

PERCEPTION OF SPORTS TOURISM AWARENESS: AN EXAMINATION OF NIGERIA FANS' KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST IN 2023 AFCON

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Abstract

This paper investigated the level of awareness and interest in sports tourism among Nigerian football fans during AFCON 2023. The research design adopted for this study is descriptive and survey-based, which enabled the systematic collection of primary data through the administration of a structured questionnaire. The study focused on a sample of 150 respondents, selected from various communities within the Local Government Area. Descriptive analysis was employed to analysis the data. Result from the study revealed that there is a high level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition. The level of education among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. The ethnicity of Nigerians has an impact on the level of awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. The level of income among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition and that Nigerians rely on all information channels to get information about the AFCON footballing competition. The study therefore recommends that travel agencies and event organizers should create affordable and well-structured tour packages that combine match attendance with cultural and recreational activities.

Keywords: Sports, Tourism, Awareness, Interest, AFCON 2023, Fan Engagement.

Introduction

Football is widely acknowledged as the most popular and passionately followed sport globally, with an estimated fan base exceeding 3.5 billion individuals (Tepend, 2021). Known as "soccer" in the United States, football transcends linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries, emerging as a global phenomenon that unites people across various regions. In Nigeria, football holds a particularly revered status and is deeply embedded in the social fabric of the nation (Iwaugwu et al., 2023). Beyond being a recreational activity, football represents a cultural institution and a significant part of daily life. It is not uncommon for almost every household in Nigeria to have at least one devoted fan, a reflection of the sport's widespread appeal and social influence.

Scholars such as Hassabi et al. (2010) and Kramer et al. (2018) have confirmed the global dominance of football, citing its unmatched levels of viewership, support, and celebration. Nigeria's large population—exceeding 200 million people—and predominantly youthful demographic with a median age of 19 (UNDP, 2021; Iwaugwu et al., 2023), further amplify the country's football enthusiasm. For Nigerian youths, football is a source of joy, identity, and social cohesion. The globalization of media and the advancement of digital technologies have significantly expanded access to football content, making live matches, highlights, and fan interactions readily available (Dogari et al., 2018; Knoll et al., 2014). As a result, the sport has become more integrated into the daily lives of the populace and has emerged as a key aspect of youth culture.

In tandem with the sport's popularity, sports tourism has evolved into a significant component of the global tourism industry. Tichaawa et al. (2018) define sports tourism as travel involving the observation or participation in sporting events outside one's usual environment. This form of tourism has proven to be a driver of economic development, cultural exchange, and international diplomacy. According to Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa (2018), the sector plays an increasingly important role in developing countries seeking to diversify their economies through service industries and tourism.

The Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), Africa's premier football tournament, represents one of the continent's most influential sporting events and a major catalyst for sports tourism. The 2023 edition, hosted by Côte d'Ivoire, was a significant spectacle that attracted attention across Africa and globally. For Nigeria, AFCON 2023 presented an opportunity to merge the country's deep-rooted football passion with tourism experiences. Thousands of Nigerian fans traveled to support the Super Eagles, thereby contributing to cross-border sports tourism. However, challenges such as ticket hoarding and fan intimidation were reported, which negatively impacted the experience for some attendees.

Despite these setbacks, digital platforms significantly enhanced fan engagement and participation. For instance, TikTok served as a vital platform during AFCON 2023, with the Confederation of African Football (CAF)'s official account amassing over 8.8 million followers and the #AFCON2023 hashtag generating over 390,000 user-generated videos (Iwaugwu et al., 2023). These figures highlight the digital amplification of sports events and their increasing relevance in fan culture.

In Nigeria, the tournament spurred several tourism-related initiatives that bridged local enthusiasm with broader economic activity. Events such as Brila Media's Naija Fans Fest combined live match screenings with cultural performances and games, attracting large audiences and stimulating local businesses. Similarly, the Lagos State Government, under Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, organized free public viewing centers across the state. These centers promoted community cohesion, enhanced accessibility to the tournament, and served as hubs of informal economic activity.

Moreover, the tournament catalyzed commercial activities such as the sale of team merchandise and increased participation in sports betting. These trends underscore the economic potential embedded in football events and highlight how such tournaments can stimulate various aspects of the local economy. According to Nigeria's Minister of Sports Development, Senator John Owan-Enoh, there is a critical need to perceive sports as a strategic economic sector. He has advocated for infrastructural development and policy support to position Nigeria as a viable hub for sports tourism in Africa.

In a broader cultural context, football in Nigeria is often described as a "modern religion" due to its profound emotional and social significance among the youth. It offers entertainment, identity, a sense of belonging, and opportunities for socio-economic mobility. As globalization and digital connectivity continue to deepen, international tournaments such as AFCON exert even greater influence on local fan cultures, consumption patterns, and travel interests. However, Osuoha, et al (2025) noted that sports tourism is capable of generating negative environmental impacts such as overcrowding and pollution and therefore called for effective waste management during such mega events.

Despite Nigeria's vibrant football culture and its predominantly youthful population, there remains a noticeable gap in academic research concerning how major international sporting events—such as AFCON 2023—affect sports tourism awareness and behaviors among Nigerian football fans. While anecdotal evidence suggests heightened enthusiasm during such tournaments, there is limited empirical data exploring whether this translates into increased interest or participation in sports tourism. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive insight into how international football tournaments can be strategically leveraged to promote both domestic and outbound sports tourism, particularly within the context of emerging economies like Nigeria, which often face infrastructural constraints and policy challenges. Without a clear understanding of these dynamics, Nigeria risks missing valuable opportunities to harness football as a vehicle for sustainable tourism development and economic diversification. Therefore, this study aims to assess the level of awareness and interest in sports tourism among Nigerian football fans during AFCON 2023.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Ado-Ekiti, the capital city of Ekiti State, located in the southwestern region of Nigeria. As one of the most developed urban centers in the state, Ado-Ekiti holds both historical and contemporary significance. Formerly the seat of the pre-colonial Ekiti Kingdom, the city is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and is

predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group. With an estimated population exceeding 500,000 residents, Ado-Ekiti ranks among the more populous cities in Nigeria.

Ado-Ekiti is characterized by a vibrant sports culture, particularly in relation to football. The city is home to numerous sports facilities and organized fan clubs that actively participate in and support both urban and rural-level sporting events and tournaments. This dynamic engagement with sports makes Ado-Ekiti a relevant setting for a study on sports tourism awareness.

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive and survey-based, which enabled the systematic collection of primary data through the administration of a structured questionnaire. This approach was chosen to effectively capture the perceptions, awareness, and interests of the participants regarding sports tourism during the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) tournament.

The research was carried out across multiple communities within the Ado-Ekiti Local Government Area of Ekiti State. Due to practical and logistical constraints, it was not feasible to study the entire population. Therefore, the study focused on a sample of 150 respondents, selected from various communities within the Local Government Area.

Given the nature of the research objectives and the variables involved, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, facilitating triangulation and ensuring the robustness of findings.

Although the study is localized within Ado-Ekiti, the findings may offer insights that are applicable to broader contexts, particularly other urban centers in Nigeria with similar socio-cultural and sports engagement dynamics.

Cochran's equation of finite population was used to determine the sample of the study. The formula is stated below:

$$N_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2 N}$$

$$N_0 = \frac{SS}{1 + \frac{(SS-1)}{Pop}}$$

Where

SS = Sample size

Pop = Population

n = sample size

Z = Z value of confidence level.

P = Estimated proportion of an attribute present in the population

q = 1-p

e = Desired level of precision expressed in decimal.

N = Population size.

Using a 90% confidence interval; Z = 1.645

e = ± 10% = 0.1

p = 0.5 (maximum variable)

q = 1 - 0.5 = 0.5

N = 0.5

$$N_0 = \frac{(2.53)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.10)^2} = 160$$

$$N_0 = \frac{160}{1 + \frac{(160-1)}{4300}} = 153.85 \approx 150$$

The sampling procedure employed in this study involved the random selection of residential divisions within the Ado-Ekiti Local Government Area. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to ensure that each unit of the population had an equal chance of being selected, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

Primary data served as the main source of information for this study. This data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which was administered to residents across various communities within the study area. The questionnaire served as the principal research instrument and was designed to elicit responses relevant to the research objectives.

The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions formed the structured core of the instrument and were primarily used to facilitate quantitative analysis. The open-ended questions, on the other hand, were incorporated to capture more nuanced responses and to provide a more holistic understanding of the participants' perspectives.

The items in the questionnaire addressed key issues that captures the perceptions, awareness, and interests of the participants regarding sports tourism during the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) tournament. Respondents were asked to reflect on the positive and negative implications of sports tourism on the average Nigerian. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), allowing respondents to express the degree of their agreement with each statement.

For the purpose of data analysis, the study employed the Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient. This statistical technique was selected due to the quantitative nature of the data collected, which comprised ordinal variables that could be ranked. Spearman's correlation is particularly appropriate when assessing the strength and direction of association between two ranked variables.

This method was deemed suitable as the study fulfilled the required conditions for its application, including: an adequate sample size (minimum of 10 observations), independent observations, data presented in frequency form, and use of the entire dataset without omissions. The technique also allows for the testing of hypotheses by comparing observed values against expected values under the assumption that the null hypothesis is true.

Moreover, degrees of freedom, determined by sample size, were considered in interpreting the significance of the correlation coefficients. The use of this technique enabled the researcher to examine the strength of association between variables and provided insights into the overall distribution of responses in relation to the research hypotheses.

Due to the nature and number of the variables involved in this study, quantitative data analysis was used to process the data. For the quantitative analysis Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 17) was used to process the data. For the lower version of analysis for the perception of respondent's percentages were used to analyse the data. This means that the analysis was done on the content of the data which were collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 illustrates the response rate recorded during the data collection phase of this study. Out of a total of 150 questionnaires distributed across the selected study locations, 143 questionnaires were successfully retrieved, representing a response rate of 95.33%, while 7 questionnaires (4.67%) were not returned.

This high response rate was facilitated by the method of administration. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and waited while participants completed them, enabling immediate collection. This approach minimized loss and ensured that the intended sample size was maintained, thereby preserving the representativeness of the target population and enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

All retrieved questionnaires were subsequently organized, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for systematic analysis. The data were then interpretively analyzed to derive meaningful insights in line with the study's objectives.

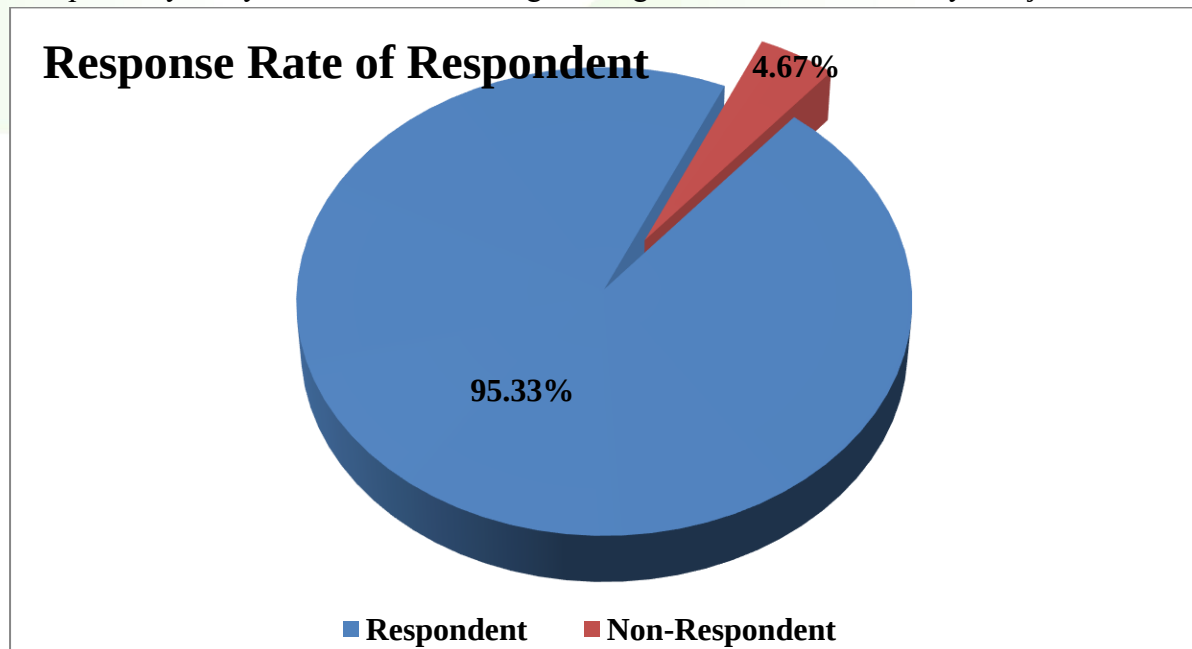


Figure 1. Response rate of respondent during the course of the study

Source: Fieldwork, (2024)

Personal Details of Respondents

Table 1. Personal details of respondent during the course of this study

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	91	63.64
	Female	52	36.36
	Total	143	100%
Age bracket	18-30 years	38	26.57
	31-50 years	65	45.46
	51 and above	40	27.97
	Total	143	100%

Educational attainment	SSCE	30	20.98
	NCE/OND	37	25.87
	B.Sc/B.Ed	51	35.66
	Ph.D	5	3.50
	No formal	20	13.99
	Total	143	100%
Nationality	Nigerian	137	95.80%
	Foreigner	6	4.20%
	Total	143	100%
Marital Status	Single	56	39.16
	Married	67	46.85
	Divorced	20	13.99
	Total	143	100%
	Total	143	100%

Source: Fieldwork, (2025)

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The presentation and analysis of the demographic characteristics of respondents are summarized in Table 1. The study sought to determine the gender distribution of participants. As indicated, 63.64% (n = 91) of the respondents were male, while 36.36% (n = 52) were female. Regarding age distribution, 26.57% (n = 38) of respondents fell within the 18–30-year age bracket, 45.46% (n = 65) were aged between 31 and 50 years, and 27.97% (n = 40) were aged 51 years and above. In terms of educational attainment, 20.98% (n = 30) of respondents held a Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE), 25.87% (n = 37) possessed an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), while 35.66% (n = 51) held a Bachelor's degree (B.Sc./B.Ed). A smaller percentage, 3.50% (n = 5), were Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) holders, and 13.99% (n = 20) had no formal education. The nationality of respondents revealed that the vast majority, 95.80% (n = 137), were Nigerian citizens, whereas 4.20% (n = 6) were non-Nigerians. Marital status distribution showed that 39.16% (n = 56) of respondents were single, 46.85% (n = 67) were married, and 13.99% (n = 20) were divorced at the time the study was conducted.

As it is expected of any population sample, the sample reflected the population distribution of the study area as questionnaires were apportioned in line with the population distribution and thus the study revealed that the male formed the majority of the total respondents. This correlates with the findings of Tunde (2012) who recorded more males than female with a male percentage of about 56.7% to 43.3% of female. Most of the respondents are between the age of 31-50 years. The study also revealed that more respondents are B.Sc/B.Ed holders more than any other degree. This is in line with the findings of Edet *et al.* (2014) and Agbu and Raji (2020) who reported that more respondents are B.Sc/B.Ed holders more than any other degree.

Knowledge of the respondents on the level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition

Table 2 Respondents' view on whether there is a high level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition

There is a high level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition.		
Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	64	44.76
Agree	58	40.56
Disagree	19	13.28
Strongly Disagree	2	1.40
Total	143	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 2 shows respondents' view on whether there is a high level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition. It was observed from the result that 44.76% (64) of the respondents strongly agreed that there is a high level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition. The result also showed that 40.58 (58) agreed, 13.28% (19) of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 1.40% (2) of the respondents strongly disagreed that there is a high level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that there is a high level of awareness among Nigerians of AFCON footballing competition.

The findings of this study highlight a significant and widespread awareness of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) football competition among Nigerians. This is consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the strong cultural relevance of football in Nigeria, particularly in terms of public awareness and engagement with international sporting events. The level of awareness of AFCON in Nigeria is reflective of the larger role that football plays within the national consciousness, and this study found that Nigerian respondents are highly informed about the competition. This aligns with the findings of Hassabi et al. (2010) and Kramer et al. (2018), who found that football is not only a widely followed sport but also a source of significant national pride, with events like AFCON captivating the attention of millions of Nigerians.

Table 3: Respondents' view on whether the level of education among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition

The level of education among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition		
Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	18	12.59
Agree	12	8.39
Disagree	62	43.36
Strongly Disagree	51	35.66
Total	143	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 shows respondents' view on whether the level of education among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. The result reviewed that 12.59% (18)

of the respondents strongly agreed that the level of education among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition, 8.39% (12) of the respondents agreed. Results also showed that 43.36% (62) of the respondents disagreed, 35.66% (51) strongly disagreed. Majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that the level of education among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. The study reveals a strong correlation between the level of education and the awareness of the AFCON competition. Respondents with higher educational attainment were more likely to express knowledge of AFCON, suggesting that individuals with greater access to information and media platforms are more informed about international football events. This finding aligns with Dogari et al. (2018), who observed that education influences how individuals engage with media and global events, making them more likely to consume diverse sources of information, including news about sports tournaments like AFCON. Additionally, Knoll et al. (2014) emphasized the role of education in increasing access to information, which fosters awareness of significant global events, such as sports tournaments. Education often serves as a conduit for better access to technology and information, allowing educated individuals to stay more connected with global sports narratives. The positive correlation between education and awareness in this study affirms this assertion and further suggests that the more educated individuals are, the greater their exposure to, and understanding of, global events like AFCON.

Table 4: Respondents' view on whether the ethnicity of Nigerians has an impact on the level of awareness of the AFCON footballing competition

The ethnicity of Nigerians has an impact on the level of awareness of the AFCON footballing competition		
Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	21	14.69
Agree	10	6.99
Disagree	50	34.97
Strongly Disagree	62	43.36
Total	143	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Tables 4, shows respondents' view on whether the ethnicity of Nigerians has an impact on the level of awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. 14.69% (21) of the respondents strongly agreed, 6.99% (10) of the respondents agreed that the ethnicity of Nigerians has an impact on the level of awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. The research also revealed that 34.97% (50) of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 62% (43.36) of the respondents strongly agreed. Majority of the respondents disagreed, this affirmed that the ethnicity of Nigerians has no impact on the level of awareness of the AFCON footballing competition.

Contrary to initial expectations, this study found that ethnicity did not significantly impact the level of awareness of AFCON among Nigerians. This outcome agrees with the findings of Tichaawa et al. (2018), who argued that football has transcended ethnic lines, becoming a

unifying force in countries like Nigeria. The universal appeal of football in Nigeria means that fans, regardless of their ethnic background, are collectively engaged in the sport and its major tournaments, such as AFCON. The findings support the idea that in multicultural societies like Nigeria, football offers a shared experience that overrides ethnic divisions. In fact, Bob and Swart (2010) have also suggested that the sport's ability to unify diverse communities is one of its key features, further indicating that ethnic differences may not influence awareness of international sports events in such settings.

Table 5: Respondents' knowledge on whether the level of income among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition

The level of income among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition		
Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	33	23.08
Agree	24	16.78
Disagree	45	31.47
Strongly Disagree	41	28.67
Total	143	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 5 shows respondents' knowledge on whether the level of income among Nigerians relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. 23.08% (33) of the respondents strongly agreed, 16.78% (24) agreed, 31.47% (45) of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 28.67 (41) strongly disagreed. Majority of the respondents disagreed, this holds that the level of income among Nigerians doesn't relate to awareness of the AFCON footballing competition. Similarly, income levels were found not to have a significant correlation with the awareness of the AFCON competition. This suggests that Nigerians across various economic strata have equal access to information about the competition, likely due to the widespread reach of both traditional and digital media. Marumo et al. (2015) also noted that the growing presence of digital media platforms, which provide free or low-cost access to information, has significantly reduced the information gap between different income groups. Regardless of their income, Nigerians are exposed to similar channels of media coverage, which has helped ensure that awareness of AFCON is widespread. Further supporting this view, Salgado-Barandela et al. (2021) indicated that digital technologies and social media have allowed individuals from lower-income backgrounds to access content related to international sporting events, leveling the playing field in terms of exposure to such events. This reflects the democratizing effect of modern communication tools, which ensure that income does not create barriers to sports awareness.

Table 6: Respondents' Knowledge on whether Nigerians rely on all information channels to get information about the AFCON footballing competition

Nigerians rely on all information channels to get information about the AFCON footballing competition		
Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	47	32.88
Agree	48	33.57
Disagree	45	31.47
Strongly Disagree	3	2.10
Total	143	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 6 shows respondents' knowledge on whether Nigerians rely on all information channels to get information about the AFCON footballing competition. 32.88% (47) of the respondents strongly agreed, 33.57% (48) agreed, 31.47% (45) of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 2.10% (3) of the respondents strongly disagreed. Majority of the respondents agreed; this affirms that Nigerians rely on all information channels to get information about the AFCON footballing competition.

Several other studies have similarly supported the key findings of this study. For example, Nyikana (2016) and Steinbrink et al. (2011) have highlighted the centrality of football in Nigerian society, observing that both educated and non-educated Nigerians exhibit high levels of engagement with football events. These findings corroborate the results of this study that show education as a positive factor influencing awareness, while ethnicity and income are not significant barriers to sports knowledge.

Moreover, Diedrich and Garcia-Buades (2009) argued that globalization, driven by technological advancements, has played a pivotal role in expanding the reach of sports competitions, making them accessible to a broader audience. This aligns with the findings in this study, where Nigerians, irrespective of their ethnic or income backgrounds, access AFCON-related information via multiple platforms.

Muthama et al. (2017) supported the view that educational attainment positively impacts the level of engagement with sports, including football. They found that individuals with higher education were more likely to participate in sports-related activities and follow major sports tournaments. This is congruent with this study's findings, where higher educational levels corresponded with greater awareness of AFCON. Bob and Swart (2010) also stressed the role of media in promoting sports awareness and engagement, noting that media channels, including social media platforms, significantly shape public perceptions and understanding of global events. The widespread media coverage of AFCON, particularly through digital platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, was highlighted in the study by Iwaugwu et al. (2023), which showed that the popularity of these platforms has led to an increase in fan engagement, particularly among younger, tech-savvy Nigerians.

Tichaawa et al. (2018) also emphasized that sports tourism, including events like AFCON, contributes to the global popularity and awareness of football competitions. Their study showed that fan engagement with AFCON and other major football tournaments goes beyond

the borders of participating countries, highlighting how digital platforms help connect global fans and promote cross-cultural awareness. Finally, Hassabi et al. (2010) also reinforced the idea that sports, especially football, are deeply embedded in global culture and serve as a unifying force in diverse societies. This aligns with the findings of the present study, which showed that ethnicity has little impact on sports awareness, and that AFCON serves as a common point of reference for Nigerians across ethnic divides.

Hypothesis Testing

Variables	ΣX	ΣX^2	ΣY^2	ΣXY	r-val
The Perception of sports tourism awareness	699	3189	5674		0.78
Impacts on an Average Nigerian	184	2815			

Significant 0.05 level, critical $r=0.178$, $df=498$.

From the result above Table, the calculated r-value of 0.78 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.178 at 0.05 levels of significance and 498 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis which revealed that perception of sports tourism awareness has a significant impact on the average Nigerian.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
	R Square Change	F Change				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
			df1	df2						
1	0.325 ^a	0.101	0.13	0.782	.00000	8.819	11	452	.000	0.123.

a Predictors: (Constant), Awareness of AFCON footballing competition

b Dependent Variable: tourism development and socio-cultural and economic development

The result of the regression analysis on Table 2 shows a yielded coefficient of regression (R) of 0.325 and a multiple regression R-square (R^2) of 0.101, and adjusted R^2 of 0.13, at 0.01 level of significance, the result is significant, the result also shows that an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the multiple regressions produced an F-ratio of 8.819, while the f-critical value is 1.91 (2-tailed), since the calculated F-value of 8.819 is greater than the critical F-value of 1.91, at 0.05 significant level, (2-tailed), the result is also significant at 0.05 level. The significance of this result is that the AFCON footballing competition has a significant impact on the average Nigerian.

The findings from this study affirm the widespread awareness of AFCON among Nigerians, with education playing a key role in facilitating access to information about the competition. This study further highlights that ethnicity and income levels do not significantly influence awareness, which suggests that football's universal appeal in Nigeria transcends such demographic factors. The study's findings are supported by a range of scholarly research, which emphasizes the unifying role of football in Nigerian society and the impact of digital media in enhancing public engagement with international sports events like AFCON. Thus, the global reach of football and the ability of media to democratize access to sports-related

information have made AFCON a national and international event, accessible and known by all Nigerians, regardless of their educational background, ethnicity, or income level.

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully highlighted the significant level of awareness of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) football competition among Nigerians, demonstrating that football remains an integral part of the country's cultural and social fabric. The research confirms that education plays a crucial role in shaping the awareness of major football events like AFCON, with more educated individuals showing a higher level of engagement. However, the study also reveals that factors such as ethnicity and income do not significantly influence the awareness of the competition, emphasizing the unifying power of football in transcending demographic divides.

The findings further suggest that the accessibility of information through a variety of media platforms, including digital and social media, has allowed Nigerians from various backgrounds to stay informed about AFCON. This underscores the importance of media in democratizing access to global sports events and facilitating a more inclusive sports culture. The research aligns with previous scholarly work, which affirms the centrality of football in Nigerian society and the role of education and media in enhancing awareness and engagement with international tournaments.

In light of these findings, it is clear that the AFCON competition holds a significant place in Nigeria's sporting landscape. Moving forward, efforts should focus on leveraging the existing awareness to enhance sports tourism and further promote football-related events as a driver of both national unity and economic growth. Additionally, this study contributes to the broader understanding of how sports, particularly football, can serve as a tool for social cohesion, cultural exchange, and the economic development of nations.

RECOMMENDATION

This study therefore recommends that:

1. Government tourism agencies and sports bodies should launch educational campaigns to inform the public about the concept and benefits of sports tourism.
2. Travel agencies and event organizers should create affordable and well-structured tour packages that combine match attendance with cultural and recreational activities.
3. Prior to major sporting events, organizers should share information about local tourist sites and experiences through fan platforms, media, and social networks.
4. Collaborate with popular sports influencers and supporter groups to raise awareness and encourage participation in tourism-related activities during international tournaments.
5. Governments and private stakeholders should work to reduce visa restrictions and travel costs for sports fans, making participation in sports tourism more accessible.
6. Strengthen partnerships between national tourism boards, football federations, and private tour operators to build a sustainable sports tourism ecosystem.

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