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The platformisation of consumer culture in and through football: resisting commodification?

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ABSTRACT

This paper advances an understanding of the platformisation of society through the prism of global football. With an analysis of four continental club competitions' presence on Instagram and Facebook, this article seeks to question expressions of algorithmic consumer culture. Particularly, the article explores how users' (dis)engagement with branded content on the relevant platforms speaks to processes of "algorithmic resistance" but simultaneously can be contextualised by football supporters' historically significant resistive practices in opposition to "modern football's" commercial rationalities. By arguing that platformisation processes occur "in" and "through" football, this article contributes towards an understanding of platforms' (1) distinct, penetrative reach in football, and (2) responsive, everyday resistance practices in form of non-engagement with branded content, which could be seen to express football's commercial rationalities. The article, hence, brings forward debates relevant to consumer and popular culture, platforms and, broadly, power-resistance in platform societies.

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Introduction

Association football (hereafter football), contributing with almost half of the 2024 global sport market predicted revenue of US$112.40 billion (Statista 2024a; 2024b), can be considered as one of the most globalised popular cultural products (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004). It constitutes an important context that shapes and reflects large societal processes. Indeed, researchers across myriad fields have identified football as an illuminating context to analyse concepts such as consumer and spectacle society (Baudrillard 1998; Debord 1999), global and the network society (Castells 2000; Robertson 1992), risk and cosmopolitan society (Beck 1992, 2010), surveillance society (Foucault 1995), digital society (Fuchs 2022) and more recently: the platform society (Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018).

In the social and cultural study of football, we can observe how these changes have been theorised through a host of "*-ization*" turns. These turns, from the 1990s and onwards, have focused on football's role as a "mirror and motor" (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004) of large-scale processes by reflecting wider, external forces but also driving these said forces forward. Broadly aligning with the processes identified above, and focusing on football, scholars have demonstrated how, as a popular cultural phenomenon, it has become a space where a global culture – with its localised nuances

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– is expressed and contested (Andrews and Ritzer 2007; Cleland et al. 2017; Giulianotti and Robertson 2004; Petersen-Wagner 2017). Moreover, governing bodies like *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) and its continental counterparts have been identified as global governors (Petersen-Wagner and Lee Ludvigsen 2024a, 2024b) that are on par with other organisations such as the United Nations (UN) in terms of global governance. Meanwhile, building from the global neoliberal logic, increasingly prevalent after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and subsequently the end of a bi-polar world, highlighting aspects of consumerism and the spectacle society (Baudrillard 1998; Debord 1999), scholars have used football to demonstrate how:

> institutions (governing bodies, leagues, teams, events, individual athletes) are now un-selfconsciously driven and defined by the inter-related processes of: corporatization (the management and marketing of sporting entities according to profit motives); spectacularisation (the primacy of producing of entertainment-driven [mediated] experiences); and, commodification (the generation of multiple sport-related revenue streams) (Andrews and Ritzer 2007, 140).

Nevertheless, football's commercialisation is characterised not solely by those *external* neoliberal logics that have converted supporters into "consumers" (Giulianotti 2002, 2005; Walsh and Giulianotti 2001), but leagues and teams themselves have also internally driven forward this logic (Hayton, Millward, and Petersen-Wagner 2017; King 2004; Lee Ludvigsen and Petersen-Wagner 2022; Millward 2011; Petersen-Wagner and Lee Ludvigsen 2023a). Building from early theorisations from Foucault (1995) and Beck (1992), football's *securitization*-turn has seen wider security governance trends mirrored by the control of football fans and stadiums, but stadiums have also been used to trial new technologies later applied in other contexts, such as political protest (Lee Ludvigsen 2022). Recently, authors have also conceptualised football's digitalisation and mediatisation-turns (Hutchins and Rowe 2012; Lawrence and Crawford 2018). Concerning these two, the digital and media-related trends in football showcase how digital technologies have penetrated both the production and consumption circuits of football (Petersen-Wagner and Lee Ludvigsen 2023a), whilst football's mediatisation is illustrated by the "expanding everyday prevalence and influence of the mass and social media" (Giulianotti and Numerato 2018, 233) which collectively have underpinned football's important position in modern consumer cultures. Overall, while all these "turns" within the study of football capture football's configurations in line with social, political and technological developments of their time, it can be argued that we are now witnessing another large-scale process that, so far, has not been fully conceptualised academically, despite being mentioned in earlier work – namely, the platformisation of society in and through football. Indeed, there is still "[…] a growing need to understand how platformisation works in sport, considering the ever-evolving nature of platforms and the 'sports world'" (Petersen-Wagner and Lee Ludvigsen 2025, 237).

In this paper, we seek to reflect this call for a complex analysis of the current platform-turn, by focusing on five continental club competitions' presence on Instagram and Facebook – namely the UEFA Champions League (Europe), the CONMEBOL Libertadores (South America), the CONCACAF Champions Cup (Central and North America), the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League (Africa), and the AFC Champions League (Asia) – and how these presences speak to social, cultural and political dimensions that are inherently conflated in the spectacular global production and consumption circuits that operate within the algorithmic logic of platforms.

We do so, by focusing on one specific aspect of the current platformisation of society as identified by van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018), namely commodification, but consequently engage with the other two mechanisms – algorithmic selection and datafication – that are mutually articulated in the business models of predominantly all distinct platforms; hence reverberating on the cultural consumption and production experiences of users and creators that inhabit those places. To focus on the commodified experience of platformisation, we turn our attention to a specific technological affordance – the branded content (Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022) – defined by Facebook (2024: n.d., emphasis added) as "creator or publisher's content that features or is influenced by a business partner for an exchange of value. *Creators or publishers are responsible for tagging a*

business partner's Page when posting branded content"[1], which has been the subject of regulation in important markets to our leagues such as the United States of America (Federal Trade Commission 2023), Mexico (Procuradoría Federal del Consumidor 2024), the United Kingdom (Advertising Standard Authority 2024), some EU countries (European Commission 2023), and Brazil (Conselho Nacional de Autorregulamentação Publicitária 2021).

Against this backdrop, one important question that emerges relates to how such branded content is received on the consumption side. The consumption of "modern football," both online and offline, is characterised by acts of resistance and struggle (Numerato 2018). Yet, these acts of resistance must not be conflated with stadium or street protests against profit-oriented club owners, because "resistance," ultimately, can be far more subtle and embedded in everyday practices (Lilja and Vinthagen 2018). Thus, the relationship between (platform) users and algorithms may, as such, reveal the possibilities of "algorithmic resistance" (Velkova and Kaun 2021). Hence, the paper aims to interrogate how the *(dis)engagement with branded content* sheds light not only on specific platform processes of commodification and algorithmic resistance (Bonini and Treré 2024; Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018), but also on wider practices that are specifically present in the cultural and political experience of football across the world (Cleland et al. 2017; Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018; Numerato 2015, 2018).

Consequently, our findings not only contribute to debates within media, platform, consumer culture, and sport studies, but speak to important questions of power, governance, regulations and politics at the intersection of global private platforms and national-regional public governments' interests. This contribution is reflected by our argument holding that, by looking specifically into football cultural consumption and production circuits, we can illuminate what van Dijck (2024, 1) describes as "the lasting impact of platformization not just on labor and business management, but on democratic processes and institutions."

Literature review

Platformisation

Hailed for its potential to alter the power dynamics between users and provide a more equal space, the Internet has, over the last two decades, evolved towards a more concentrated arena where a few players are able to dominate the cultural and economic exchanges (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018). In her manifesto, Baym (2015) highlights that this concentration of power stems from the fact that social media platforms "[obscure] the unpleasant truth that "social media" is the takeover of the social by the corporate" (Baym 2015, 1), by way of inequalities that empower platforms while disempowering users (see van Dijck 2021, 2024).

These clashes between users and platforms, the value systems in which users and platforms operate, and the subsequent power imbalances are at the backbone to what van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) conceptualised as the platform society. For van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018), the contestation between private interests of platforms and public values espoused by users exists in and operates through mechanisms of datafication, commodification and algorithmic selection, which platforms advance, and the social practices and interactions which users enact when existing in and through those spaces. Those mechanisms that van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) refer to are present in different degrees across distinct platforms, and more specifically, exist in a dynamic synchrony through "platform trees" of vertical integration, infrastructuralisation, and cross-sectorisation that enhances the power of specific platforms that can control the entire processes (van Dijck 2021).

Importantly, one of the power imbalances which processes of platformisation advance through the interconnected mechanisms of datafication, commodification, and algorithmic selection is the

[1]Instagram (2024, n.d.) defines branded content as "content for which the creator has been compensated, either with money or something else of value, by a brand or business partner […] Creators must tag the brand or business partner when posting branded content on Instagram".

new (in)visibilities existing in those spaces (Petersen-Wagner and Lee Ludvigsen 2025; Poell 2020; Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022). Those power imbalances occur at both institutional, individual and collective levels, having wider impact on the cultural industries, specifically by dictating and directing cultural practices of content creation and consumption, and the circulation and visibility of specific cultural products (Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022). Because of the concentration of power in the hands of specific platforms that have "successfully aggregated significant numbers of users, cultural producers, advertisers, data intermediaries, and other third parties" (Poell 2020, 654) – or to use van Dijck's (2021) analogy of a strong trunk where the core power of platforms is enacted – new dependencies are created between cultural producers and platforms (Nieborg and Poell 2018). Following Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy (2022), one of the tensions arising from this new dependency is how the platform-infused cultural production navigates the reach (niche vs. mass), the importance (quality vs. quantity), the motive (editorial vs. advertising), and relatedness (*authentic* vs. *unauthentic*) of the cultural products being distributed and consumed through and in platforms. For the authors (*op. cit.*), the necessity for cultural producers, who are reliant on platforms, to accommodate *advertorial* material constrains not only the creative processes but also impacts the perceived authenticity and relatedness that producers have with their user base. As unpacked next, these *advertorial* materials become an important point of intersection between platform dynamics – and hence platformisation – and the cultural consumption of football.

Platformisation in and through football

In *Platform Capitalism* (2017), Srnicek demonstrates how platforms and data commodities are central to contemporary capitalism, transforming the fields of consumption, employment and communication. Hence, scholars face an important task in unpacking the historical and social conditions lying beneath platform capitalism (van Doorn 2022). As Srnieck reminds us, "[t]he digital economy is becoming a hegemonic model: cities are to become smart, businesses must be disruptive, workers are to become flexible and governments must be lean and intelligent" (2017, 5). These platform-related transformations, in parallel with football's commodification mean that the ways in which supporters consume and talk about the game have been reconfigured and platformised.

Throughout the 2000s, clubs, leagues, broadcasters and governing bodies of sport started to utilise social media platforms in order to reach existing and new fan bases (see Lee Ludvigsen and Petersen-Wagner 2023; Petersen-Wagner and Lee Ludvigsen 2023a). Smartphone apps simultaneously have been employed by clubs to construct a more digital match-day experience under the banner of innovative "smart stadiums" where electronic tickets, QR codes and Wi-Fi are constant features. As digital technologies, social media and emerging platforms increasingly layered the consumption, but also production of football as a spectacle – both inside and outside the stadium itself – Lawrence and Crawford (2018) thus argued that it is possible to speak of football's (hyper)-digitalisation. This refers to the ways in which football's industries and cultures are bound up to intersecting processes that both undermine and boost football's popularity, including:

> (1) the rapid rate of digital technological development; (2) the accessibility and sharing capabilities of social and mobile media; (3) accelerated levels of digital literacy among football fans; and (4) a greater emphasis on informational, as opposed to consumerist, forms of neoliberalism" (Lawrence and Crawford 2018, 3).

Whilst this, undoubtedly, helps us understand how football has undergone a *digital* turn, it remains important not to conflate digitalisation with platformisation despite their co-existence in the digital world. Platformisation, crucially, captures "how platforms are not just 'objects' but the result of socio-technical and political-economic processes of development and implementation; they are technically integrated into the fabric of societal actors, transforming their economic dynamics" (Kerssens and van Dijk 2021, 251), and as alluded to in the previous section, are motoring changes in diverse fields through the penetration of platform dynamics that go beyond the platforms themselves (see van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018).

The implications of this, however, is that it becomes necessary to approach platformisation as a process occurring both *in* and *through* football. Such an argument builds on Giulianotti and Robertson's (2004) theorisation of football as a mirror/motor of globalisation. We maintain that wider platformisation trends penetrate and are mirrored in football, such as the increased emphasis on content creation and on adapting to emerging platforms within football clubs. Concurrently, football may also be the driver of new platform-related trends that extend to other domains of social and cultural life, including e-ticketing or specific trends or memes that emerge during mega-events like the World Cup. In itself, this remains important because as platforms have come to "constitute the very backbone of the World Wide Web" (Caliandro et al. 2024b, 5), and football being one of the most important popular cultural phenomena (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004) is not solely reflecting the social, cultural and political importance of platforms – it is directly and indirectly reinforcing it.

Resistance, modern football and commodified platforms

Despite its conceptual popularity within sociology and social movement studies, "resistance" lacks a generally agreed-upon definition (Lilja 2022). Resistance is often viewed to possess an organised element, in opposition to power, and envisaged as a direct confrontation with sovereign expressions of power (Death 2010; Lilja and Vinthagen 2018). Yet, as Foucault (2008) noted, resistance may take up diverse shapes including what he calls "counter-conduct" and a critical attitude – which symbolise not direct revolts, but rather subtle questioning of truths and existing power relations. In this respect, we approach resistance broadly, in line with Lilja and Vinthagen (2018, 211), who emphasise that acts of resistance may be exercised by individuals or groups, and "organized or non-organized, violent or nonviolent, sometimes constructive and invisible, or it might be grand, hindering or up-scaled." As argued here, when exploring resistance in the context of both platforms and "modern football," an important task is thus to locate those more subtle, and non-organised ways in which resistance takes place, because full-scale boycotts or street protests constitute the exception rather than the norm, in this context.

Much like other processes transforming consumer cultures, including globalisation (Millward 2011) and commercialisation (Giulianotti and Numerato 2018), football's platformisation should not be considered a linear nor uncontested process. Football and commodified platforms separately and braided together may be seen as sites of resistance. In contemporary football, it is well-known that the impacts of globalisation, securitisation, commercialisation and mediatisation (Giulianotti and Numerato 2018), by many, are considered to have marginalised "traditional" football supporters, and altered the way in which football is experienced and firmly embedded football within a global marketplace where transnational investors, sponsors and broadcasters have crystallised their hegemony.

Many supporters claim that the game's modernisation has, *inter alia*, enhanced ticket prices, sanitised match-days atmospheres through policing restrictions and all-seating policies, led to changes to traditional kick-off times (due to broadcasters' growing influence) and, finally, the prioritisation of commercial development over on-pitch performances and success (Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018; Numerato 2015, 2018; Webber 2015). Given that football, its clubs, and fans have historically been anchored in their local communities, this has led to the iconic and symbolic struggle of many fan groups around the world against "modern football" (Numerato 2015). Thus, despite the slippery meanings of "modern football" (Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018) and the incoherent, sometimes contradictory, movement of supporters standing "Against Modern Football" (Webber 2015), Numerato (2015, 126) maintains that supporters displaying resistance towards "modern football" has a unifying effect on supporters:

> A shared meaning given to terms such as "the juggernaut," "the monster," and "the system of modern football" bonds football supporters together against the common "enemy" in the spheres of finance, corporations, mass media, sports federations, club management, and government.

While coalescing against a range of "common enemies," supporters who set out to oppose modern football therefore express collectively their own self-interest but also reveal their wider concerns regarding football's future (Webber 2015). Collective action, protests and even boycotts have accordingly been central to supporters' struggle over the definition of what football should *look like* (Cleland et al. 2017; Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018; Numerato 2018).

As the literature shows through different case studies, various supporters groups have, since the 1980s, utilised various strategies to express their collective sentiment (sometimes anger) at modern football, including protests and boycotts, specific campaigns, lobbying, the publication of football fanzines (or e-zines) and the organisation of formalised supporters' organisations (Hill, Canniford, and Millward 2018; Millward 2011; Numerato 2018).

Materialistically, some supporters, meanwhile, set out to consume football in an "authentic" manner; resisting hence what they see as an inauthentic, synthetic consumption – by for example, abstaining from purchasing official and branded products such as shirts, merchandise, matchday programmes and even setting up their own pre- or post-match entertainment events rather than those choreographed in a top-down fashion inside, or around stadiums (Rookwood and Hoey 2024).

In recent decades, the role of social media has also been captured here, with Hill, Canniford, and Millward (2018) arguing that the Internet has allowed movements "Against Modern Football" to bypass traditional institutional channels in their attempts to enforce social change; and has facilitated the transcending of rivalries in order to unite supporters against the influence of the media, corporations, club management and politicians. This aspect is also present in *loosely aligned transnational* movements against technological inroads into football, such as the implementation of Video Assistant Referee technology at the 2018 FIFA Men's World Cup, where supporters relied on the digital space of YouTube videos' comments section – and therefore a technological artefact – to resist and oppose another technology increasingly seen to represent modern football (Petersen-Wagner and Lee Ludvigsen 2023b).

Yet, while this literature demonstrates that the digital world provides tools for mobilisation and contention, and that supporters display resistive tendencies in their consumption of football, an important research gap appearing here relates to how (dis)engagement with platforms and related (e.g. branded) content is, in itself, revealing of a possible resistance against elite football's commercially oriented directions, especially given the many forms of subtle, individual and uncoordinated everyday resistances mentioned earlier. In this regard, this mobilisation and contention existing within the cultural production and consumption of football find resonance with other forms of cultural resistances that are common to the wider platformised and algorithmic spaces (Airoldi and Rokka 2022; Bonini and Treré 2024; Velkova and Kaun 2021). As Bonini and Treré (2024, 10) highlight:

> On the one hand, online platforms developed a technical infrastructure that could calculate, datafy, and commodify visibility; on the other hand, wherever visibility is at stake, we find individual and collective practices that attempt to artificially manipulate and reappropriate it. Visibility is thus the battleground where platforms and cultural workers confront each other.

As contended, the struggle over visibility, which includes processes of (dis)engagement with specific content can be understood as one type of subtle, everyday resistance that is not organised or revolting per se (cf. Lilja and Vinthagen 2018) but still occurs as an act of not accepting (cf. Foucault 2008), opposing, circumventing or manipulating *something* or extant power relationships.

The subtle and invisible act of *disengaging* therefore is an individual act with (potential) political implications in a time where platforms' power is directly linked to their position in the platform economy. This power, in turn, allows platforms to "define the playing field on which platforms operate," and in some cases even exercising influence over state legislatures (Vallas and Schor 2020, 285). With this conceptualisation of resistance, we may approach content disengagement as one *type* of resistance, although we acknowledge the "large" distance between this type of

resistance and, for example, boycotts, disobidience or taking to the streets. These forms of individual and collective resistance to platform dynamics, and especially mechanisms which affect visibility, have wider impacts to the commodified experiences of users in those spaces.

As Bonini and Treré (2024) show, users, by having a degree of agency in how the algorithmic experience unfolds, and hence a degree of expertise through forms of algorithmic gossip (see Bishop 2019), seek to *game* this experience in order to maximise their political, cultural and economic position, while minimising the ones by the platforms. A similar logic is found by Manriquez (2019) who noticed how Uber drivers participating in the platform economy use their local knowledge to *game* the algorithm and maximise revenue during busy periods with price surges.

The algorithmic articulation that exists through a dialogical process, that mediates platform control and consumer resistance takes place in three distinct levels: at the *individual*, in making sense of the algorithmic experience; at the *collective*, through hijacking the system; and, at the *market*, through contesting algorithmic representations (Airoldi and Rokka 2022). These forms of individual and collective resistances – as through *engagement pods* (O'Meara 2019) – to platform dynamics, and particularly to the algorithm commodified experience, as articulated by Bonini and Treré (2024) and Airoldi and Rokka (2022) revolve around the *gaming* of visibility (see Bishop 2019; O'Meara 2019) in which users wish to become more visible – or enhance their favourite cultural manifestation (e.g. band, singer) to essentially become more visible.

Methods

In order to empirically capture platformisation mechanisms in and through football, this article uses as a starting point, and subscribes to, the key premises of digital sociology (see Caliandro 2024). Digital sociology is concerned primarily with investigating digital social life (Marres 2017) and recognises that, as Lupton (2014, 5) writes, "life is digital." In essence, it sets out to analyse the "affordances of technologies in various social spheres and how they shape and are shaped by social relations, social interaction and social structures" (Fussey and Roth 2020, 660). Notwithstanding, this has implications for consumer theorists and for how to *do* social research both methodologically and theoretically. With regards to the former, we contend that if social researchers, as Lupton (2014, 5) emphasises, are to "make the study of digital technologies central to its very remit " – then this involves a significant need for continual methodological reconsideration, fine-tuning and innovation in order to keep up with the sheer speed of digital societies (e.g. platforms).

By committing to exploring digital social life – and the power relations that no longer operate according to a traditional offline/online dichotomy – this article follows Caliandro et al. (2024a) methodological approach for the comprehension of consumer culture that happens in and through platforms. In doing so, we become primarily concerned with *following the traces* left by users when engaging in those platformised spaces, either by producing or consuming cultural products. For the former, we turn our attention to the five continental club competitions' institutional presence on Instagram and Facebook – namely the UEFA Champions League, the CONMEBOL Libertadores, the CONCACAF Champions Cup, the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League, and the AFC Champions League – and particularly how their cultural production includes or excludes branded content (*advertorial*) material. Consequently, for the latter, we focus on how end-users engage with branded and non-branded content through the *liking*, *viewing*, *commenting* digital traces of (dis)taste (Airoldi 2021) left on those forms of content. Importantly, these five competitions were selected as they (i) represent the primary continental club competitions on their relevant continent; and since (ii) they allowed for covering a *global* fan base, given that each season, new clubs may qualify for the said competitions. Here, we must acknowledge that one limitation of this approach that we cannot capture other, or secondary continental competitions such as, for instance, the UEFA Europa or Conference Leagues.

In order to capture the traces left in the consumption and production circuits, we gained accessed to Meta Content Library v4 (Meta Platforms, Inc. 2024a) which includes Facebook data

from "posts shared to and information about Pages, groups and events, as well as a subset of public profiles belonging to widely-known individuals and organisations' and Instagram data from "posts shared by and information about business and creator accounts, as well as a subset of personal accounts belonging to widely-known individuals and organisations" (Meta Platforms, Inc. 2024b, nd). Our selection of Instagram and Facebook, meanwhile, means that the study arrives with some limitations, as other social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok could have provided another layer of comparison with regards to engagement patterns (likes, comments) across various platforms. Moreover, the use of Meta Content Library v4 also comes with potential limitation, as the data available for researchers are aggregated, meaning that there is a lack of granularity in terms of who are the users (e.g. gender, age, geographical location, etc.) who (dis)engage with the available content.

In the end of October 2024, using the Meta Content Library v4, the first author downloaded all posts and relevant associated metadata (metrics such as views, likes, comments, and information such as creation time, is_branded_content: false or true, and media_type) of the Facebook public profiles of UEFA Champions League, CONCACAF Champions Cup, CONMEBOL Libertadores, TotalEnergies CAF, and AFC Champions League. Meanwhile, for Instagram we have used similar profiles and metadata, accounting for the fact that CONMEBOL curates two distinct profiles: one in Spanish and another in Portuguese, which we have analysed separately. With the use of Python language, we further manipulated the datasets to include a relative metric for our polynomial regression – ratio of active (sum of likes and comments) and passive (views) – for posts in which the views metric is available.[2] To conduct our statistical analyses, we then employed a combination of SPSS v.29 (IBM 2024) for descriptive, chi-square and non-parametric tests, and a combination of Python packages[3] for polynomial regression and trend visualisation. Polynomial regressions are used to estimate curvilinear relationships – rather than linear relationships – between independent and dependent variables, while a cubic term estimates two inflection points in the curvilinear relationship (Hair et al. 2019). In our analysis, we have fit a 5th degree polynomial that can have up to three inflection points. The choice of a 5th degree polynomial sought to find a balance in the regression model estimation that avoided overfitting by adding extra parameters, while at the same time finding substantial and moderate effects at 0.75 and 0.50 levels as indicated by Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011).

Accordingly, the next sections unpack how the *(non-)existence* of and *(dis)engagement* with branded content reveal both aspects of platformisation and resistance in platformised spaces, and production-consumption elements that are culturally important for our *loci* of analyses – the platformised football.

Results

The five continental competitions' institutional presence on Facebook and Instagram follows different historical trajectories. In terms of Facebook, released to the general public in 2006 (Bucher 2021), the UEFA Champions League and AFC Champions League can be considered as *early adopters* amongst the different continental competitions as they have curated their profiles since February and October 2011, respectively, while the TotalEnergies CAF posted its first post on November 2013, with CONCACAF Champions Cup in March 2016, and finally, the CONMEBOL Libertadores as recently as in April 2018. Meanwhile, on Instagram, which was released as an iOS app in 2010 and bought by Facebook – now Meta Platforms, Inc. – in 2012 (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020), the situation was somehow distinct. AFC Champions League posted first in April 2013,

[2]Facebook posts' views counts are available only for content shared after 1st January 2017, and Instagram posts' views counts are only available for content shared after 1st October 2022 (Meta Platforms, Inc. 2025).

[3]Pandas (McKinney 2010), Matplotlib (Hunter 2007), Seaborn (Waskom 2023), Numpy (Harris et al. 2020), and SciPy (Virtanen et al. 2020).

Table 1. Facebook descriptive (is_branded_content).

post_owner.named			*N*	%	Avg. Per Day
AFC Champions League	Valid	FALSE	12,023	100.0	
		TRUE	1	0.0	
		Total	12,024	100.0	2.52
CONCACAF Champions Cup	Valid	FALSE	12,481	97.8	
		TRUE	285	2.2	
		Total	12,766	100.0	4.04
CONMEBOL Libertadores	Valid		20	.1	
		FALSE	23,239	97.3	
		TRUE	618	2.6	
		Total	23,877	100.0	10.01
TotalEnergies CAF	Valid	FALSE	12,857	99.9	
		TRUE	13	.1	
		Total	12,870	100.0	3.16
UEFA Champions League	Valid		253	.8	
		FALSE	29,920	90.9	
		TRUE	2,752	8.4	
		Total	32,925	100.0	6.39

followed by UEFA Champions League in November 2014, and the CONMEBOL Libertadores profiles in 2018 (May for the Spanish and July for the Portuguese language). In the early 2020s, TotalEnergies CAF (February 2021) CONCACAF Champions Cup (October 2022) posted for the first time.

Importantly, these distinct platform historiographies demonstrate how platform spaces come to be configured dialogically in relation to their physical existence as spectacularised products. Ultimately, although the competitions were all established in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, their commercial trajectories have differed. Currently, it could be argued that the UEFA Champions League and CONMEBOL Libertadores's status as "the main continental competitions worldwide" are heavily linked to the symbiotic nexus between popularity, commercialisation and media reach (Castilla, González-Ramallal, and Mesa 2025, 1). These distinct historiographies reinforce the notion that there are not only a multitude of commercialised and mediatised leagues, but also a multitude of Facebook(s) (Bucher 2021), and consequently of Instagram(s), that are produced at the intersection of platform affordances and users' appropriation practices.

This distinct appropriation by users – either institutional or end-user – holds importance, as Meta Platforms, Inc. (2024b, 61) claims that its "family monthly active people (DAP) was 3.98 billion on average for December 2023," which is a metric that "estimates the number of unique people using at least one of Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, and WhatsApp" (Meta Platforms, Inc. 2024b, 4). This means that around half of the world's population is engaging through and in at least one platform operated under the Meta banner. The uniqueness aspect in which those platforms were appropriated into the production and consumption circuits is also reflected when focusing on content creation in general, and the appearance of branded content in particular. As visible in Tables 1 and 2, the leagues have curated content distinctively across the two platforms, with TotalEnergies CAF, CONCACAF Champions Cup – and to some extent, CONMEBOL Libertadores (if assuming that some of the content is replicated on both profiles) – posting more on average per day on Facebook, while the UEFA Champions League and AFC Champions League having more posts per day on average on Instagram.

Similarly, when focusing on the existence of branded content on these leagues' institutional profiles, we observe clear differences – statistically significant on chi-square tests (<.001) in both platforms – in the use of this technological affordance. Furthermore, what this result indicates, as the UEFA Champions League and the CONMEBOL Libertadores clearly posts more branded content compared to the other leagues, is a possible reflection of the importance of those continental confederations in world football (see e.g. Castilla, González-Ramallal, and Mesa 2025; King 2004) but, most significantly, the level of commercialisation and mediatisation processes that

Table 2. Instagram descriptive (is_branded_content).

post_owner.named		N	%	Avg. Per Day
AFC Champions League	FALSE	20,443	100.0	
	TRUE	4	0.0	
	Total	20,447	100.0	4.85
CONCACAF Champions Cup	FALSE	2,849	99.8	
	TRUE	7	0.2	
	Total	2,856	100.0	3.89
CONMEBOL Libertadores – ES	FALSE	21,813	96.8	
	TRUE	711	3.2	
	Total	22,524	100.0	9.51
CONMEBOL Libertadores – PT	FALSE	20,617	92.6	
	TRUE	1,645	7.4	
	Total	22,262	100.0	9.72
TotalEnergies CAF	FALSE	3,867	99.9	
	TRUE	2	0.1	
	Total	3,869	100.0	2.24
UEFA Champions League	FALSE	23,572	90.6	
	TRUE	2,437	9.4	
	Total	26,009	100.0	7.17

these competitions have undergone. For instance, the UEFA Champions League's global broadcasting deals were worth over 2.6 billion dollars in 2022/2023 (Statista 2024c). CONMEBOL, meanwhile, received around 1.4 billion dollars for both of its continental competitions for a three-year cycle (the Libertadores and the Sudamericana) (Sportcal 2022), and CAF, CONCACAF and AFC deals were bundled together with other continental club and national teams' competitions. Hence, it is possible to argue that the mediatisation and commercialisation in and through these competitions also reflect their platformisation, and specifically the commodification mechanism as highlighted by van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) – in and through those institutional profiles. This commercialised practice encountered in both UEFA Champions League and CONMEBOL Libertadores is further seen when plotting a 5th degree polynomial between the monthly number of posts (either branded or non-branded) as dependent variables and time aggregated in months as independent variable, filtered by the different media types, highlighting the distinct platform affordances (Figure 1).

While the low R^2 in some of the content producer, platform and media type combination – with a caveat that "in some research contexts R^2 values of 0.10, and even lower, are considered satisfactory" (Hair et al. 2019, 780) – suggests that time alone does not strongly explain the variability in the dependent variable, which migh indicate that other factors may be influencing the trend. Nevertheless, it is still possible to note that there is a degree of variance for the different types of content combination (branded and media type) that reflect the seasonality of those leagues, and the possible importance of a specific platform for the spectacularisation of the league – such as with a decline on the use of Facebook by CONMEBOL Libertadores and an increase by the AFC Champions League. In terms of the associated metrics (likes, views, comments) in relation to both branded and non-branded content, through descriptive analyses it is already possible to note a clear distinction between the level of engagement between the two types of content. As apparent in Tables 3 and 4, on both platforms and in all the different leagues the non-branded content has been consistently engaged more either through more viewing, liking or commenting.

This level of disengagement with branded content appearing across the different leagues and platforms evidences a potential individualised *gaming* of the algorithm (see Airoldi and Rokka 2022) that could potentially be seen as a type of collective action that follows the cultural practices loosely associated with the "against modern football" movements that are, in themselves, incoherent. Hence, those cultural practices that occur in and through football (i.e. resisting commercialisation) – in the *physical world* – are also evident in the cultural practices in and through platforms and the associated content shared by the different leagues. Those distinctions, where statistically

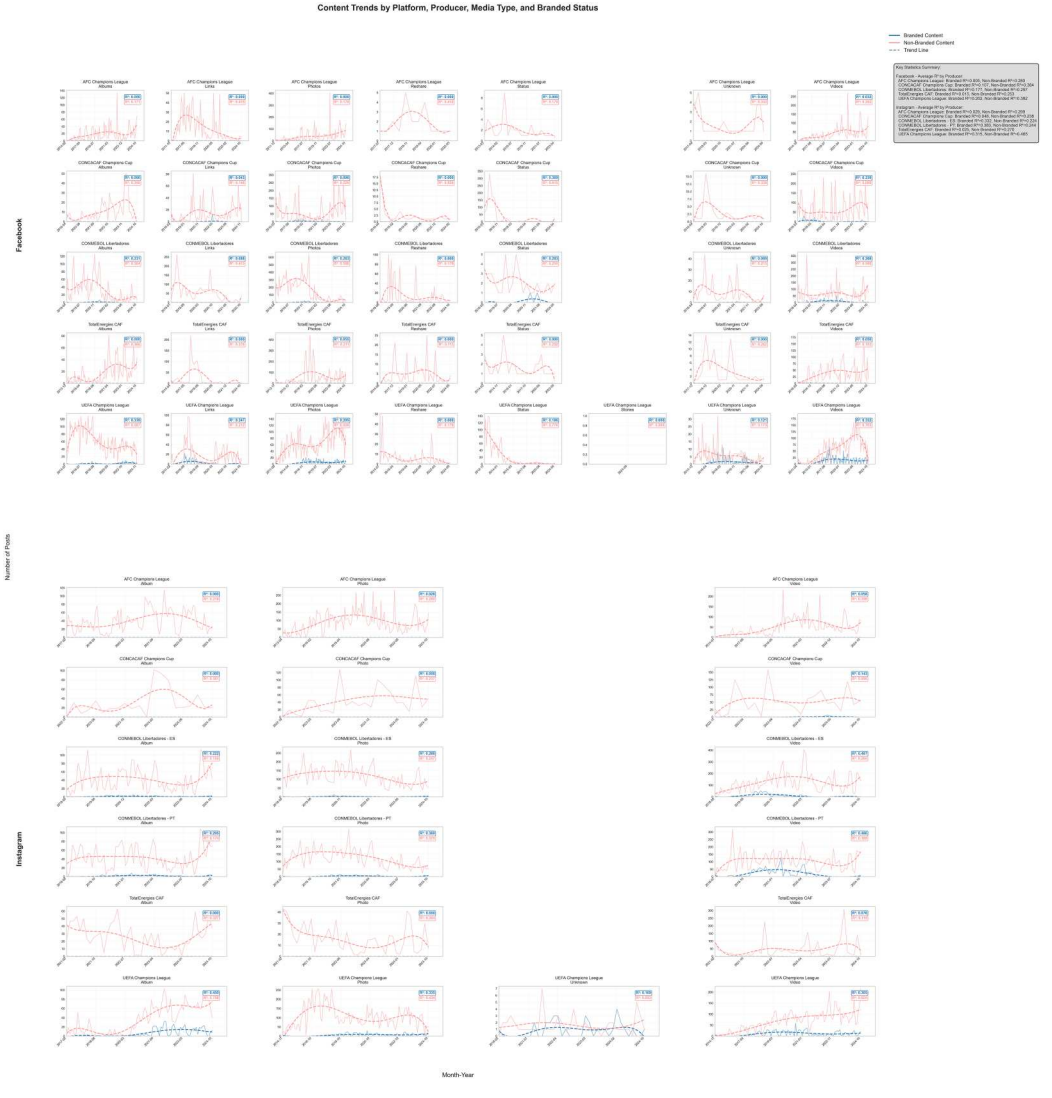

Figure 1. Content trends by platform, producer and media type.

confirmed (<.001) by non-parametric tests (Mann–Whitney *U* test) on profiles with enough contents posted as branded or non-branded, including CONMEBOL Libertadores and UEFA Champions League on Facebook, and CONMEBOL Libertadores in Spanish and Portuguese and UEFA Champions League on Instagram. This disengagement is more clearly seen on the plotted high order polynomial regressions (Figures 2 and 3) – with the same caveat of a low R^2, especially for content producers with very low numbers of branded content in their different media type library – where the average likes for non-branded content tend to increase in absolute number or relational to the number of likes for branded-content (e.g. the decrease in average likes for non-branded is less pronounced than for branded). In a similar vein to likes, the engagement through commenting (Figure 3) shows a consistent decrease for branded content in either absolute or relational terms. Nevertheless, as it is possible to note, in both forms of engagement there are exceptions, where for photos, as a media type, on both Instagram profiles curated by CONMEBOL Libertadores (PT and ES) and the one by UEFA Champions League, there is a slight increase – in either absolute or relational terms – of engagement for branded content in relation to non-branded

Table 3. Facebook descriptive statistics by branded content type.

post_owner.named	is_branded_content		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AFC Champions League	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	11,942	0	9,801	34	172
		statistics.like_count	11,851	0	139,101	875	3,570
		statistics.views	11,313	135	28,610,274	83,899	408,401
		Valid N (listwise)	11,157				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	1	5	5	5	.
		statistics.like_count	1	542	542	542	.
		statistics.views	1	88,415	88,415	88,415	.
		Valid N (listwise)	1				
CONCACAF Champions Cup	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	12,459	0	4,091	29	98
		statistics.like_count	12,412	0	67,610	416	1,678
		statistics.views	10,105	126	34,189,937	99,914	537,617
		Valid N (listwise)	10,031				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	285	0	352	14	39
		statistics.like_count	285	0	3,551	147	343
		statistics.views	280	506	4,579,733	50,538	284,833
		Valid N (listwise)	280				
CONMEBOL Libertadores		statistics.comment_count	9	0	968	158	325
		statistics.like_count	9	25	2,846	492	912
		statistics.views	20	9,141	270,905	57,720	81,551
		Valid N (listwise)	7				
	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	21,301	0	294,235	306	3,125
		statistics.like_count	20,832	0	108,889	1,497	3,485
		statistics.views	23,225	205	28,426,228	307,968	622,392
		Valid N (listwise)	20,564				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	534	0	49,168	267	2,225
		statistics.like_count	520	28	17,278	899	1,649
		statistics.views	618	9,245	2,370,222	259,677	336,034
		Valid N (listwise)	510				
TotalEnergies CAF	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	11,049	0	353,742	473	3,859
		statistics.like_count	9,966	0	115,676	3,111	6,972
		statistics.views	11,889	112	24,889,289	454,921	1,104,984
		Valid N (listwise)	9,071				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	9	69	521	224	140
		statistics.like_count	9	799	4,020	1,903	927
		statistics.views	13	49,897	768,753	163,992	211,057
		Valid N (listwise)	9				
UEFA Champions League		statistics.comment_count	89	6	3,746	321	599
		statistics.like_count	72	0	98,183	11,771	15,745
		statistics.views	243	5,797	6,170,124	1,110,038	1,073,088
		Valid N (listwise)	58				
	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	21,212	0	96,778	1,087	3,050
		statistics.like_count	16,409	0	3,578,351	41,597	80,861
		statistics.views	21,864	105	478,341,999	3,364,566	8,658,596
		Valid N (listwise)	10,283				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	1,912	0	28,425	516	1,335
		statistics.like_count	1,570	0	339,911	10,772	19,839
		statistics.views	2,559	19,529	82,053,338	1,353,486	2,451,358
		Valid N (listwise)	1,424				

content, meaning that the gap between the two is narrowing down. This potentially suggest an adaptation in terms of content production, where photos become the preferred affordance for curating branded content, in comparison to other commonly used affordances such as albums and videos.

Nevertheless, while it was expected that, because of the *negative trend* for comments and likes across the different profiles influencing *negatively* the algorithm in pushing branded content, when analysing the number of views over time, it is possible to note (see Figure 4) how both branded and non-braded content have more similar trend shapes. This is particularly clear when focusing on the use of albums and photos platform affordances on the UEFA Champions League Facebook and Instagram profiles, and, to some extent, on the use of video affordances on the

Table 4. Instagram descriptive statistics by branded content type.

post_owner.named	is_branded_content		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AFC Champions League	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	18,234	0	303,498	354	3,040
		statistics.like_count	18,234	9	347,005	8,951	11,429
		statistics.views	4,302	2,236	4,291,529	181,459	220,011
		Valid N (listwise)	3,794				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	4	10	728	195	356
		statistics.like_count	4	2,021	11,348	4,820	4,384
		statistics.views	0				
		Valid N (listwise)	0				
CONCACAF Champions Cup	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	2,849	0	642	31	54
		statistics.like_count	2,849	64	97,269	3,034	6,267
		statistics.views	2,844	7,437	2,949,125	98,657	130,601
		Valid N (listwise)	2,844				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	7	2	18	8	6
		statistics.like_count	7	188	2,108	805	854
		statistics.views	7	26,956	151,444	47,142	46,024
		Valid N (listwise)	7				
CONMEBOL Libertadores – ES	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	21,504	0	32,375	289	527
		statistics.like_count	21,504	2	858,962	20,444	30,926
		statistics.views	5,649	69,790	22,968,455	876,379	879,624
		Valid N (listwise)	5,544				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	711	0	1,413	103	145
		statistics.like_count	711	119	53,335	5,771	6,763
		statistics.views	54	138,546	1,327,210	505,238	295,525
		Valid N (listwise)	54				
CONMEBOL Libertadores – PT	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	19,926	0	51,458	157	624
		statistics.like_count	19,926	1	1,266,039	12,350	30,792
		statistics.views	5,194	12,836	21,222,878	524,971	924,247
		Valid N (listwise)	5,001				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	1,640	0	1,663	47	106
		statistics.like_count	1,640	13	46,727	2,563	3,710
		statistics.views	91	49,624	612,557	191,065	107,665
		Valid N (listwise)	86				
TotalEnergies CAF	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	3,251	0	17,077	256	663
		statistics.like_count	3,251	246	558,475	15,922	24,833
		statistics.views	2,072	1,785	16,103,716	429,069	598,937
		Valid N (listwise)	1,696				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	2	9	51	30	30
		statistics.like_count	2	1,338	3,869	2,604	1,790
		statistics.views	0				
		Valid N (listwise)	0				
UEFA Champions League	FALSE	statistics.comment_count	22,456	0	111,043	2,435	5,212
		statistics.like_count	22,456	463	12,897,900	449,400	422,814
		statistics.views	6,739	181,132	165,257,235	10,271,379	8,779,068
		Valid N (listwise)	5,681				
	TRUE	statistics.comment_count	2,364	0	75,364	1,705	3,901
		statistics.like_count	2,354	1,630	1,678,231	232,416	193,316
		statistics.views	850	599,194	56,645,332	6,000,542	4,181,057
		Valid N (listwise)	777				

CONMEBOL Libertadores Spanish Instagram profile. This *similarity* in shape in terms of visibility, while having different shapes regarding engagement as in Figures 2 and 3, suggest that both branded and non-branded content are not being pushed *similarly* by the algorithm. This potentially suggest that while Meta Platforms Inc., acknowledges the existence of this new business practice of brands paying for appearing on content creators' feeds and technically affords that through the branded content feature (see Poell, Nieborg, and Duffy 2022), as the multi-sided market matchmaker (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018), it does not profit directly from this practice. Nevertheless, the use of the branded content affordance by creators, and a potential increase in visibility without the accompanying engagement as our analyses have shown, indicates that this form of content is either boosted by creators and brand collaborators

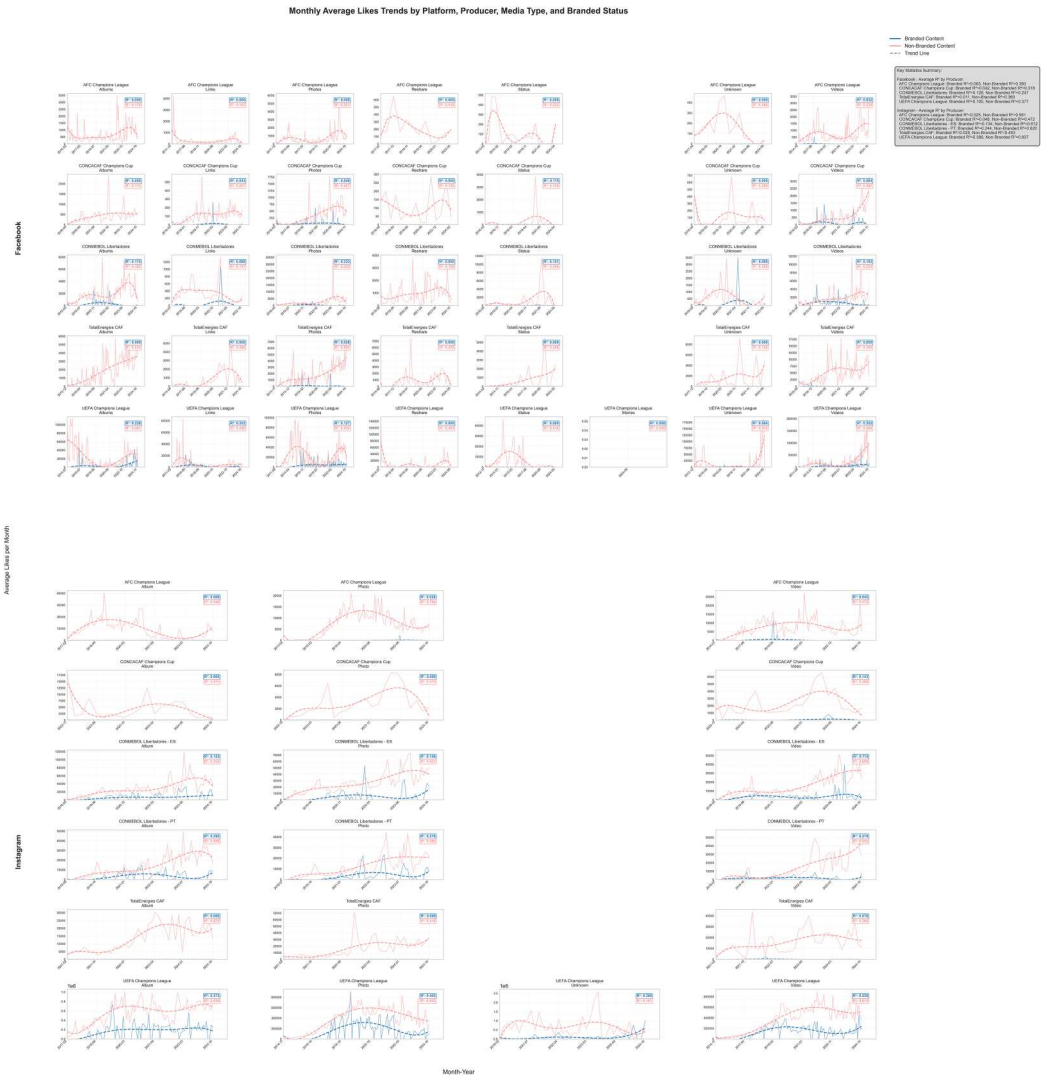

Figure 2. Monthly average likes trends by platform, producer and media type.

via ad promotions irrespective of engagement inputs to the algorithm, or Meta by *artificially* boosting it through its algorithm engineering reinforces its position as a key ecosystem and marketplace for creators and brands to inhabit. Hence, it could be argued that those algorithmic practices by Meta as the platform matchmaker seek to directly benefit it financially, as by increasing its advertisement revenue as indicated in their last financial statement when it was claimed that "ad impressions delivered across our Family of Apps increased 28% year-over-year in 2023" (Meta Platforms, Inc. 2024c, 61).

While the average views trends above highlight more aspects that are inherent to the platform, in terms of its control of what is made visible or invisible, when analysing a relative metric of the active (comments plus likes) by passive (views) consumption practices (see Figure 5), it is possible to perceive accommodations and articulations between all users: content creators, end users, and possibly the platform through its algorithm. This is more clearly seen in the Facebook profile for the CONMEBOL Libertadores, specifically in the case of albums, where a U and inverted-U trend, for non-branded and branded content, respectively, exist.

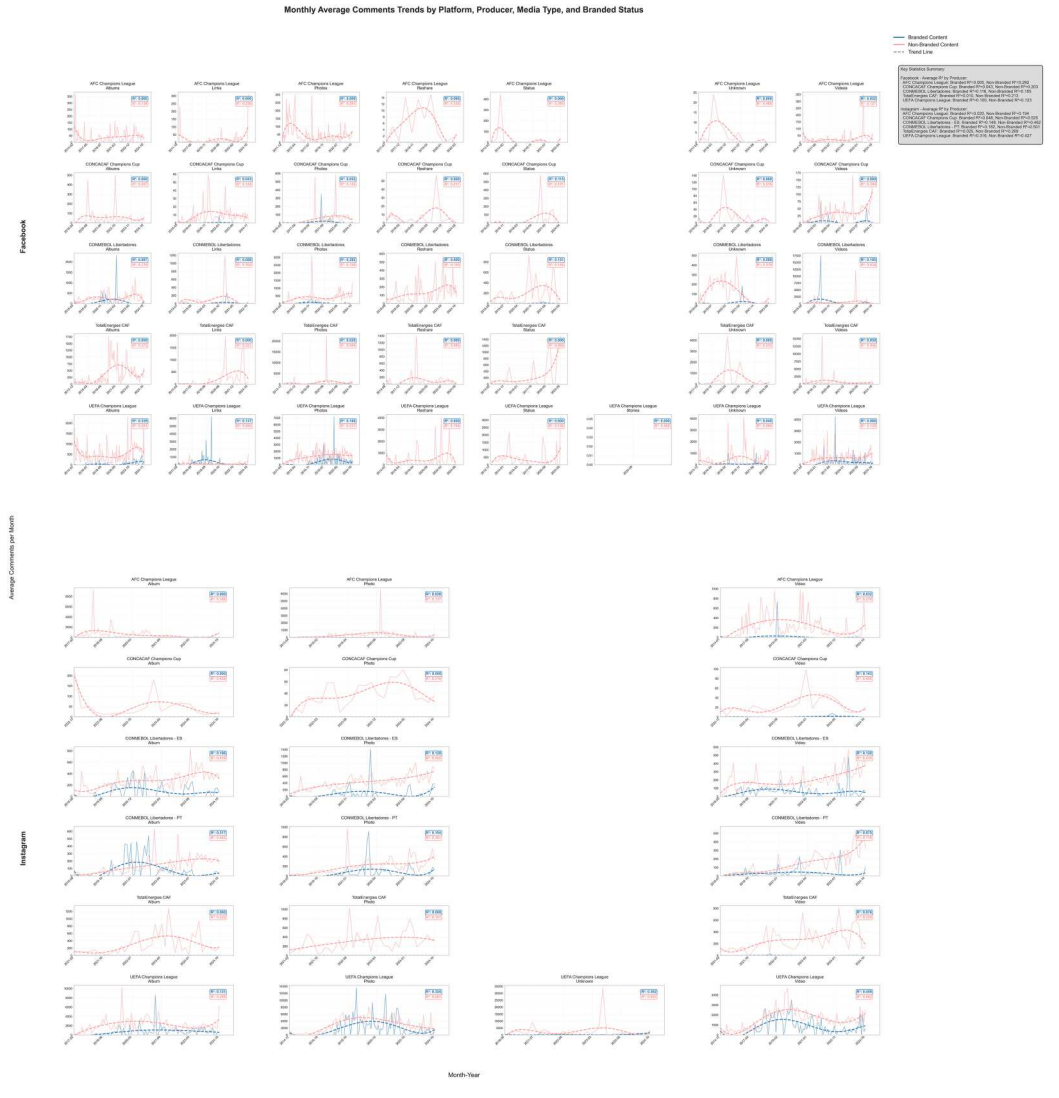

Figure 3. Monthly average comments trends by platform, producer and media type.

This particular U and inverted-U shape potentially show accommodations to the content creation practice (e.g. making branded content to look more organic and authentic) and hence on average improving engagement, with subsequently users becoming highly aware of this type of content and then *gaming* the algorithm through disengagement practices by users. Meanwhile, a similar phenomenon might also be occurring on the UEFA Champions League Instagram profile, and on CONMBEOL Libertadores Portuguese and Spanish Instagram profiles, in terms of the photo affordance. Here, while the inverted U-shaped trend lines follow *similar* trajectories, overtime there is an increase in relational and absolute number in the ratio of active to passive engagement for branded content in relation to non-branded content. Interestingly, this is not found on other media types, particularly albums and videos, indicating a possible accommodation by content creators in terms of moving branded content to photo-type content, that reflects or is potentially dictated by users' *gaming* practices.

Taken together, what the different analyses show is a historical lower level of engagement with branded content, nevertheless with possible accommodations and adjustments by the different

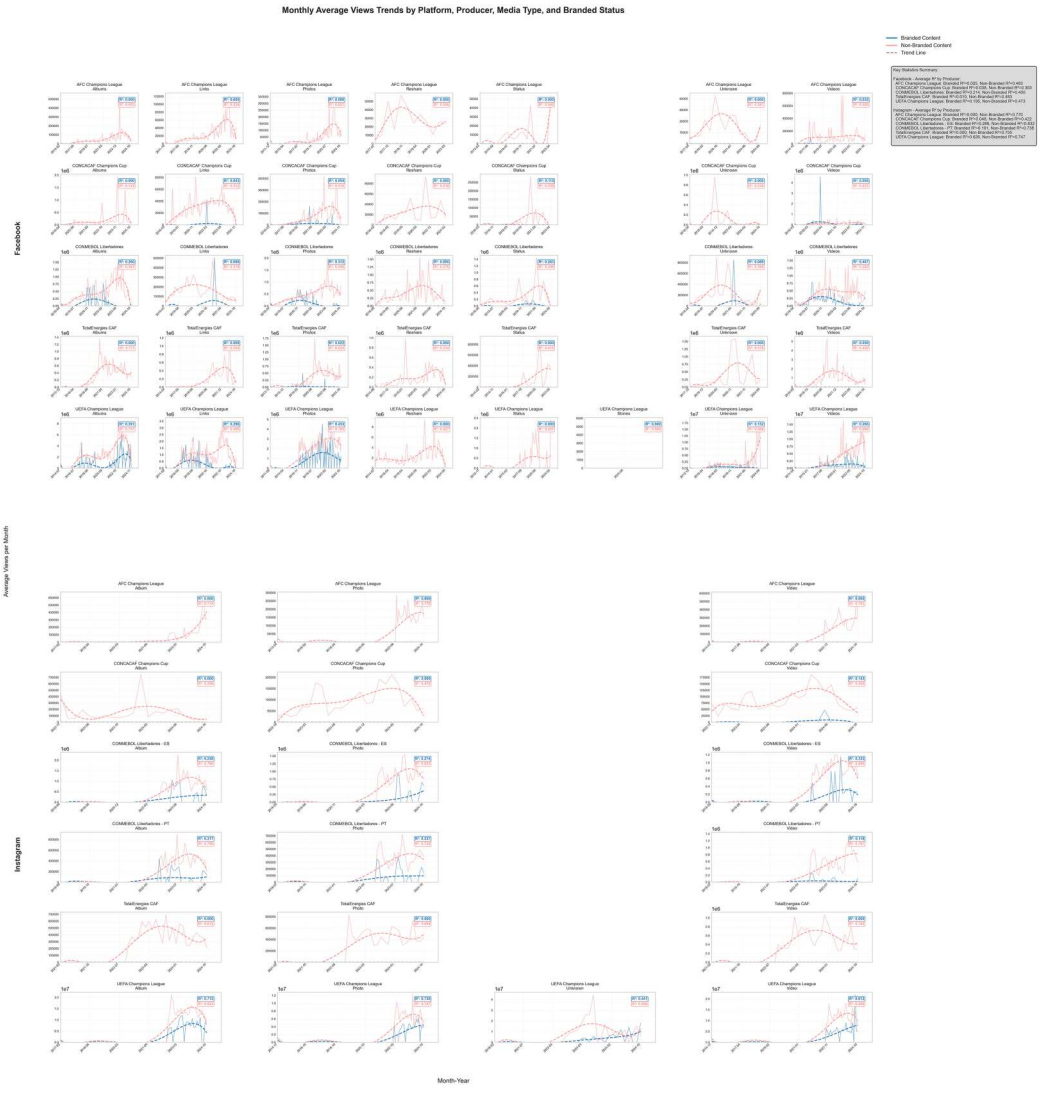

Figure 4. Monthly average views trends by platform, producer and media type.

entities involved in this multi-sided market, either through potential changes in practices of content creation by the leagues, temporal changes in (dis)engagement through the different affordances (likes and comments) by users, and tweaks to the algorithm by the platforms.

Discussion and conclusion

In making sense of the disengagement with branded content on the relevant platforms, it is possible to return to the discussion of supporters' discontent with football's hyper-commercialisation. Whilst not all supporters actively resist the commercial logics inscribed in football, and whilst even those who do, often still continue to consume football, the literature has primarily focused on supporters resisting high ticket prices, profit-oriented club ownerships and kick-off times dictated by broadcasters (Millward 2011; Numerato 2018). Adding to this, it is possible to argue that branded content represents another component of football's mediatisation and commercialisation that is, subsequently, disengaged with by users who, in this context, are likely to also be supporters.

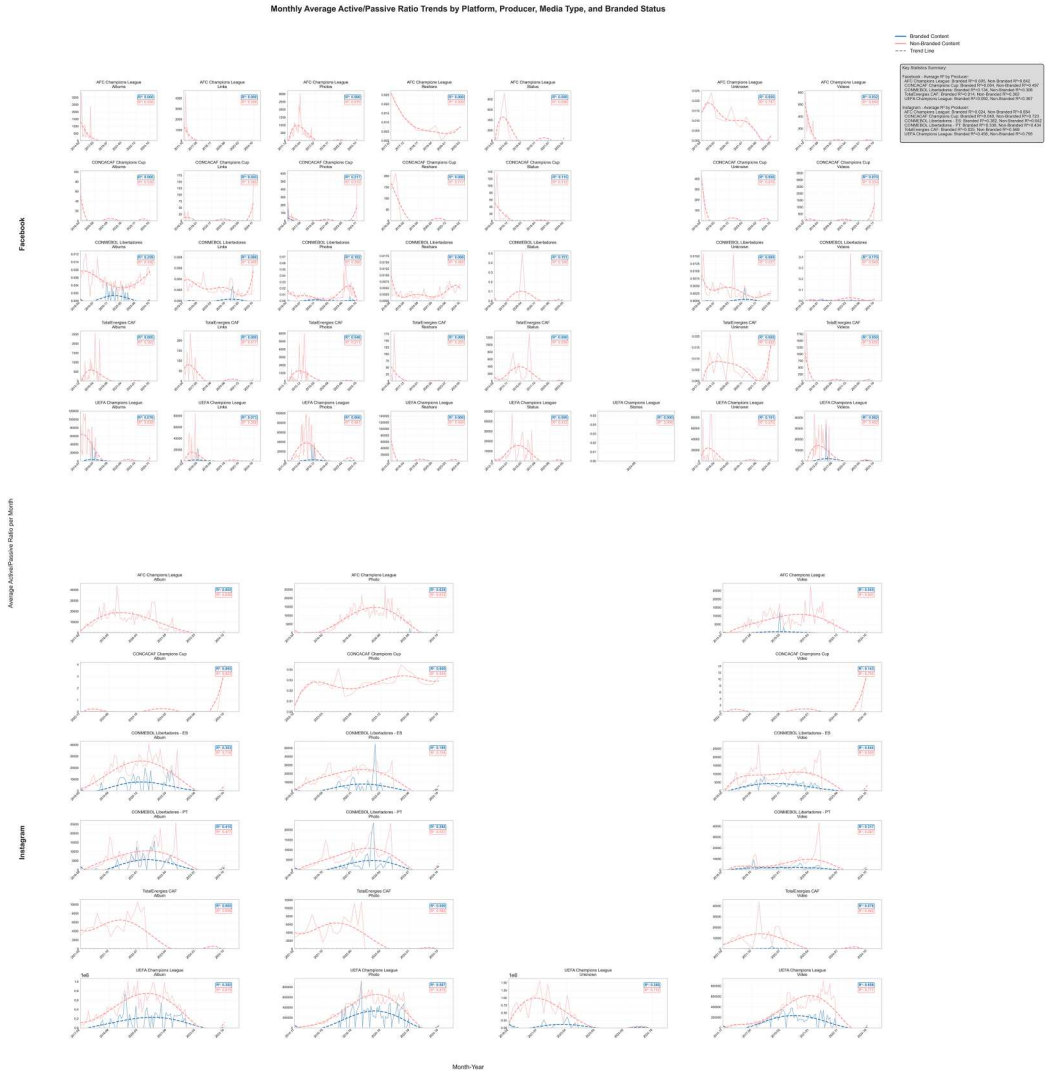

Figure 5. Monthly active-passive ratio trends by platform, producer and media type.

This remains important, because it reveals how supporter (or user) disengagement may constitute a form of uncoordinated resistance to football's modernisation that is not organised, visible, nor collective by nature – but rather, individual and invisible. Disengagement, thus, is markedly different from, say, banners or protests inside or outside stadiums expressing a discontent with "modern football," and is characterised by its platform-mediated undisruptive nature. Whilst Numerato (2018) and Millward (2011) focus on organised groups of supporters in Europe who resist commercial and media-related transformations in football, what our analyses show is more mundane and endemic forms of resistance (see Bonini and Treré 2024; Izkerk-Bilgin) that happens individually but with collective and market repercussions (Airoldi and Rokka 2022). The form of resistance located within football supporters' disengagement with branded content aligns, therefore, with what Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) conceptualised as dispersed resistance. This stems from the fact that – as of February 2025 – the leagues' institutional profiles have almost 250 million followers combined (over 116 million on Facebook and over 132 million on Instagram), presupposing that this *collective* form of resistance is not coordinated in a deliberate yet incoherent fashion "against

modern football" (Numerato 2018; Webber 2015) or more widely to the ones discussed by Bonini and Treré (2024) and O'Meara (2019). This mundane form of resistance, through the acts of disengagement with branded content, can be considered as endemic to so-called authentic cultural forms of experiencing football that rests on a *romanticised* and *nostalgic* felling towards the past (Numerato 2018) and, we may add, a *dystopian* perspective towards the future of football.

This *romanticised* and *nostalgic* feeling towards a so-called authentic expression of football as a popular cultural manifestation in relation to its mediatised and spectacularised contemporaneous guise finds resonance in the cultural use of platforms, and the spread of their mechanisms through the Internet. As highlighted by Baym (2015) and further conceptualised by van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018), the penetration of platform mechanisms – and particularly the algorithmic experience – has profoundly reshaped the earlier *romanticised* notion of an "open Internet," where all content neutrally circulates. Users, by becoming aware of algorithms' role in reshaping *neutrality* and visibility – and therefore reshaping their experience on the Internet – similar to football supporters *vis-à-vis* the commercialisation of football, take into their own hands the power to change the outcome of the algorithmic experience. While it becomes practically impossible to avoid the algorithm – just like football supporters who remain critical of broadcasters' power but often continue to consume football on those same channels – users then *ally* themselves with the algorithm to *game* it for their advantage. Hence, we argue that algorithms possess a Janus-faced aspect where they are both a mechanism to be resisted and a mechanism to be coopted.

When coopting the algorithms for their dispersed resistance practices, football supporters, differently from the fans described by Bonini and Treré (2024), are not *gaming* it for visibility. Rather, they are doing it for invisibility. Through their practices, and the possible help of algorithms, supporters, by engaging less with branded content, are able to "hide" or "mute" this form of content that can be associated with further inroads made by commercialisation and mediatisation into the cultural fabric of football. Moreover, by disengaging with branded content, these users are also seeking to become invisible to the algorithm's tentacles. Interestingly, the co-option of the algorithm by supporters through disengagement practices might have found a potential ally on the algorithm gatekeepers – the engineers behind the platforms – that by abiding to the commodified mechanisms of the platforms seek to increase the visibility of content that generates further direct revenue to the platform rather than to users (e.g. the leagues).

As such, in this multi-sided market (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018), it is possible to see how at least three conflicting moral economies (see Thompson 1971) co-exist and collide: supporters' resistance against modern football and commercialisation; leagues' own commercial interests; and platforms' commodification practices that rests on datafication and advertisement impressions. These collisions between the three distinct moral economies are better represented by the accommodations and adaptations seen in terms of the different trend analyses, where a fine balance needs to be struck in order to keep this symbiotic relationship between users, content creators, and platforms existing and growing.

Returning to our analogy – the platformisation *in* and *through* football – this article hence contributes with an understanding of the dynamics lying beneath platforms' penetrative reach *in* global football, but also how specific practices of (dis)engagement and mundane resistance – with significance and transcendence beyond football *per se* – are advanced *through* the consumption of football on platforms. Hence, whilst this paper advances debates within platform, cultural and sport studies, it also holds a broader significance because it speaks to wider questions of resistance and power in a platform age (cf. van Dijck 2024). Here, the disengagement with perceived manifestations of commercialisation emerges as one resistance strategy.

Regardless, two key puzzles remain important to address in the future. First, our methodological choices mean it is unclear if similar (dis)engagement patterns occur on other platforms, like YouTube. Here, we must emphasise that "modern football" is of course always in the making. In light of the recent FIFA Club World Cup which, in its expanded and new form, took place in the US for the

first time in 2025, we contend that future research could explore the applicability of our findings in this case, specifically, regarding how the platformization of this tournament created new sites or patterns of resistance. Particularly so, as the tournament was criticised by commentators and supporters alike for being another commercially driven extension of football. Second, and more broadly, it is intriguing *if* similar patterns exist in other sports or cultural settings, or if it is limited to elite football. Whilst football is often a space for political engagement, discontent with commercialisation processes exist in other sports like cycling, basketball and ice hockey, too. Moreover, is the disengagement with branded content likely to surface in the consumption contexts of influencers, music festivals or the fitness and wellness industry? These puzzles remain important for future research on the nexus of platforms, consumption and capitalism.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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