
Tianheng Zhou *
College of Liberal Art, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210023, China
* Corresponding Author Email: sbh@kdxnt.com

Abstract. The internet's growth and the emergence of new media have enriched our culture and opened new avenues for communication. Various platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, provide immediate access to news and information while allowing people to freely express their opinions. Yet, these technological advancements have also amplified real-world conflicts, leading to the rise of online group extremism. In the world of football, the rivalry between Ronaldo and Messi extends to their fan communities. The behavior and psychology of these football stars reflect Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, influencing their fans. This study examines group extremism through psychological and online communication lenses, aiming to understand the factors driving fans' online behaviors and the implications of their communication. The research addresses the impact of online fan culture, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. Through illustrative examples and percentage-based analysis, we explore the origins of online fan culture, the varied responses within different fan groups, and the consequences of this culture in the online sphere. We also delve into whether fans of Ronaldo and Messi can coexist harmoniously. This research offers insights into online fan culture and its effects on online communication dynamics.

Keywords: Communication Psychology; Football Stars; Online Fan Culture.

1. Introduction

In the era of mobile Internet development, the way fans participate in football matches has gradually shifted from offline to online. At the same time, the COVID-19 epidemic in 2019 has accelerated this process, which is further reflected in the interruption of the matches of the five major European leagues in 2020 and the cancellation of the Golden Globe Awards and other award ceremonies based on the principle of fairness.

At the same time, political, economic, social, and technological factors have also provided a favorable environment for the development of world football matches. Through the joint efforts of team players, team founders, sponsors, venue service providers, live broadcast rights trading, and fan groups, the football industry has flourished on both offline and online platforms.

With the development of a series of network technologies and the improvement of event influence, the enthusiasm of fans for participating in the event has increased, leading to the continuous expansion of the scale of fans.

First of all, the Internet has provided an advanced technical means and platform for the spread and development of football. The popularity and development of mobile Internet allow people to pay attention to football matches and learn about the game dynamics at anytime and anywhere. Football fans around the world can obtain relevant information through mobile APP, social media and other means, including China's TikTok, Tencent Sports, Knowledgeable World and global TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and so on. Fans' preferences for football events tend to be diversified, with access to information such as live broadcasts of highly competitive and enjoyable matches such as the World Cup, the five major European leagues, and the Champions League, statistics of team and player data, player transfer inquiries, and attention to sports stars Ronaldo and Messi. Fans have also shifted from only participating in the process of watching games before, during, and after the game, The participation methods are more convenient and diverse, greatly improving the efficiency and scope of football online dissemination.
Secondly, the internet has also brought more commercial attributes, benefits, and opportunities to the development of football, such as football broadcasting rights, event ticketing, fan related products, football games, and consumption of alcohol during watching matches, as well as Tifo production. These business opportunities not only drive the development of the football industry, but also provide fans with a richer football cultural experience, promoting the emergence of online fan culture. At the same time, the higher the viewership of the competition, the higher the price of the advertisement, the stronger the authority of television broadcasting, the greater the interest of advertisers, and the more opportunities for being brought into the camera by the broadcasting television camera, the more intense the competition for advertising [1].

However, football has achieved rapid development in a short period of time with the help of the internet, but at the same time, the internet has also brought some challenges to the dissemination and development of football. Firstly, there is the phenomenon of "more information, less content". The internet has a large amount of information, fast updates, and football news swipes across the screen, lacking depth and professionalism, which can easily make fans' understanding float on the surface and cannot see the essence of events, such as some events related to football stars. Secondly, there is the issue of "false information". There have been many rumors and false news about football stars and football on the internet, which may mislead fans' judgments and decisions. Finally, there is the issue of "piracy". Some illegal websites have damaged the legitimate rights and interests of football dissemination by uploading football game videos, while also affecting the viewing experience of fans. Among them, the most famous and well-known aspect in the online dissemination of football is the comparison of honors between Ronaldo and Messi, mainly including the Ballon d'Or, the Champions League, the World Cup, and so on. Meanwhile, this comparison also reflects the comparison between Ronaldo fans and Messi fans. The emergence of any social phenomenon is not accidental, it has a certain degree of inevitability. From the development of the internet to changes in social life experiences and psychological changes, the spread of online football has a certain influence on fans. Therefore, it is also necessary for us to analyze these social phenomena of football stars and online fan culture from the perspectives of communication and audience psychology, in order to gain a deeper understanding of these phenomena.

2. Literature Review

Lu proposed a formula: the combination of competition and audience is equivalent to stand culture. At the same time, Lu also found that the higher the viewership of the competition, the higher the price of the advertisement, the stronger the authority of television broadcasting, the greater the interest of advertisers, the more opportunities for being brought into the camera location by the broadcasting television camera, and the more intense the competition for advertising. The television industry also receives some indirect income from it [1]. Francis proposed that both fan culture and stand culture contain three dimensions: material, spiritual, and institutional, as well as two aspects: external manifestation and internal concealment [2]. Yi proposed that internal hidden forms are manifested at the spiritual level, such as values, emotions, and thinking methods. External manifestations manifest at the material and institutional levels, such as social systems, venues [3]. In ball games, there is a phenomenon of fans cursing and fighting against each other, which is also an "insulting culture" that coexists with individuality and commonality. This phenomenon has existed for a long time, regardless of right or wrong, gender, or age, with malicious insults [4]. Tan discovered that fan culture contains rich psychological factors, such as the worship effect of football stars, social communication psychology, rebellious and stimulus seeking psychology. The worship of football stars is also a reflection of human imitation nature, thus satisfying one's own psychological reflection [5]. Shi and Shao discovered that the fan community is the role participation component of stand culture, and fans can become important participants in sports events. It also stems from identity recognition in sports behavior. Fans' expression of their own value enhancement and personal emotions is reflected in the team's behavior, with consistency. Therefore, the premise for citizens to become fans is their identity
recognition in sports events [6]. Zhang and A discovered that the influence of fan psychology on fan culture is a social phenomenon and a manifestation of fan psychology, which directly affects the development of fan culture. At the same time, they also found that fan fanaticism is common and is also a reason for the external expression of fan atmosphere and stadium atmosphere [7]. Piltz proposed that the social reasons for fan fanaticism culture, such as differences in personality, are the loss of spiritual sustenance; The emergence of economic problems has led to the occurrence of violent incidents; As well as human behavior and reactions to the environment, such as social reform [8]. Liu believes that the fan community strengthens the collective ability, allowing fans to feel the cohesion of the team and the fighting spirit of the players, and mobilizing human initiative and participation [9]. Levine proposed to cultivate a good fan culture, gradually guiding the values and orientations caused by the division of regions and team organizations towards common ideals, goals, races, beliefs, and a sense of belonging [10]. The spiritual culture is the essence, institutional culture is the guarantee, and spiritual culture can be internalized into the behavioral rules of fans through the limitations and guarantees of institutional culture. At the same time, only by combining and unifying material culture, spiritual culture, and institutional culture can we maintain a good atmosphere of fan spirit and fan culture [11].

3. Methodology

It mainly collects comments on various social media platforms, compares the number of fans of Ronaldo and Messi, two of the most famous football stars in the contemporary era, classifies the content descriptions of the two players in football short videos, and analyzes the content of different texts to show it by percentage. It mainly uses: Douyin, Instagram, TIKTOK, YouTube and Facebook. At the same time, examples were also used to demonstrate methods, such as analyzing the daily comments and YouTube content of American internet celebrity IShowspeed, as well as his views and worship of football stars, providing some facts to prove the impact of football stars on fans and the analysis of group extremism.

4. Results

A large amount of data was collected through the social media fan base of Ronaldo and Messi, as well as examples of the honors of the two football stars. This paper concludes that Ronaldo has a stronger influence in the world than Messi, and the fan base is also larger. The personality and behavior of fans are also influenced by their respective football stars. At the same time, there is a phenomenon of group extremism among 40% of fans, known as mutual online insults. Finally, the analysis identified ways and methods to improve group extremism, as well as the vision for football stars and fan groups.

5. Discussion

5.1. Cause: Football Star

Football stars are one of the most popular stars in the sports industry, possessing many unique characteristics. Firstly, they possess exceptional technical skills and are able to perform outstandingly in competitions. Secondly, their team cooperation ability is strong, and they can effectively cooperate with their teammates, which enhances the overall strength of the team. In addition, they also possess good perseverance and pressure resistance, able to remain calm and unaffected by external interference when facing challenges. Finally, their professional ethics are also very high, able to pursue their own interests while not forgetting the interests of the team and work hard for the team to achieve victory. In summary, football stars are highly regarded by fans and the football industry due to their exceptional technical level, excellent teamwork ability, good perseverance, and noble professional ethics.
Famous football stars include Gaid Mueller, Franz Beckenbauer, Maradona, Neuer, Thomas Mueller, Beckham, etc. Among them, the most famous are now: Leo Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. These two are one of the most outstanding football players of our time, and they have achieved remarkable achievements in their professional careers.

And what makes Ronaldo and Messi fans obsessed with them is inevitably their respective abilities:

1. Technical ability: Messi is known for his outstanding skills and agile footsteps, his ball control skills, breakthrough ability, and shooting accuracy are amazing. Ronaldo is known for his strong physical fitness, speed, and aerial advantage, as he excels in shooting, heading, and free kicks.

2. Personal style: Messi is led by his dexterity and technique, adept at using quick dribbles and sudden breakthroughs with small steps. He emphasizes teamwork and is skilled in creating opportunities and assists. Ronaldo, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on personal abilities and performance. He possesses excellent scoring and decision-making abilities, and often stands out at critical moments.

3. Professional Achievements: Messi and Ronaldo have both won multiple league championships, domestic and international cup championships, and they are truly unparalleled duos. The two have won the Ballon d'Or multiple times, such as Ronaldo winning a total of 5 Ballon d'Or awards, and Messi winning 7 Ballon d'Or awards, which is also one of the highest personal honors in football.

4. Personal preferences and fan influence: The unwashed style is humble and more low-key, and he has won widespread respect and affection for his outstanding performance. Ronaldo is more controversial, as his confidence and personal image have attracted many fans but have also attracted some criticism.

Overall, Messi and Ronaldo are legendary players in football history, each of whom has made significant contributions to the football world in their unique ways. Both in terms of technical ability and professional achievements, they are the top players in the football world, which is also the reason why they become superstars.

But at the same time, the technical style and personality traits of these two legendary football stars have also attracted a unique fan group. Messi and Ronaldo have the same winning mentality on the field, but their personalities are different off the field.

The different birth and family circumstances of the two also contribute to their different personality traits. Ronaldo is proud and does not allow others to disrespect him, never giving up. However, he also misses his deceased father, who unfortunately passed away in his middle age. Messi's family, on the other hand, is happier than Ronaldo's. It's a replica of his parents, low-key, introverted, shy, and quiet. They have a happy family with his wife Antonella.

The different influences brought by family have given Ronaldo and Essie different personalities, with Messi being more introverted and Ronaldo being more outgoing. Their career paths have become different as a result.

Ronaldo fans admire Ronaldo's skills and confidence, but they are also saddened by his family experience. Messi fans love Messi's skills and kindness, but just like different personalities collide with different sparks, different fans also struggle and oppose each other, which is also the impact and cause of these two football stars on fans.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology, including a five-level model of human needs, typically depicted as levels within a pyramid. From the bottom up of the hierarchy, the needs are physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), social needs (friendship), respect, and self-actualization. This five-stage model can be divided into insufficient demand and increasing demand. The first four levels are usually referred to as defect requirements (D requirements), while the highest level is called growth requirements (B requirements). People need motivation to achieve certain needs, some of which take precedence over others, and individuals have different pursuits of needs. Some have a need for self-esteem that exceeds the need for love and belonging.

From these two football stars, it can be seen that Ronaldo has unlimited self-esteem and a competitive spirit, which also makes him have strict self-requirements and dietary management for
his body management, football skills, and game state. He even demands his own performance beyond the need for social friendship and respect for others, through partial satisfaction and control of his so-called D needs, in order to achieve his own B needs and achieve the stage of self-actualization value, this is also what Ronaldo has been forcing himself to do. This is not only reflected in Ronaldo himself, but also in Ronaldo's requirements for his son, partially meeting his own son's D needs. Through personal training and experience imparting, Ronaldo enables his son to become someone like him in the future, Realize the improvement of self-worth, that is, in terms of status, achievements, honors, etc. in the football field.

Messi, on the other hand, develops D and B needs in a relatively balanced manner. In his own family, due to his dwarfism, he cannot have a proud height like Ronaldo. However, through his efforts and talent, he can improve dribbling and passing skills, and his self-discipline is not as strict as Ronaldo's requirement that hair should not be present anywhere except for his hair. Messi has been wearing a beard in recent years. Moreover, in addition to the most basic training, Messi also does not require himself to have the same physical fitness and muscle mass as Ronaldo. In terms of social friendship, Messi is superior to Ronaldo in terms of respect. It can be seen from at least 7 Ballon d'Or votes and player feedback, which is also due to Messi's gentle personality. Messi describes failure and family as follows: he also dislikes failure but knows how to face it. He ignores failure and tells himself that there is still a chance, while family can help him forget the pain of failure on the field.

These two football stars have different performances in terms of D needs and B needs, which also affects the attitude of their two fans towards each other's fans on the internet.

5.2. Comparison of Fan Culture between the Two on the Internet

1. What is fan culture and its performance on the internet

The representative works of fan culture are the Tifo of each stadium, as well as the fireworks of home team colors set off inside the stadium.

What is Tifo? Tifo is a fan culture that originated in Italy and can be traced back to ancient Roman times, when nobles could enter the arena with flags supporting a particular gladiator while watching a gladiator duel. In the late 1970s, as the confrontation between AC Milan and Inter Milan fans escalated, Tifo culture became popular on the football field, and fans began to produce larger and more spectacular Tifo.

As a major display of fan art creation, Tifo has become an important component of football matches and fan culture. With Tifo, fans can express their emotions and opinions in the most intuitive and effective way. Both fan culture and stand culture contain three dimensions: material, spiritual, and institutional, as well as two aspects: external manifestation and internal concealment [2]. The internal hidden forms are manifested at the spiritual level, such as values, emotions, and thinking methods. External manifestations manifest at the material and institutional levels, such as social systems, venues [3].

Taking Germany as an example, it has a well-established football coach and player training system, a modern stadium with high-level equipment, and a world-class league and national team. The German team, with its profound foundation, excellent and stable results, and advanced football philosophy, has led the trend of world football and received unanimous praise from the industry. In 1998, it was selected as the "Best Team of the 20th Century" by the British professional football magazine "World Football". In 1999, it was selected as the "Best Team in Europe of the 20th Century" by the French newspaper "L'Equipe". The authoritative football magazine "French Football" has selected Germany as the "National Team of the Year" 13 times.

At the same time, many clubs in the Bundesliga have their own stands at home, and this is the most loyal and crazy fan stand. During important matches or events, German fans will wave giant pictures with patterns or words on the stands, preserving the Tifo culture that originated in southern Europe and continues to the current stadium.
Among them, there are also the most famous Bundesliga champions - Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund. Bayern Munich has the most modern Allianz stadium in Germany, while Borussia Dortmund is home to the Devil's Stadium, which is the number one in Europe.

In the 2012/2013 season, Borussia Dortmund faced Malaga at home in the second leg of the Champions League quarter finals. At that time, on the south stand of Westphalia Stadium, which had not yet been renamed as "Iduna Signal Park Stadium", Borussia Dortmund's loyal fans pulled up a giant Tifo, depicting a fan in a Borussia Dortmund jersey holding a telescope and gazing into the distance. The caption read "Walking on the road to finding a lost Champions League trophy". This phenomenon also demonstrates the craziness, collective cohesion, and fanatical spirit of enthusiastic fans.

However, with the development and popularization of network technology, more and more "out of the circle" fans have the opportunity to pay attention to and support football matches on the other end of the world at the same time. At the same time, everyone can use new media platforms to create videos of their home team's live fan culture, in order to promote their home team's Tifo or players, which also dilutes and intersects the sense of boundaries. One of the most obvious characteristics is the emergence of cross-border fans: they are not significantly different from other home team fans, but the only difference is that when the attributes that support the team are labeled as "nationality", the tension between national emotions and personal belonging has to be reconsidered, revealing the cultural connotations of the fan community as a group in a globalized (more accurately, in a cross-border context) sense.

2. Comparison of Ronaldo and Messi Fans on the Internet

On the internet, fans of Ronaldo and Messi often criticize each other's football star behavior due to their different honors and personal personalities.

For example, Ronaldo fans will refer to Messi as "Asata" on the internet, while Messi fans will refer to Ronaldo as "Aveiro", both of which have derogatory nicknames.

On the internet, the fan community does not have to face each other directly, thus obtaining their sense of satisfaction and achievement through abusive behavior online. This is a "abusive culture" where individuality and commonality coexist, and this phenomenon has existed for a long time, regardless of right or wrong, gender, or age, with malicious insults [4].

Who is the most influential football player in the world can be analyzed based on the global fan base of Ronaldo and Messi. In terms of Instagram alone, Ronaldo has 608 million followers, while Messi has only 488 million followers. From this app alone, it can be seen that there is a clear gap, and 40% of these two huge fan groups often engage in mutual attacks to gain their own psychological sense of achievement. The worship of football stars is also a manifestation of human imitative nature, satisfying one's own psychology and feelings [5].

Just as Lazarus proposed and Arnoldrez 'definition of emotional psychology:' Emotion is the organization of physiological and psychological responses from positive or negative information in an ongoing environment, which relies on short-term or sustained evaluations. 'Both fans rely on their short-term online understanding, The influence of other people's evaluations of each other's football stars and their long-term and sustained evaluations of each other's football stars have gradually formed an emotion. At the same time, a person will find someone with absolute authority in a certain field and act as their own representative or label.

But sometimes critics are not true fans of either side. They only vent their dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction with their own lives through their shallow understanding of football. In order to achieve this goal, they need to find a so-called "spiritual leader" to lead their public opinion to vent their emotional psychology, to satisfy oneself by venting one's sense of existence online to compensate for one's lack of existence in reality.

And it also involves the so-called sense of identity, which is the prerequisite for citizens to become fans in sports events [6]. Identity is an individual's perception of themselves, confirmation of their own identity, and recognition of the group they belong to. And a single individual's identity can make oneself feel less resonant, so collective identity has become a crucial part. It gathers a large part of
the individual's identity and then forms a group, alleviating psychological loneliness. Both fans have found specific online app comment platforms in the broad online environment, thus obtaining the function of collective emotional venting in a specific online space, releasing personal emotions in real life and online media. At the same time, in order to gain the recognition of the internal group of fans, the timely expression of online digital fans usually has group consistency and exclusivity.

And this is also a manifestation of the so-called extreme fan culture on the internet, and even a variant form of extreme fan culture in reality. It is also a manifestation of group extremism. The phenomenon of fan fanaticism is common, and it is also a reason for the external expression of the fan atmosphere and stadium atmosphere [7]. Group decision-making may make individuals more adventurous or more conservative. A large number of studies have found that group decision-making is more likely to go to extremes, that is, group polarization, than individual decision-making. The principle of the minority obeying the majority also makes group discussions more extreme in terms of the views held by group members. That is, the previously conservative tend to be more conservative, and the previously adventurous tend to be more adventurous. Without comparison, one cannot achieve a sense of achievement and superiority, while generating spiritual pleasure through mutual slander.

And there are three mechanisms for this group's extremism: the first is the information leadership mechanism. The reason why the online fan group comes together is due to the consistency of identification with football stars, and the maintenance of their own football stars, which leads to the information orientation of other fans. The Social Causes of Fan Enthusiasm Culture: the second is the social constraint mechanism on words and actions [8]. The lonely status of individuals in the internet can cause psychological burden when expressing personal opinions, especially when negative information about another football star is published, which can lead to another targeted football star's fan group besieging the spokesperson. At this time, a fan group with the same ideological identity will provide psychological protection for the individual. At the same time, in the online environment, it also maintains spokespersons due to collective identity, which increases group extremism and opposition between groups. The fan community strengthens the collective ability, allowing fans to feel the cohesion of the team and the fighting spirit of the players, and mobilizing human initiative and participation [9]. This is also the third mechanism, which is the extreme and confidence mechanism, which is derived from the second mechanism. When an individual's viewpoint is recognized and proven by the collective, the individual's confidence will increase accordingly, forming a set, affecting the group, making the group more extreme in their respective viewpoints, and deeply causing group opposition.

3. Can the two coexist harmoniously?

About being able to coexist harmoniously, eliminating so-called false fans who have an extreme sense of urgent need, and gradually guiding the development of values and orientations caused by the division of regional and team organizations towards common ideals, goals, races, beliefs, and sense of belonging [10]. The two can definitely coexist harmoniously. As long as one can stay away from the "bias effect", analyze and think rationally, and objectively evaluate.

An American internet celebrity anchor on Instagram and YouTube, Speed, was a Ronaldo fan who supported Ronaldo at the Qatar World Cup, always wearing Ronaldo's Portugal jersey. In the subsequent World Cup finals, he still wore the French jersey, but in the end, Argentina won his own World Cup, and Speed himself took off the French jersey, revealing the Argentine jersey hidden inside, through this behavior, this paper finds that Speed is not a so-called internet extremist, but truly loves this sport, while respecting every football star, supporting every winner, and affirming the efforts of every football star for personal and collective achievements.

The process of emotional expression among online fans is also the process of shaping the image of one's own home team and football star. Under moral standards, avoid aggressive speech and group extremism caused by one's own stereotypes. Only by combining and unifying material culture, spiritual culture, and institutional culture can we maintain a good atmosphere of fan spirit and fan culture [11].

646
6. Conclusion

Over the past 15 years, Ronaldo and Messi have reigned as football's royalty, amassing billions of passionate fans worldwide. Messi’s remarkable attributes include his incredible speed, low center of gravity, exceptionally high stride frequency, and outstanding passing and shooting skills. Even in the face of challenges, such as key teammates leaving Barcelona and a shifting system, Messi perseveres. Ronaldo's unwavering desire for goals and unyielding commitment to victory represent a spirit that transcends mere self-discipline. These qualities are something for fans to cherish and remember. In the realm of football, Ronaldo’s fans hope for Messi’s precise passes when they encounter defensive walls, while Messi’s supporters wish for Ronaldo's towering headers in the face of a 2.95-meter cross. This mutual appreciation exemplifies the harmonious relationship between both football stars and their fans. The rise of new media has fostered more direct and immediate communication among fan groups, overcoming geographical and temporal boundaries. While enhancing communication, it is crucial to prevent groupthink and the potential adverse consequences of using sports as an outlet for frustration. In adherence to moral and legal standards, it is incumbent upon fans to channel their emotions constructively, support their respective football stars and home teams, and preserve the purity of the football world. This entails safeguarding the image of individuals, groups, players, and teams, ensuring that the world of football remains untainted.

References