** Racism in online football fan communities**

Article. Cable et al. (2021)'Racist behaviour is interfering with the game': exploring football fans' online responses to accusations of racism in football. <u>Soccer & Society</u>, 23, 8, 880-893
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Aim and methods. Racism remains a serious problem in football, extending beyond the stadium and into online spaces. Recent research has focused on understanding how football fans react to accusations of racism and how racist views are expressed on social media, particularly on Twitter. This study examined fan responses to an incident during a 2019 match between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur, where Chelsea player Antonio Rüdiger reported experiencing racist abuse. The researchers analysed thousands of tweets related to the match and the subsequent allegations.

Key findings. While many fans expressed solidarity with Rüdiger and condemned racism, a significant minority dismissed the claims, questioned Rüdiger's motives, or downplayed the seriousness of the situation. Some even falsely accused Rüdiger of fabricating the incident for personal gain. The research highlighted how the speed and anonymity of platforms like Twitter can encourage more extreme reactions and allow prejudiced views to surface. Importantly, the majority of responses condemned racism, suggesting that overt racism isn't the dominant view, but it's still a concerning presence.

The study also revealed that racism online isn't always direct abuse. It can manifest in more subtle ways, such as prejudiced jokes, questioning a player's integrity, or using culturally insensitive stereotypes. This research suggests that social media can amplify existing prejudices and provide a platform for expressing views people might not share in person. The formation of fan communities and identities also plays a role, with tensions sometimes arising within these groups.

This research matters because it provides valuable insights into the attitudes towards race and racism held by some football fans. Understanding these attitudes is crucial for developing effective strategies to challenge discrimination both online and offline. It also highlights the need for social media companies to do more to tackle online hate speech and address harmful content.

Limitations. The research primarily focused on Twitter, meaning the findings may not represent the views of all football fans. Furthermore, analyzing public tweets only provides a snapshot of the broader conversations taking place, and focusing on a single incident may not capture the full complexity of the issue. Despite these limitations, the research provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of racism in football and the challenges of addressing it in the digital age.