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Digital sovereignty and leisure: Bluesky as an alternative to X's suspension in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This paper puts into conversation the concepts of platformisation, digital sovereignty, and leisure by exploring the shift to Bluesky during the legal suspension of X in Brazil between 30th August and 8 October 2024. To analyse the impact on Brazilian users of the Supreme Court decision to block access to X's servers during this period, we map the adoption and use of Bluesky by the 20 football clubs playing in the Brazilian first division. We use engagement metadata (e.g. likes) as a proxy for end-user adoption and map how Bluesky emerged as an alternative platform during the suspension in the consumption and production circuits that take place within the broader processes of platformisation of leisure and sport. The paper contributes to the literature on digital and platform leisure by demonstrating how digital sovereignty (e.g. state legislation) affects the platformisation of leisure and sport by reshaping user behaviours, fostering platform adoption, and transforming the consumption and production circuits of platformised sport. The broader significance of this paper relates to how political actions (in)directly intersect with leisure infrastructures and cultures.

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Introduction

On 30 August 2024, the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court (hereafter STF) Minister, Alexandre de Moraes, ordered the suspension of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), as the platform failed to appoint a legal representative in Brazil, to block accounts that were spreading criminal or anti-democratic messages and to pay fines imposed for keeping those accounts active (Agencia Brasil, 2024a; Globo.com, 2024a). The suspension of the platform could be seen as the culmination of an investigation conducted by the Brazilian Federal Police since 2021 into digital militias and the distribution of fake news that threatened Brazilian democracy (Agencia Brasil, 2022, 2024b; Globo.com, 2021).

When Moraes ordered the inclusion of Elon Musk – the owner of X since October 2022 — among the individuals under investigation in the Digital Militias Inquiry in April 2024, citing the 'criminal instrumentalization of the social media platform X'

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(Agencia Brasil, 2024c), following posts that criticised both Moraes and the STF (@elonmusk, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c), it may have contributed to the resignation of X's legal representative and administrator in Brazil (Globo.com, 2024b). The imbroglio between Moraes, the STF, Musk and X, reached a tipping point during August 2024, when Musk (elonmusk, 2024d) decided to close X's offices in Brazil which finally led to Moraes' decision to suspend X access in Brazil until all original STF's requests were fulfiled. Not until early October was the suspension of X was lifted (Globo.com, 2024c).

The question that we seek to address relates to how platformised leisure is impacted by regulatory frameworks and the *anarchic* struggle for digital sovereignty (Couture & Toupin, 2019; Floridi, 2020; Internet Society, 2025; Kumar & Thussu, 2023; Lehuedé, 2024a). From a leisure perspective, this is important as a specific number of platforms have 'successfully aggregated significant numbers of users, cultural producers, advertisers, data intermediaries, and other third parties' (Poell, 2020, p. 654), meaning that suspensions or technological blockings of one platform have a direct impact on the production and consumption circuits of leisure activities that are contingent to those same platforms (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). For instance, Twitter – the precursor of X – was identified by different authors as an important platform on which the spectacle of sport was produced and consumed (Billings, 2014; Hutchins, 2011; Lee Ludvigsen & Petersen-Wagner, 2022) and can be considered amongst other platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Lee Ludvigsen & Petersen-Wagner, 2023; Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2023, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Petersen-Wagner et al., 2025; Shannon, 2022) as integral to the current platformisation trends unfolding in the sports and leisure industry at large.

Platforms, albeit competing, can be considered complementary to each other in terms of the cultural production and consumption practices. This is apparent as each platform predominantly affords specific cultural products (e.g. short vertical videos, horizontal videos, pictures). In this respect, X was firmly embedded in sport through its original focus on microblogging-style, short status updates (Murthy, 2017). This allowed users, *inter alia*, to react to specific events in the sporting world, or structure-specific discourses and trends around hashtags (Cleland et al., 2018; Lee Ludvigsen & Petersen-Wagner, 2022). Sociologically, these cultural practices assume an importance because they serve to democratise sports discourses, allowing users to contest pundits' or clubs' viewpoints that, similarly, are often communicated via X.

Considering, then, the suspension of X in Brazil, alternative platforms emerged as substitutes for those cultural practices deeply associated with X. Most notably, this included Bluesky (2025a), Mastodon (2025) and Meta's Threads (Meta, Inc, 2023). The rise of these platforms, as Ittefaq (2025) writes, has prompted users to migrate to these spaces (for a discussion on platform migration after TikTok ban in India, see also Kumar & Thussu, 2023). Bluesky, a platform founded by Twitter's co-founder Jack Dorsey, is built on the premises of open communication protocol for distributed social networks – a premise shared by *rival* Mastodon (see Bluesky, 2025b for a distinction between the two platforms) – and defines itself by stating that 'social media is too important to be controlled by a few corporations. We're *building an open foundation for the social internet* so that we can all shape its future' (Bluesky, 2025a, n.d., emphasis on the original) and that 'traditional

social networks are often closed platforms with a central authority. There's a small group of people who control those companies, and they have total control over how users can use the platform and what developers can build' (Bluesky, 2025b, n.d.).

The Brazilian suspension of X, but more widely, the rise of new platforms has 'initiated a new debate about platform migration and digital disconnection' (Ittefaq, 2025, p. 2). Our proposition is that these debates matter for leisure studies. Hence, we address the following research question: how do alternative platforms make their inroads into the consumption and production circuits of sport and leisure?

We argue that, after becoming hegemonically dominant in specific associated cultural practices, centralised platforms such as X, despite its inaccessibility for around 40 days and the user migration to competing platforms such as Bluesky, possess an enduring gravitas and cultural weight that manages to pull away users from those newly adopted platforms. As such, this article drawing upon engagement metadata contributes with a novel case study to existing scholarship on the relationship between platforms and leisure. It also advances an understanding of how regulative efforts, and the pursuit of digital sovereignty has significant consequences for sporting and leisure cultures.

Literature review: the nexus between digital leisure, platformization and their regulation

Digital leisure cultures and studies

In this section, we seek to unpack the nexus between digital leisure, social media platforms and their regulation. Specifically, we recognise how leisure activities and practices may be situated at the heart of a wider struggle over 'digital sovereignty'. The 'digital' typically refers to the technologies, infrastructures, data and content that relies upon electronic computing devices (Peters, 2016). As such, the disciplinary development of leisure studies has been significantly characterised by the emergence of digital leisure (McGillivray, 2017; Silk et al., 2016; Sintas et al., 2015; Spracklen, 2015). Some scholars, accordingly, have pointed enthusiastically towards the related rise of 'digital leisure *studies*' and argued for the importance of advancing this subfield further (Schultz & McKeown, 2018) in order to contribute towards a 'livelier' and 'critical' leisure studies field (Lupton, 2016; Redhead, 2016). In broad terms, digital leisure captures the wider acceleration of leisure cultures, as configured by digital technologies, devices, and turns (McGillivray, 2017) that have transformed and continue to transform social life, although at an unequal pace (Lupton, 2014).

Broadly speaking, the *digital* realm has therefore not only opened up for wholly new leisure activities or spaces, such as video games (or even e-sport) (Brock, 2017; Muriel & Crawford, 2020) or Internet blogging (Kunert, 2021) but significantly reconfigured traditionally less digital or non-digital practices. This includes running and cycling – activities that may be tracked, shared via apps, or even performed *virtually* (Felczak & Filiciak, 2025; Reed et al., 2023) – and the digital attendance of quizzes or sporting events which of course have been accelerated by advances in technology, the desire for 'lock-down leisure' during Covid-19 (Lee Ludvigsen et al., 2023), and the wider platform

economy that has blurred the lines between producer/consumer (cf. Ritzer, 2014) and enabled 'anyone' to become a creator (Bond et al., 2021).

Therefore, as Schultz and McKeown (2018) argue, digital leisure studies are fundamentally concerned with making sense of the impact of digital cultures upon leisure and, more specifically, academically position digital cultures as central to 'understand contemporary leisure practices, experiences, institutions and subjectivities and the place of leisure in understandings of embodiment, power relations, social inequalities, social structures and social institutions' (Silk et al., 2016, p. 713). By acknowledging and taking seriously that digital leisure worlds may work as a window through which we can understand social structures, institutions and relationships, this paper situates itself *within* this area of leisure studies. In doing so, it seeks to understand the notion of 'digital sovereignty' which, again, is central to these questions of leisure-related power relations, platformization, and the regulation of digital platforms in a contemporary age.

Digital leisure and social media platforms

Here, it remains necessary to take stock of the importance of social media platforms within leisure cultures. Since the emergence of digital leisure studies, social media platforms have remained at the core of scholars' analyses. For example, researchers have paid attention to how social media platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Tumblr, throughout the last twenty years, have given rise to new forms of surveillance capitalism that tracks users' leisure habits (Zuboff, 2015) and how it may create new physically distinct but tight-knit and cosmopolitan communities transcending nation-state borders (Kunert, 2021; Petersen-Wagner, 2017a, 2017b). Others, meanwhile, explored how social media users have turned towards platforms such as YouTube or TikTok to follow and view events that they traditionally would consume through media channels such as television (Lee Ludvigsen & Petersen-Wagner, 2023; Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a). Hence, individuals and groups pursuing leisure activities, and key actors of the platform-driven economy, exist in a symbiotic relationship that constantly reinforces itself through acts of consumption and production that feed into the different platform mechanisms (van Dijck et al., 2018). We contend that this enduring and symbiotic relationship cannot be viewed in isolation of the de-territorialised boundaries between politics and economics (Beck, 2005), helping us to firmly appreciate what can only be characterised as the *politics of digital leisure*.

Regulating digital leisure?

As a microcosm, the leisure world, as such, can help us understand the power games which Beck (2005) alluded to, that are played out by nation-states, global businesses such as the big five infrastructure platforms, and civil society actors in an age of platformised globalisation. Here, the stakes of this 'game' differ according to the mentioned desire to an 'escape from the workaday world' (Lupton, 2016, p. 710) and desire to participate in leisure activities (users/consumers); desire for engagement and a greater reach (clubs/teams/organisations); desire for interactions and data (platforms); and, desire for regulation (nation-states). Brought together, these conflicting desires and interests, we argue,

reveal the power dynamics and inter-dependencies lying beneath platforms' positions in digital leisure, and their algorithmic consumption and production circuits. Here, consumers on the one hand depend on platforms' existence, but simultaneously carry counter-power insofar as they select which platforms to actively use, or refrain from.

On the level of the 'providers' or 'distributors' (or owners) of leisure activities, spaces or practices such as sport, for example, sport governing bodies (e.g. FIFA or IOC), specific competitions (e.g. the Olympics or *Tour De France*) or sports teams (e.g. FC Barcelona or New York Knicks), social media platforms may provide new ways for communicating and sharing content to wider transnational user base. However, this enables, for example, a football club not only to connect with supporters (or users) in new ways but concurrently advances or conditions commercial interests through the use of branded content (Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025b), while also enhancing its global brand and global reach.

On the level of social media platforms themselves, this has in turn created a competition among the different platforms, who all seek to provide alternative spaces for consumption and production of *cultural expressions*, ultimately with a goal of increasing its user base, content producers, advertisers, and consequently dominating the market within the *winners-take-all* effect (Duffy et al., 2019). This *domination* of specific platforms – or even content producers who inhabit those platforms (see e.g. Bärtl, 2018) – dictates which platform users would join, interact through, and use for their leisure time activities. As alluded to in the introduction, this fight for users and interaction, however, has on the state and political levels seen calls for greater regulation specifically in terms of data (e.g. who owns it, and how it is shared) (Hummel et al., 2021), content moderation (Internet Society, 2025) and more widely in terms of the entire platform ecosystems (Couture & Toupin, 2019; Floridi, 2020; Lehuedé, 2024a).

Social media platforms – as spaces of leisure – are therefore also not isolated from wider political and power struggles between states, industrial actors, global corporations, and users and, indeed, advancing what Floridi (2020) calls the fight for 'digital sovereignty'. This dynamic nexus between digital sovereignty and leisure cultures, however, has seldom been considered by scholars working in the area of digital leisure studies despite the importance attributed to 'the digital' in leisure studies, and the centrality of 'leisure' for platform capitalists.

Digital sovereignty and the regulation of leisure

The incremental inroads made by platforms in our digital experience (Baym, 2015), and across different sectors such as leisure and sport, have exposed the centrality of Big Tech organisations – and particularly the big five infrastructural platforms (Meta, Inc., Microsoft, Alphabet, Inc., Apple, and Amazon) – in societies and social organisation at large. As we have alluded previously, leisure, and sport in particular, is not immune to those advances made by platforms, and particularly how platform mechanisms such as datafication, commodification, and algorithm selection create new contingencies (e.g. invisibilities) in terms of consumption and production circuits existing within those spaces (Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a, 2025b). As van Dijck (2024, p. 1) argued:

> we have seen a distinct rise in challenges concerning platforms and societies: the growing impact of Big Tech platforms on digital ecosystems around the globe; the rise of two 'superpower' ecosystems which are in many ways interwoven with geopolitical forces; the mounting dependence of state and civil society actors on large digital infrastructures owned and operated by Big Tech; and the lasting impact of platformization not just on labor and business management, but on democratic processes and institutions.

These dependencies, and the lasting impact of platformisation on democratic processes and institutions, that van Dijck (2024) alludes to, are at the centre of the discussions in terms of regulations concerning data, content, and the entire digital ecosystem. For instance, Lehuedé (2024b) shows how the initial ideal of free data flow has now transitioned into a space of data turbulence where the governance of data becomes the norm. This turbulence in the *flow of data* and the subsequent regulation and governance are the outcomes of three interconnected processes as in platformisation, and particularly the role of data in the business models of distinct platforms, data sovereignty and the territorialisation-localisation of data by nation-states, and the increasing demand for raw materials and infrastructure for the storage and processing of big data (Lehuedé, 2024b). Concerning the second process, the notion of territorialisation-localisation of data was initially evident in Global South discursive spaces – but has since then made inroads in Global North spaces such as through General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (European Commission, 2025) and the United Kingdom GDPR (UK Government, 2025) – and was central to a rhetorical performative practice that put individuals, groups, and nations in opposition to *hegemons* such as the big five infrastructural platforms (Couture & Toupin, 2019), and countries such as the United States of America and China (Lehuedé, 2024a). For instance, Kumar and Thussu (2023) show how in the case of the TikTok ban in India following the military clashes between India and China, the notion of digital sovereignty can be seen as an interconnected claim for control that includes users (e.g. claiming control over their own data) and nations (e.g. to become technologically self-reliant) that through changing geopolitical tensions make specific platforms to become more vulnerable to regulations (see also Lehuedé, 2024a).

As Floridi (2020, p. 371) points out, the anarchic struggle for digital sovereignty touches everyone, putting 'not only of all against all, but also anyone allied with anyone, with variable alliances changing according to interests and opportunities', where in some moments platforms are allied between themselves, or against themselves, or allied with nation-states, or against nation-states, or allied or against particular users and groups. This changing of alliances is well documented in the written evidence submitted by different platforms and user groups to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (UK Parliament, 2024), demonstrating how the notion of sovereignty requires constant 'brokerage and negotiated forms of interdependency and a relinquish of autonomy' (Bonilla, 2017, p. 333).

Overall, therefore, this section situates the concept of digital sovereignty within broader discourses speaking to the importance of digital leisure studies, but also – given our case example situated in football – digital football studies, as a field concerned with accelerated digital cultures in football (cf. Lawrence & Crawford, 2022). Clearly, digital leisure studies are not isolated from wider struggles in the global *platformised* political domain speaking to digital sovereignty, although scholars are yet to empirically document this relationship in full. The Brazilian suspension of X offers an intriguing case

study for further examinations of this relationship. Against this backdrop, this paper therefore examines how Bluesky surfaced as an alternative platform in the leisure context of Brazilian football.

Methods

To map how Brazilian first division clubs adopted and used Bluesky in light of the Supreme Court's decision to block X, we draw from computational methods (Boatwright, 2023) to study the digital traces (Caliandro et al., 2024) left by the football clubs as content producers, and users who have engaged with the content shared on the platform. Our methodological approach is in line with the digital turn within leisure studies, that emerged from a need to reconsider methodologies that can capture digital leisure cultures (Schultz & McKeown, 2018), and an acceptance that the *digital* is also *real* (Petersen-Wagner, 2017b). Similar arguments can be found within digital sociology, where we may identify calls for taking the digital seriously, and for approaching the *digital* through specific methodologies (Lupton, 2014, 2016).

As aforementioned, Bluesky (2025b) is built on an open-source framework for open social network, meaning that access to its application programming interface (API) is open to any user. For social researchers interested in comprehending the digital, this makes Bluesky an important space for analysis, as, unlike closed platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, there is no need for requesting academic or research API access, or for paying for access – in the case of X that has removed the Research API tier at the end of May 2023 (The Verge, 2023).

After identifying and verifying the official profiles of first division Brazilian football clubs on BlueSky, on 28 February 2025, the lead author connected to Bluesky API (actor.getProfile and feed.getAuthorFeed endpoints) (BlueSky, 2025c)[1] and through Python and scrapped all posts from the 16 clubs – out of the total 20 – playing in the Brazilian first division during the ban. While most of the clubs had embraced Bluesky, there were four important omissions; clubs that have not created a Bluesky profile or had no posts available to be scrapped (Palmeiras, Flamengo, Red Bull Bragantino, and São Paulo). The collection yielded 10,256 posts, accounting for everything that was posted up to 28th February – the oldest post was from Bahia on the 12 April 2024.[2] The collection included the display name of the club, the date of the post, the text in the post, and associate metrics such as number of likes, comments, quotes, and reposts, plus users' information such as when the profile was created, number of posts, number of followers and how many users they follow. The metrics were important, especially the number of likes in each post, which we have used as a proxy to measure platform adoption by football fans. To analyse the collected data, a combination of Python packages such as NumPy (Harris et al., 2020), Matplotlib (Hunter, 2007), and SciPy and Scikit-learn (Pedregosa et al., 2011; Virtanen et al., 2020) were used to perform a 5th degree polynomial regression of average likes per post and number of posts per day (independent variables) and date (dependent variable), and Seaborn (Waskom, 2023) for the visualisation of the results. 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 use of up

to three inflection points through the 5th degree term is justified by at least two important dates in our research context: the day that the ban on X has started (30 August 2024) and the day that the ban was lifted (8 October 2024); and allowing for any other potential inflection point that does not derivate from any of our a priori assumptions. We have used a week prior to the ban (23 August 2024) and a month after the ban (8 November 2024) as a window for our regression to capture both platform adoption and abandonment.

Below, we unpack our findings by showing how the platform was adopted by the different clubs during the ban, and especially how, after the ban was lifted, the platform was abandoned by the clubs and football fans in their consumption and production circuits.

Results

The adoption of Bluesky as a platform – adding to the consumption and production circuits of spectacularised sport enabled by a plethora of platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook – by Brazilian football clubs followed a similar trajectory, with most of the clubs creating their profile around the banning and blocking of X in Brazil (30 August 2024). As seen in Table 1, only two clubs created their profiles in the months ahead of the ban. First, Grêmio creating it during October 2023, but only posting for the first time on 1 September 2024 with a post that read: 'AGORA SIM O CÉU ESTÁ AZUL! Bem-vindos ao nosso Bluesky oficial!. 🦋[3]' (translated by the first author as: 'NOW THE SKY IS BLUE INDEED! Welcome to our official Bluesky!🦋') that plays with the club colours and the name of the platform. Second, Bahia, which created its profile in April 2024, and posted for the first two times in April and not again until the ban with a first post that read '🟦🟦⬜ Esquadrão pronto! ⬜🟦🟦 Elenco finalizou preparação pra estreia no Brasileirão' (🟦🟦⬜ Squad ready! ⬜🟦🟦 The team has finished preparations for the Brasileirão debut').

Table 1. Club Bluesky profiles - posts.

handle	displayName	postsCount	createdAt
botafogo.com.br	Botafogo	408	2024–08-30T20:47:38.667Z
fortaleza1918.com.br	Fortaleza Esporte Clube🦁	338	2024–08-30T22:51:29.314Z
internacional.com.br	Sport Club Internacional	637	2024–09-01T17:50:36.631Z
saopaulofc.net	São Paulo Futebol Clube	0	2024–08-31T02:34:25.431Z
cruzeiro.com.br	Cruzeiro 🦊	256	2024–08-30T23:16:13.502Z
esporteclubebahia.com.br	Esporte Clube Bahia	735	2024–04-12T22:07:38.773Z
vasco.com.br	Vasco da Gama	375	2024–08-30T20:41:56.673Z
atletico.bsky.social	Atlético	790	2024–08-30T15:15:18.367Z
corinthians.com.br	Corinthians	2,955	2024–09-09T13:28:19.759Z
gremiofbpa.bsky.social	Grêmio FBPA	1,609	2023–10-27T19:52:38.317Z
ecvitoria.xyz	EC Vitória	98	2024–08-31T18:22:46.735Z
fluminense.com.br	Fluminense F.C.	759	2024–08-31T11:49:22.136Z
criciuma.com.br	Criciúma Esporte Clube 🦁	94	2024–08-31T18:34:17.735Z
juventude.com.br	ECJuventude	1,200	2024–08-30T23:11:10.315Z
redbullbragantino.bsky.social	Red Bull Bragantino	0	2024–08-29T01:05:24.652Z
athletico.com.br	Athletico Paranaense	500	2024–08-29T19:08:36.054Z
cuiabaec.bsky.social	Cuiabá Esporte Clube	104	2024–08-29T16:31:54.352Z
dragaodobrasil.bsky.social	Atlético Clube Goianiense – OFICIAL	22	2024–08-31T15:10:26.739Z

Focusing on the createdAt information in the table above, it becomes clear that Bluesky only emerged as an alternative platform in the production part of the circuit after the ban and blocking was imposed by Minister Moraes. The adoption of new platforms by content creators such as the football clubs that we collected data on can be seen in light of Poell's (2020) argument regarding the platformised media concentration, whereby network effects of end users, advertisers, and creators make it harder for creators – or end users or advertisers – to *break away* from the gravitational force pulling them towards one particular platform ecosystem. Similarly, the 'turn' towards Bluesky also demonstrates precisely the ever-changing nature of digital football cultures which scholars situated in digital football studies must be alive to, as the question of how clubs communicate with, or reach fans is not immune from wider political, technological and digital trends, such as the ban on X (see Lawrence & Crawford, 2022). For instance, it can be assumed, from the createdAt information from the different clubs, that one force pulling them away from X, and therefore pushing them to migrate to Bluesky, was the decision by the STF to block access to X in Brazil. Moreover, it is possible to note from the postCount information in Table 1 how clubs distinctively produced content to be shared on Bluesky, with some clubs creating almost 3000 posts (Fluminense) while others only creating their profile (São Paulo). This becomes even more pronounced when visualising a week-by-week distribution (see Figure 1) of content shared by the different clubs during the six-weeks period ban.

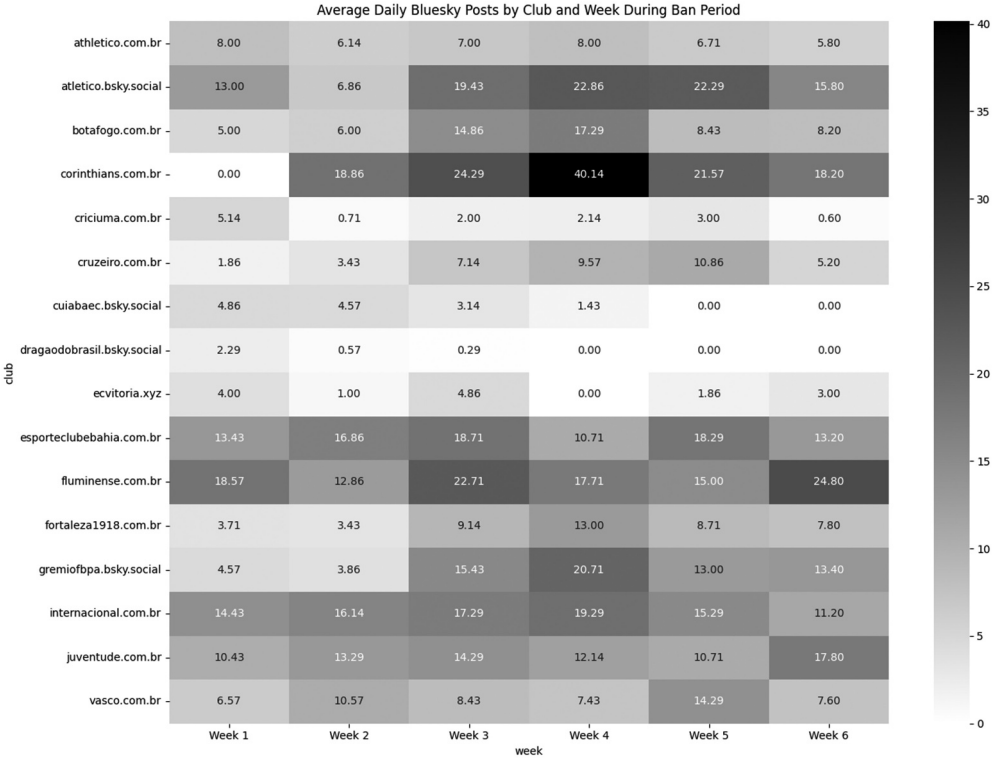

Figure 1. Average daily Bluesky posts by club and Week during ban period.

In line with Castells (2023) 'network society', it appears that the emergence of a new platform altered the pre-existing relationship between clubs and fans, by offering new spaces of club-fan interactions, revealing the reactionary aspect of football's own network society. Indeed, we may see how, on average, clubs started to slowly embrace Bluesky as a platform in their production of the spectacularised sport, that, nevertheless, followed distinct trajectories in terms of how each club decided to use the platform. In this sense, following Lawrence and Crawford (2022), we see tendencies of acceleration, as a defining feature of digital football cultures, whereby key moments (e.g. the ban of X) increase the speed of clubs' content production on a new platform.

For instance, Corinthians became an active producer of content throughout the ban; peaking with an average of 40 posts per day during week four of the ban, reflecting the games they were playing in the quarter finals of the CONMEBOL Sul Americana Championship and in the Brasileirão (Men's team), Brazilian National Basketball men's league, under-17 football men's, and their women's team winning the Brazilian championship. Moreover, like the pattern found in the example of Corinthians, most of the clubs had a weekly increase in the number of posts shared per day, with a peak around weeks three and four of the ban. The way clubs embraced the platform found resonance in the way their supporters engaged with the content. As it is possible to see in Table 2, there is an important difference between the number of followers which club managed to attract, which do not only reflect their fan base size (Statista, 2023), but also to the way they have embraced the platform by the number of posts shared on the platform ($r = .571$, $p = .013$).

Clubs with larger fan base, and especially with more content creation, have managed to keep a larger audience on the platform. Interestingly, while most of the clubs' official profiles on Bluesky tended to follow only other institutional profiles such as the Brasileirão, Copa Libertadores, or their women's football team, Fluminense used a different approach, by following common (presumably, including their supporters) users. While the total number of followers for each club point to an important adoption of the platform by fans, the figures are still modest when compared to the total followers

Table 2. Club profiles – followers.

handle	displayName	followersCount	followsCount
botafogo.com.br	Botafogo	20,669	4
fortaleza1918.com.br	Fortaleza Esporte Clube	6,182	1
internacional.com.br	Sport Club Internacional	12,863	3
saopaulofc.net	São Paulo Futebol Clube	9,527	1
cruzeiro.com.br	Cruzeiro	22,584	1
esporteclubebahia.com.br	Esporte Clube Bahia	10,300	1
vasco.com.br	Vasco da Gama	49,692	1
atletico.bsky.social	Atlético	21,667	3
corinthians.com.br	Corinthians	86,652	2
gremiofbpa.bsky.social	Grêmio FBPA	14,818	2
ecvitoria.xyz	EC Vitória	2,873	6
fluminense.com.br	Fluminense F.C.	21,481	500
criciuma.com.br	Criciúma Esporte Clube	768	3
juventude.com.br	ECJuventude	1,165	3
redbullbragantino.bsky.social	Red Bull Bragantino	802	1
athletico.com.br	Athletico Paranaense	4,581	1
cuiabaec.bsky.social	Cuiabá Esporte Clube	579	16
dragaodobrasil.bsky.social	Atlético Clube Goianiense – OFICIAL	881	6

those clubs have on other platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, X and Facebook (IBOPE, 2023). For instance, while Corinthians managed to amass up to 86 thousand followers on Bluesky during this period, it was reported by IBOPE (2023) that they had almost 8 million followers on X, with similar differences being constant across all the 18 clubs who have created a Bluesky official account. As argued here, this important disparity of a magnitude of almost 100 times highlights the power of specific platforms in commanding the attention, especially when those said platforms become hegemonic in at least one form of cultural production and consumption. Nevertheless, when using likes per post as proxy for end user adoption it is possible to perceive how a possible peak occurred during weeks one and two of the six-weeks ban (see Figure 2).

This difference in end-user adoption in comparison to institutional adoption by the football clubs, with peaks occurring in different weeks of the ban, might provide additional evidence that there were not only an external force pushing the clubs away from X considering the ban, but also an internal force pulling them towards Bluesky as fans seemed to be already *inhabiting* the platform. Hence, it is argued that an already *established* user base remains an important factor in cyclic nature of the cultural production and consumption of platformised sport. In a way, it is not the football clubs *as content creators* that are generating a supply of content for platform adoption, but it is potentially fans who are already active on the platform that generate a demand for clubs to create content. This latent power by fans in generating platform adoption is better evidenced through the polynomial regressions as seen in Figure 3.

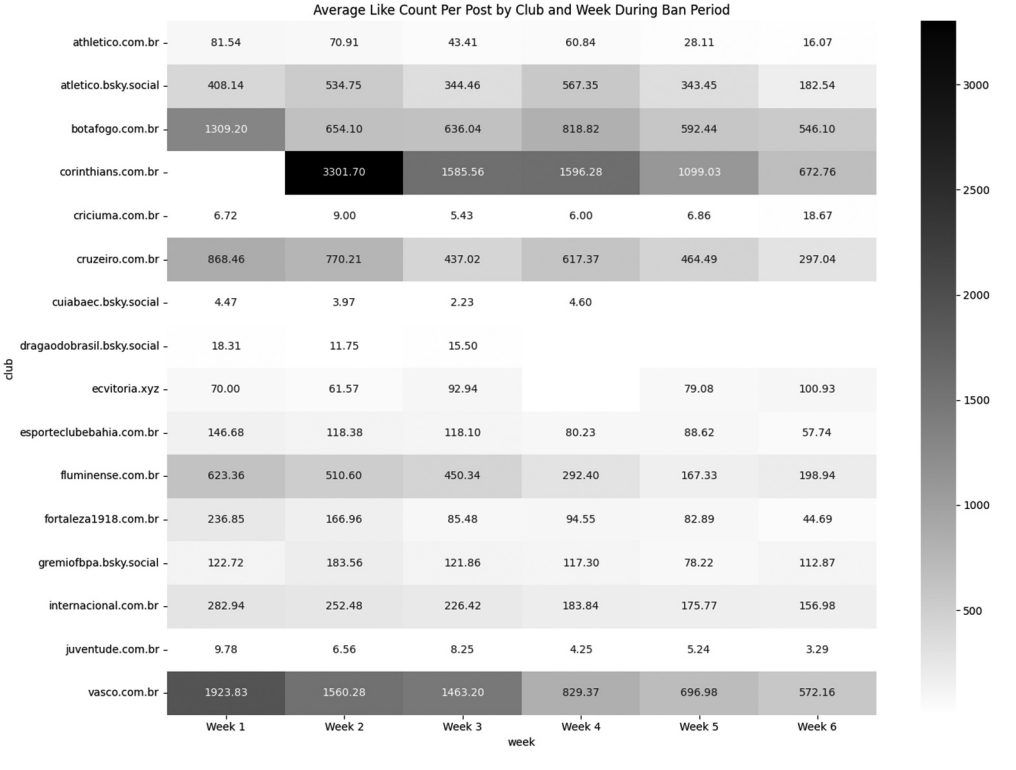

Figure 2. Average like count per post by club and Week during ban period.

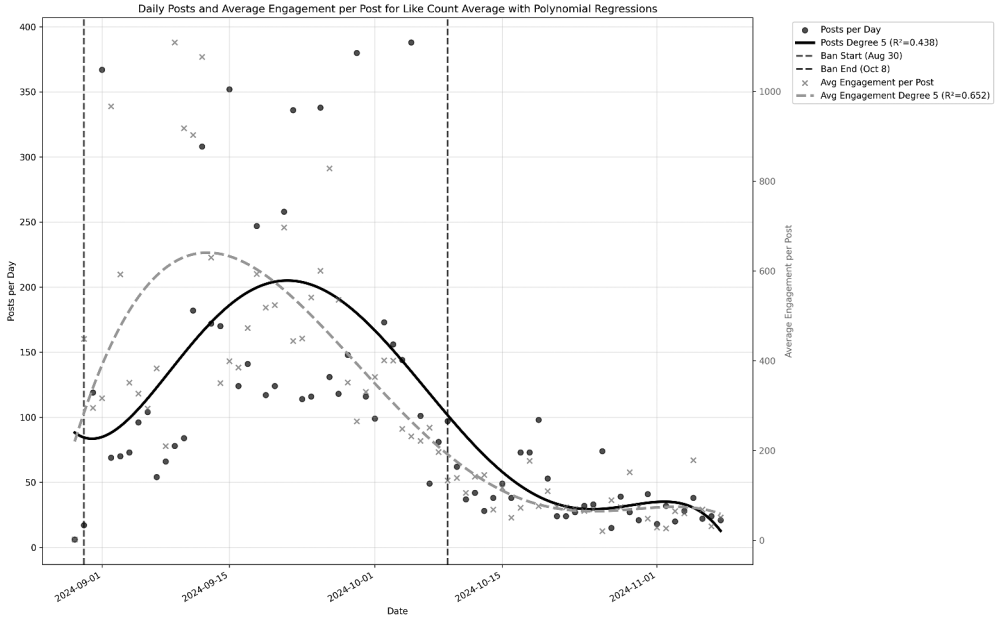

Figure 3. Daily posts and average engagement per post for like count average with polynomial regressions.

The fit lines as represented in the Figure 3 show how content engagement, and therefore proxy platform adoption by users, and content creation followed similar patterns but disassociated in time. Firstly, it is evident that before the ban by the STF, Bluesky was not part of the cultural production and consumption circuits in Brazilian football. Secondly, the more pronounced and earlier curve of average likes per post shows how users might have migrated first to the platform and therefore became one important driving force for football clubs to adopt the platform. This appears to happen as clubs as content creators increased their production subsequently to the cultural consumption by fans. Nevertheless, while clubs were reaching peak production, users were already starting to engage less with content on the platform, potentially showing that other platforms such as Meta's Threads or Mastodon were either becoming the actual alternative to X. Thirdly, when the ban was lifted on the 8 October 2024, there was a clear abandonment by both end-users and content producers, with only three clubs (Grêmio, Corinthians, and Juventude) continuing to constantly share posts.

Finally, while most of the clubs started producing content on the platform by a form of introductory post as seen in this section's opening examples, apart from Vitória who posted 'Nosso perfil no Bluesky segue inativo, mas estamos ativos nas seguintes redes: Discord: discord.gg/ecvitoria X: x.com/ecvitoria Instagram: instagram.com/ecvitoria YouTube: youtube.com/tvvitoriaoficial TikTok: tiktok.com/@ecvitoria Facebook: facebook.com/ecvitoria Threads: threads.net/@ecvitoria' (Our profile on Bluesky remains inactive, but we are active on the following platforms: Discord: discord.gg/ecvitoria X: x.com/ecvitoria Instagram: instagram.com/ecvitoria YouTube: youtube.com/tvvitoriaoficial TikTok: tiktok.com/@ecvitoria Facebook: facebook.com/ecvitoria Threads: threads.net/@ecvitoria) all the other clubs have just abandoned the platform by 'leaving behind'

normal content such as match reports, preparation for future games, promotional material, or community engagement type of posts. The use of the word inactive by Victoria, or the lack of a clear leaving message by the other clubs, might indicate that clubs were still unsure about the outcomes of the legal struggles between STF and X, and hence have decided to leave open the opportunities to re-engage in the platform in case X were to be banned again.

Discussion and conclusion

To date, few studies have explored Bluesky as a site for leisure consumption and production circuits. It is clear, however, that digital leisure studies must be responsive to emerging issues and platforms and by seeking to contribute further to our understanding of digital leisure cultures, a key premise of this article is that these leisure cultures are far from isolated from power relations, social structures, and wider geopolitical struggles (cf. Silk et al., 2016). Specifically, it was contended that the way in which digital leisure spaces are produced and consumed can work as a window for what Floridi (2020) called anarchic struggles for digital sovereignty. Hence, the cultural practices of producing and consuming football in digital spaces exist in this *anarchic struggle* for digital sovereignty where platforms, local governments, local legislations, and fans co-exist and take different roles according to specific configurations and situations. For instance, the suspension of X in Brazil, and Brazilian football clubs' responsive adaption of Bluesky offers an illuminating context in which we may explore one facet of this geopolitically and socially significant struggle. As our findings demonstrate, Bluesky emerged as an important alternative digital leisure space during the ban of X. Yet the suspension of X and emergence of Bluesky did not automatically translate into long-lasting hegemonic shift in the wider platform ecology. As argued, this must be seen in context of the enduring gravitas of the dominant platforms (such as X) for leisure practices, including the production and consumption of platformised football.

Taken together, our findings illustrate and give weight to what we conceptualise as the *politics of digital leisure*. The wider, social significance of this, stretching beyond the case of Brazil, is that political actions and trends both directly and indirectly shape the infrastructure of leisure and culture in a platformised world. In a platformised world, thus, leisure and (inter)national politics intersect in a series of new ways, and this has theoretical implications. In this sense, we may borrow from Beck's (2005) analysis of power in the global age, where the economic, legal, political, and social dimensions are all at interplay in global struggles for power, our analysis shows that the nationally organised legal system – in the case of STF in Brazil – is an important actor shaping how the mundane consumption and production of platformised sport unfolds. While platforms tend to operate in a perspective of borderless world system, that finds counter-power actors through national and regional legal and political system as seen in the case of territorialisation-localisation of data (Lehuedé, 2024b), the blocking of one specific platform because of a failure to comply to local legislations opens the *opportunity* for alternative platforms to emerge. Hence, it is possible to appreciate how the legal and political dimensions can have impact on economic (e.g. advertisers, content creators, platforms) and social (e.g. consumption, leisure) dimensions by the way in which it was only that when X was blocked that Bluesky emerged as an alternative space. Nevertheless,

while the legal-political can be considered as a strong dimension in the anarchic struggle for sovereignty and in the *politics of digital leisure*, it is important to recognise forces from both social and economic dimensions in subsequent moments of our analysis. The social dimension, through the adoption of Bluesky by supporters in the first instance have potentially enforced clubs – and therefore an economic dimension – to migrate to the platform and then produce content for this driving platform adoption force. However, with the block lifted, and fans reducing their engagement on the platform, it is possible to appreciate an important facet of the economic power of culturally hegemonic platforms through the *winners-take-all* effect (Duffy et al., 2019) whereby the content creators (the clubs) and its consumers slowly but gradually abandoned the once-adopted platform. As argued here, this remains significant for digital leisure cultures because those said cultures are not exempted from the politics of platformization, but rather firmly embedded within it. Because platforms remain, in part, sites of leisure and increasingly digitalised fan cultures (Lawrence & Crawford, 2022), these sites of leisure remain dynamic and reconfigured by wider developments in the quest for digital sovereignty. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge a potential limitation to our study, since we have focused only on Bluesky as an alternative platform during the ban on X, while the increasingly digitalised fan culture exists across multiple competing and complementary platforms. This is particularly true for an alternative platform that is comparable in its affordances to X and Bluesky – namely Meta's Thread – which points towards important avenues for future research. In this respect, it remains important that scholars of leisure, media and sport continue to explore how the closing of some leisure spaces leads to the opening of alternative or new spaces and how these new spaces take up a temporary or more permanent form. Here, it also remains crucial to explore how fans engage with social media and develop new fandom practices, or re-configure or re-activate pre-existing ones in a digital context.

Notes

1. JSON data structure for those endpoints can be found on Bluesky (2025c) documentation
2. Bluesky removed the invite-only system on 6 February 2024 (Bluesky, 2024), meaning that the clubs were not limited in creating their institutional profiles by any platform constraint.
3. Grêmio and Grêmio fans use the emoji of the Estonian national flag as their club flag as it has the three colours of the club – blue, black, and white.

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