and local football hybridisation—contribute to the sociological understanding of the concrete mechanisms of market development post the propagation of social media, where social media's effects on market encounters and captation are fully displayed through the interplay between EPL clubs and local markets. Through the documentation of these neoliberal glocalisation tendencies, this dissertation lends insights to the future development of a glocal EPL market, where existing typologies of the respective position and power of EPL clubs and local markets come under question, and contribute towards an enhanced understanding of the exercise of neoliberalism under the new conditions of glocalisation.

The two main tendencies of localisation and hybridisation identified by this dissertation serve to support the existing sociological argument by Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) to employ glocalisation as an appropriate framework to understand today's EPL. Clubs were found navigating local preferences on social media by catering to local language and platform habits, marketing specific products suiting local needs and altering their social messaging. These localisations were coherent with the heterogeneous understanding of current neoliberal glocalisation identified by Ritzer (2016). Club strategies maintained their neoliberal nature through the continued opening up of new aspects of EPL football to market competition, corresponding to Ortner (2016) and Kim's (2023) works on contemporary neoliberalism. The dynamics of EPL market expansion as a "two way flow" model, as theorised by Giulianotti and Robertson (2009), were further demonstrated through the emergence of "hybrid culture" through the transformation of local spaces, personalities and symbolisms into forms that incorporate football discourses and club interests. The wide range of hybridisation go beyond the "hybrid consumption" proposed by Dixon (2012) and Elliott (2017), where hybridisation focuses on consumption itself. Instead, this dissertation proposes that the processes of hybridisation are ingrained in local structures beyond the means of commercial exchange, as neoliberal glocalisation appears sensitive to local structures. The empirical picture demonstrated the important and persistent agency of the local in shaping the structures of the market and creating diverse market forms, contradicting the exportation model of the first wave of globalisation identified by previous literature and corresponding to

the theoretical propositions of distant fandom (Bang & Amara, 2014; Gong, 2015; Kim, 2023; Kuzma et al., 2014) and distinct supports (Hinson et al., 2020; Lee, 2022; Tobar & Ramshaw, 2022) as a result of glocalised market development. One could also observe similarities in EPL clubs' market captation efforts with the development of EPL domestically. The transformation of spaces as hybridisations adhering to local market preferences shares similarities with the commercialisation of English stadium spaces (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016; Dixon, 2012), with the personification of marketisation in footballers and celebrities rooted in English star culture (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016; Elliott, 2017; Turner, 2004), and "synergies" with such commercial entities relating to the rise of EPL corporate sponsorships (Cashmore et al., 2023; Hill & Vincent, 2006; Ireland et al., 2022). The hybridisation of EPL supportership with local emotive symbolisms and identities in distant markets relates to patterns in English fandoms that indicate their "globality" (Elliott, 2017; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004; King, 2002; Penn & Penn, 2020). Such empirical findings demonstrate the co-existence and continued influences of both homogenising and heterogenising processes in shaping distant market patterns through market encounters and captation. Moreover, the shared thematic patterns and marketisation approaches from clubs towards the domestic EPL market and overseas markets confirm Cashmore and Dixon's (2016) argument that EPL's origin in the specificities of neoliberalism in the UK would be transposed to other market locales through its global expansion.

Furthermore, the various facets of the EPL glocal market mentioned in this dissertation have experienced changes beyond the "second wave" literature. TV broadcasting's primacy, while still significant financially, has given way to the growing virtual mediation and engagements on social media. This concrete mechanism of the diversification of products into the digital sphere was not sociologically established as part of the process of neoliberal glocalisation before. Players now possess genuine agency, being local commercial phenomena and personalities in their own rights, to usher in a pattern of hybridisation instead of utilisation, even influencing clubs' images through individual actions beyond the control of EPL clubs. This continued the argument of Harris (in Elliot, 2016) on the rise of football superstars as a result of consumerism and social media, where power is transferred away from the clubs. Such developments to EPL's glocalisation justify this dissertation's focus on neoliberal glocalisation's expressions in marketisation as a sociologically fruitful exercise. The permeability of football support with discourses of celebrity fandom, traditional culture and sports nationalism further supplement the existing

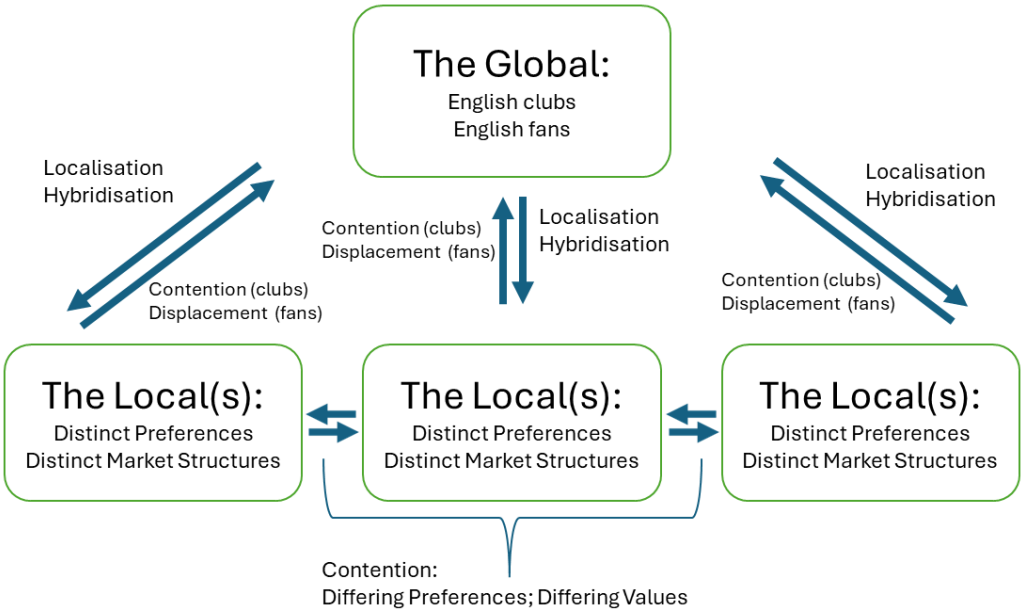
works of Bang and Amara (2014); Gong (2015) and Kim (2023) that identified the adaptation of football discourses as an expression of local priorities and societal structures. These insights go some way to affirm glocalisation and its "two way flow" understanding of global and local agency as the prominent framework of analysis for the modern EPL. Such considerations of local preferences, resources and symbolisms were argued to be ingrained in EPL's competitional structures, which correspond to the plethora of influences that defined the two waves of EPL globalisation.

The prominence of social media in mediating market glocalisation, consistently argued by multiple scholars (Cashmore et al., 2023; Han, 2020; Hill & Vincent, 2006; Ireland et al., 2022; Kuzma et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2014), were further proven through its prominent position and effects in both localisation and hybridisation. Social media played the crucial role of shaping the perspectives of virtual supporters in EPL market development, simultaneously personalising and accommodating the different needs, structures and values of different groups of supporters. This is a step beyond McCarthy et al.'s (2014) understanding of social media as a driver for traffic only. However, EPL clubs' ability to exercise power to control the social media agenda appears to be slipping. The distinctions between its different market domains could demonstrate the frivolity and hypocrisy of glocalised market development and its differing accommodations. This differs from the existing understanding of the second wave of glocalisation, where specific localisations and hybridisations of one market do not interfere with another (McCarthy et al., 2014). Such a development indicates increased global connectivity through both the progression of EPL market glocalisation and the enhanced popularity of social media, where distinct market locales were no longer isolated, separate units but interconnected and mutually influential "networks". As a result, EPL clubs opened themselves to the contestation and confrontation between different distant markets regarding the meanings of club support, finding themselves increasingly beholden to distant local meanings. Through accommodations to these distinct local meanings and distant markets, EPL clubs have become sensitive to local needs and identities, yet at the same time superficial in their commitments.

Moreover, the flexibility of EPL clubs in their social messaging indicates a decoupling of the economic organisation of market competition with the socially progressive promises of the enhancement of human welfare through market mechanisms in continuation of the critiques of neoliberalism by Appadurai (2016) and Ortner (2016). As neoliberalism's promises of social progression became lost in the pursuit of market growth in football, human

well-being could be deprioritised as the means of market expansion have the potential to become the ultimate end instead. Given these new trends identified in this dissertation, a new framework on the dynamics of neoliberal glocalisation beyond the dichotomies of global-local and homogenisation-heterogenisation will be proposed. The tightrope that EPL clubs have to walk to maintain their markets is now multifold: between the "globality" of EPL and the "locality" of specific localisation and hybridisation; between the "globality" of specific important distant markets and the "globality" of English local supporters; and between the "localities" of differing local agendas and values, Such complex dynamics of market development were not seen before in any stage of EPL globalisation, indicating a need to account for such empirical and theoretical developments in sociological literature of football market development, beyond Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) "duality of glocality" thesis by breaking down the global and the local into market agents with distinct agendas and preferences. This dissertation proposes a refined framework of neoliberal glocalisation in EPL marketisation, as seen in Figure 17.

Figure 17: The dynamics of the glocalised EPL market



In this proposed framework, the agents and dynamics of glocalisation have been further demarcated. At the global level, EPL clubs have been separated from their UK supporters, as clubs and fans have distinct agendas and preferences, with fans engaging in contention with the behaviours of the club. At the local level, as previously argued, the local market can no longer be considered in isolation. Instead, they are connected through the processes of EPL's

global marketisation and engage in contention for their respective preferences and values to be accommodated and represented by the EPL clubs. Between the global and the local, the simple dichotomy of the "two way street" of homogenisation-heterogenisation has been concretised into mechanisms observed in this dissertation. EPL clubs conduct localisation and hybridisation in multimodal discourses as an exercise of market encounter and captation, the reverberations of which manifest themselves through local contentions towards EPL clubs as hypocritical, as well as foreign supporters displacing English fans from physical attendance and influence over the clubs. This dissertation's proposed model took into account these emerging developments and themes observed in the processes of neoliberal glocalisation and consolidated these concrete mechanisms into a working model of layered, detailed actors and dynamics grounded by the empirical data to inform the sociological understanding of glocalisation in football.

Within such dynamics of neoliberal glocalisation, EPL clubs employed concepts of access, exclusivity and authenticity—existing fandom discourses—towards market development. Such captation through fandom discourses is consistent with the discoveries of Cashmore et al. (2023); McCarthy et al. (2014); and McLean et al. (2009), bringing a discussion of the essence of the English game and the status of local supporters. The appearing trend of displacement due to the "pricing out" of UK match attendees, and the waning influence UK supporters have on EPL clubs to employ progressive social messaging indicate local English supporters' diminishing importance to the global sporting institutions and experience industry that are modern EPL clubs. However, EPL clubs are still very much culturally and communally significant as institutions that maintain local emotions, cohesion and identities (Cashmore et al., 2023; Dixon, 2012; Tapp, 2004). Indeed, these local meanings and supporters are part and parcel of what makes EPL attractive globally. The direction of resolution of this tension between local English supporters and the global EPL clubs has significant implications for the sustainability of EPL and the welfare of countless UK communities. This identified tension corresponds to sociological literature on Disneyfication (Dixon, 2012), commercialisation (Elliott, 2017; McCarthy et al., 2014; Millward, 2013; Tapp, 2004; Tinson et al., 2021) and fan resistance (Cashmore et al., 2023; Claussen, 2007). Such insights on this tension are especially important with the imminent establishment of the independent football regulator from the UK government and deserve further academic attention.

Beyond the observation of the decoupling between the economic and social objectives of neoliberalism, the findings of this dissertation further problematise neoliberal glocalisation and its market development in a different way from Ritzer (2016) or Giulianotti and Robertson (2009). Neoliberalism's imperative of growth, very much manifest throughout the processes of EPL glocalisation, does not produce homogenous "non-place", "non-product", and "non-service" as Ritzer foretold due to an insensitivity of local preferences. Instead, neoliberalism's expression in football is highly permeable to local structures and capable of coopting local meanings, adhering to patterns of glocalisation. However, this is not to say that the "two way flow" model of Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) accurately reflects the tendencies of neoliberal glocalisation either: even with the establishment of local agency in producing distinct market forms, the imperative of growth is still very much present. Hence, empirical evidence suggests that football glocalisation-heterogenisation needs to be problematised in the same manner as globalisation-homogenisation has been. The imperative of growth, persistent in EPL market development and its diverse market accommodations and structures, results in the production of localised, hybridised potential "non-place", "non-service", and "non-product" through the conflictual perceptions of UK supporters and various distant supporters. These "non" market forms appear hypersensitive yet devoid of actual meaning due to the hold of distant local markets on the EPL clubs, in an extension of the existing understanding of football neoliberal glocalisation, the implications of which are profound and to be further investigated.

6. Conclusion

Empirically, the diverse strategies EPL clubs employ to transform their virtual support into concrete market actions demonstrate dynamics of neoliberal glocalisation. Clubs attempt to localise their social media virtuality, products and represented values to achieve local familiarity and affiliation. Such localisations on social media then enabled the EPL clubs to hybridise their football clubs with local elements. The hybridisation of local spaces, personalities and symbolisms provides more impetuous and potency to the promises of market encounter and captation through utilising the dynamics of authentic support, "synergies", and local cultural and emotive symbols. The results of such localisations and hybridisations are two-fold. On one hand, it has been largely successful, generating great income from distant supporters and distant markets for EPL clubs. On the other hand, as the EPL clubs take on these local preferences and meanings, they have become increasingly beholden to their distant markets. Hence, through market materialisation and intensification, EPL clubs invited the potential of new conflicts through the displacement of local UK supporters, as well as a new fragility of clubs' images as inclusive and sensitive institutions towards various distant markets. Such expressions of pronounced local agency in the process of globalisation-cum-glocalisation were not seen before in the expansion of the EPL, requiring further research. The findings of this dissertation contribute to the achievement of a coherent understanding of EPL glocalisation both as an expression of the neoliberal tendency of profit-seeking and as interactive and communicative dynamics between EPL clubs and their distant, virtual supporters, crystallising both approaches into the concrete, real-world strategies of EPL clubs in market materialisation and intensification through the evidence of social media. The new framework proposed by this dissertation on the understanding of the nuances of neoliberal glocalisation would contribute towards a further delineation of the affordances of local agency and its structural positions within the continuing progression of market glocalisation, as well as adding to the understanding of the social implications of neoliberal glocalisation as manifested through market development.

Nevertheless, some limitations exist to the approaches this dissertation has taken. Firstly, this dissertation relied on online sources to demonstrate the interactions between EPL clubs and distant local markets. While social media serves as the primary mediator of interactions between clubs and fans, other inroads that rely on physical interactions, not documented or represented through online materials and discourses, exist as marketisation

mechanisms. Due to the constraints of the data collection methods, these dynamics might not have been reflected in this dissertation, despite the majority of these attempts being represented on social media in some manner. Secondly, this dissertation selected cases that demonstrated glocalisation dynamics primarily from South Korea and China, due to the drastic distinctions between these countries and the UK in market preferences and social structures. While the reasoning of this selection is based on the empirical pertinence of such global-local interactions due to said distinctions, localisation and hybridisation could and would also occur in markets that share greater similarity with the UK while distant geographically, like those of Latin America or continental Europe. The dynamics of glocalised market development, dependent on the specific circumstances of the host market of EPL, might present different thematic patterns beyond those identified in this dissertation. Thirdly, relatively less data exists on the emerging market participants of mid-table teams such as Wolves than the "Big Six", as the dominant powers of the EPL possessed the most pronounced and successful glocal marketisation. This dissertation's identification of the emergence and development of market participants like Wolves that conduct similar localisation and hybridisation to materialise and intensify distant markets would hopefully provide future directions of study. These limitations give imperative to the continuation of the research of football in sociology to further the field of knowledge on this subject.

All in all, this dissertation argued for the distinctness of contemporary EPL market development as different from the previous waves of EPL globalisation due to its virtual dynamics and sensitivity to local preferences. It substantiated this argument by investigating EPL clubs' concrete strategies to localise social media representations and hybridise local discourses and symbolisms with football, as well as identifying the reverberations of such strategies. These findings contribute to a renewed understanding of the patterns and themes of glocalisation as the EPL's footholds deepen globally. The new challenges and implications arising from these dynamics will profoundly impact the future development of EPL and its global supporters.

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