



FROM COLLECTIVE CELEBRATION TO SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION: FOOTBALL MEDIATIZATION AS PUBLIC PEDAGOGY IN MOROCCO

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Abstract:

This article examines the mediatization of football in Morocco as a process through which collective celebration is transformed into structured symbolic communication and public pedagogy. Moving beyond conventional approaches that treat football primarily as entertainment or focus on nationalism and fandom (Tapp, 2004; Benkwitz & Molnar, 2012), the study conceptualizes it as a mediatized cultural arena where emotions, narratives, and symbols are actively produced and circulated. Drawing on qualitative media discourse analysis and symbolic interpretation, the article investigates how football-related celebrations, particularly during the 2022 FIFA World Cup, are framed, amplified, and recontextualized through media systems. It argues that spontaneous collective festivities are progressively reorganized through processes of selection, framing, and repetition, producing coherent narratives of national unity, identity, and legitimacy. To theorize this transformation, this study introduces the concept of “*from collective celebration to symbolic communication*,” describing the shift from affective collective celebration to mediated symbolic communication. This process is further interpreted as a form of public pedagogy, whereby audiences implicitly learn meanings related to belonging, citizenship, and national representation through emotional engagement with mediated football events. The study contributes to debates in media studies, sport sociology, and political communication by offering a conceptual

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framework that links mediatization, symbolic communication, and informal learning within contemporary football cultures.

Keywords: mediatization; football; public pedagogy; habitus; symbolic communication; Morocco

1. Introduction

Football occupies a prominent position in the cultural and symbolic life of Morocco, extending beyond sport to function as a key site of collective expression and meaning production. Major international competitions frequently generate intensified forms of public engagement, in which urban spaces, digital platforms, and broadcast media converge to produce shared emotional experiences. These moments of celebration are not reducible to spontaneous joy; rather, they reflect structured processes of identity articulation and symbolic representation, and collective learning.

While existing scholarship has extensively examined football in relation to nationalism and fandom, less attention has been paid to the mediating role of communication systems in shaping the production of meaning. Within Media Studies, mediatization theory provides a productive lens for addressing this gap. Hepp and Couldry (2023) argue that media are not neutral channels but constitutive forces that structure social perception and experience.

From this perspective, football must be understood as a mediated cultural phenomenon in which events are continuously framed, circulated, and reinterpreted. This article advances the argument that the mediatization of football in Morocco operates as a form of public pedagogy, whereby collective emotions are transformed into implicit lessons about belonging, loyalty, and national identity. Drawing on the work of Giroux (2004), public pedagogy is understood as a diffuse educational process occurring outside formal institutions through cultural and media practices.

To conceptualize this transformation, the article introduces the notion of “*from feasting to message conveying*.” This concept serves as a conversion mechanism and captures the shift from spontaneous collective celebration to structured symbolic communication shaped by media logics of selection, framing, and repetition.

To examine how football functions as a mediated pedagogical process, this work is guided by the following research question:

- How does mediatization transform football celebrations into symbolic performances that function as forms of informal public pedagogy?

2. Literature Review

Research on football has expanded across multiple disciplines, particularly within Sociology of Sport, Media Studies, and Cultural Studies. A dominant strand of this literature conceptualizes football as a key site for the production and expression of

national identity. Scholars such as Bourdieu (1990) and Hobsbawm (1995) have emphasized the role of collective rituals and symbolic practices in constructing imagined communities and reinforcing shared social belonging.

Within sport sociology, football has often been analyzed as a space of emotional solidarity and social integration. Studies (e.g. Enaim, 2025) highlight its capacity to generate collective effervescence, particularly during major international tournaments, where national teams become symbolic and heroic representatives of the nation-state. That said, football makes the nation-state visible, not as an abstract political structure but as something lived, felt and collectively experienced. However, much of this literature (e.g. Frenkiel, 2021) tends to treat and analyze football through the lens of nationalism. Thus, they treat football events as spontaneous expressions of identity, without fully addressing the mediating role of contemporary communication systems.

A second strand of research focuses on media and sport. Here, scholars such as Rowe (2003) have demonstrated how media institutions actively construct sporting meaning through framing, representation, and narrative production. More recent work in Media Studies, particularly the theory of mediatization developed by Couldry and Hepp (2023), further argues that media are not external to social practices but deeply embedded within them, insofar as they influence how events are experienced and understood.

In this context, football is increasingly recognized as a mediatized cultural form in which emotional expression is amplified, structured, and circulated through digital and broadcast infrastructures. Yet, despite this growing literature, there remains limited conceptual attention to how collective celebration itself is transformed into communicative meaning through mediatization processes.

Against this backdrop, the present article addresses a key gap: the absence of an integrated framework that explains how spontaneous collective festivity is systematically reconfigured into mediated symbolic communication. By introducing the concept of *“from collective celebration to symbolic communication,”* this study contributes to bridging sport sociology, media theory, and public pedagogy through a unified analytical lens.

3. Theoretical Framework

This work triangulates the following theoretical lenses (Table 1), namely mediatization theory, public pedagogy, and habitus, to understand football as a mediated cultural force that shapes public meaning and cultural identity.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework

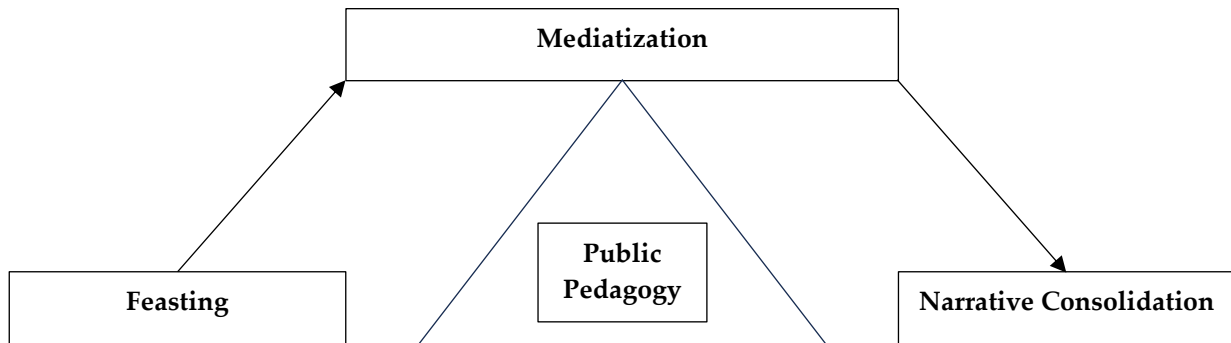
Mediatization	Public Pedagogy	Habitus
Nick Couldry & Andreas Hepp ➤ Datafication: media do not reflect events. They extract them. ➤ Media do not simply transmit events, but actively structure how they are experienced and interpreted	Henry Giroux ➤ We learn through media ➤ Cultural practices function as sites of informal learning	Pierre Bourdieu ➤ Through repetition and participation, mediated representations become embodied and perceived as natural forms of social behavior ➤ Football teaches dispositions rather than formal lessons

Drawing on the work of Couldry and Hepp (2023), this study explains how media do not merely reflect events, but rather structure, circulate and transform them into symbolic public narratives. Consequently, football celebrations are transformed into mediated spectacles in which meaning is stabilized through repetition and framing. From the perspective of Cultural Studies, public pedagogy (Giroux, 2004) highlights how cultural practices function as informal learning environments. This aligns with Bourdieu's work "The Logic of Practice" (1990), which explains how repeated symbolic exposure contributes to the formation of durable dispositions (habitus), shaping how individuals perceive and enact social reality. In this sense, football becomes a site where national identity is not taught but socially internalized through affective participation. Together, these frameworks support the analytical proposition that mediatized football functions as a system of symbolic production in which collective emotion is converted into communicable meaning.

4. Conceptual Framework

Building on the theoretical framework, this study conceptualizes football celebrations as a conversion mechanism that is not linear: It is recursive, selective, and productive. Put differently, what begins as collective feasting that is spontaneous and affective becomes structured messages through media processes. To understand the internal dynamics of this mechanism, this work proposes a triadic model adapted from the ABC model of attitude.

Figure 1: A triadic model of mediatized meaning production



5. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive case study design focused on the mediated construction of national identity, collective emotion and symbolic meaning surrounding Morocco's participation in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The case is examined through the interaction between media discourse, visual symbolism, and public cultural practices during high-intensity football moments that are characterized by extensive media circulation and collective public engagement.

The study draws on a purposively selected corpus of 20 data sources during and immediately after the FIFA World Cup tournament. The data sources were selected based on their visibility, circulation, symbolic relevance, and contribution to public narratives surrounding the Moroccan national team. The corpus includes televised match broadcasts, post-match media commentary, online press coverage, social media content, and documented public celebrations.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify moments of heightened symbolic intensity and mediatized public engagement. The selection prioritized materials that had extensive circulation, generated significant audience interaction, or contributed to recurring symbolic narratives relating to identity, collective belonging, and representation.

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) informed by media discourse and visual-symbolic analysis. This approach was selected because of its flexibility and suitability for interpretive qualitative research concerned with meaning-making, representation and affective communication.

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

- 1) identification of key mediated moments,
- 2) thematic coding of recurring symbolic patterns, and
- 3) interpretive reconstruction of meaning in relation to mediatization and public pedagogy.

Consistent with qualitative reflexive inquiry, the researcher's interpretive role was considered central to the analytical process. Meanings and themes were understood as

co-constructed through sustained engagement with the data, theoretical reflection, and contextual interpretation.

The credibility of the study was strengthened through triangulation across multiple forms of media and public expression, including match broadcasts, post-match media commentary, online press coverage, social media content, and documented public celebrations as shown in table. This multi-source approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how Morocco's World cup performance became a mediatized cultural event that is shaped through interconnected symbolic, emotional, and communicative processes.

Tableau 2: Media texts on Morocco (FIFA World Cup 2022)

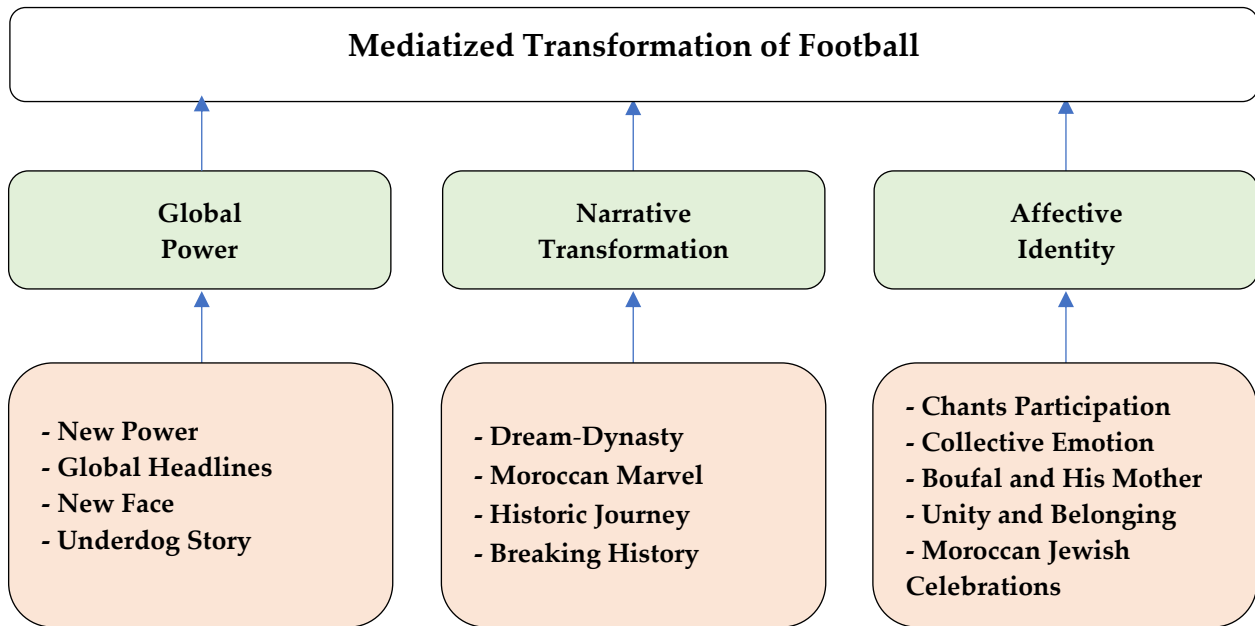
Source	Text	Message Conveying
BBC World Service Sport https://www.bbc.com/sport/africa/63945323	The Atlas lions,,,historic journey at the 2022 Qatar World Cup made global headlines, with the world's leading outlets marveling at Morocco's underdog story	A globally recognized underdog that achieved historic success
Documentary: Téléfoot https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huMnUUVtbgs	" Renaissance " le FILM sur le nouveau visage du Maroc avec Walid Regragui et Romain Saïss	National identity reconstruction
BBC Football Extra Newsletter https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63930050	... despite finding the Moroccan dialect difficult, some spectators,,,had wanted to take part in the chants, asking how to say the words	Inclusive and contagious identity transcends linguistic barriers
CNN Sport https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/17/football/world-cup-memorable-moments-intl-spt	They're known as The Atlas Lions, the Moroccan football team that's ripped up the history books at the FIFA World Cup.	Morocco: rule-breaking force
beIN Sport USA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak8A6X2YG6o	-Morocco: a new power conquering the world of football - From Dream to Dynasty	A global power that disrupts established hierarchies
YouTube: Morocco vs Portugal https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIDbIP-qOao	-Reporter: they will not be denied It is a Moroccan marvel ,, -The winning dance: Boufal and his mother	- from aspiration to excellence - Identity rooted in family and cultural authenticity
YouTube: Moroccan Jewish celebrate Qatar World Cup 2022 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9NekH7no7E	Moroccan Jewish celebrations	inclusive national identity transcends religion and difference

5.1 Analysis: From Feasting to Message Conveying

To move from description to analysis, the messages were grouped thematically as shown in the following figure (i.e. Figure 2). The figure illustrates how individual

representations cluster into broader analytical dimensions that explain how football celebrations in Morocco, including mass gatherings, ritualized chanting, and symbolic occupation of public space, are transformed into symbolic communication and public pedagogy.

Figure 2: Thematic Analysis



At the bottom level of the figure are the basic themes derived from the data. These include representations of Morocco as a “*new power*,” narratives of a “*historic journey*,” and collective practices such as chants, symbolic gestures, and public celebrations. These basic themes are then organized into three broader dimensions.

The first dimension concerns global power and national rebranding. Here, media narratives position Morocco as an emerging global actor associated with visibility, prestige, and symbolic recognition.

The second dimension reflects narrative transformation. Storylines such as “*from dream to dynasty*” or “*Moroccan marvel*” construct a movement from aspiration to achievement, producing a coherent national narrative of progress and success.

The third dimension focuses on affective identity. This dimension highlights how emotion, participation, and symbolic practices generate collective meaning. Shared celebrations, family-centered imagery, and the participation of diverse communities contribute to an embodied and inclusive sense of national belonging.

Together, these three dimensions converge into the broader process identified in this study: the transformation of football from collective celebration into a mediatized system of symbolic communication and public pedagogy.

Through this process, celebration is reconfigured into symbolic communication. The affective energy of collective feasting is translated into structured meaning, where

images of flags, crowds, and emotional reactions become carriers of national narratives. The concept of *“from feasting to message conveying”* captures this transformation: from lived emotional experience to mediated symbolic articulation.

In this configuration, football operates not only as entertainment but as a communicative system in which social meaning is produced through the interaction of affect, media logic, and symbolic representation.

5.2 Empirical Illustration: Morocco’s 2022 World Cup as a Mediatized Pedagogical Event

A powerful empirical illustration of the transformation from collective celebration to symbolic communication can be observed in the case of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, particularly the unprecedented performance of the Moroccan national team. The tournament constituted a critical moment in which football-related emotions, media coverage, and public rituals converged to produce intensified forms of national representation.

In the Moroccan context, the team’s progression to the semi-finals generated large-scale public celebrations across cities such as Casablanca, Rabat, and Kenitra. These celebrations were characterized by mass gatherings, spontaneous street occupations, flag displays, and collective chanting. At the level of lived experience, these events initially reflected what this article conceptualizes as collective feasting, that is, a form of spontaneous emotional unity grounded in shared affect and embodied participation.

However, these moments rapidly entered a process of mediatization. National and international media outlets repeatedly broadcast images of cheering crowds, family participation, and symbolic gestures such as flag-waving and national chants. Social media platforms further amplified these representations through viral circulation, transforming localized events into globally visible spectacles.

From the perspective of Media Studies, this circulation did not merely document reality; it actively restructured it. Specific visual motifs, such as crowds unified under national symbols, became dominant narrative frames through which Morocco’s participation was interpreted. These frames emphasized themes of unity, emotional cohesion, and national pride, thereby converting spontaneous celebration into symbolically structured communication.

Within this process, football operated as a form of implicit public pedagogy. The repeated exposure to mediatized images of collective unity contributed to the internalization of shared meanings about national identity. As argued by Giroux (2004), cultural and media spaces function as pedagogical sites where individuals learn social values outside formal institutions. In this case, audiences were not explicitly instructed, but rather exposed to emotionally charged representations that conveyed meanings about belonging, solidarity, and national representation.

This empirical case thus illustrates the conceptual trajectory proposed in this article: the shift from feasting to message conveying. The initial spontaneous and affective explosion of celebration was progressively transformed into a mediated

narrative of national unity and legitimacy. Through repetition, framing, and circulation, football-related festivities became vehicles for communicating broader symbolic messages about the nation.

Importantly, this transformation does not negate the authenticity of popular emotion. Rather, it demonstrates how such emotion becomes reorganized within media systems of meaning production, where lived experience and symbolic communication are continuously intertwined.

6. Discussion

To synthesize the findings, this study revisits the concept of habitus and extends the notion of public pedagogy in the context of mediatized sporting events. Table 3 presents a conceptual reworking that links embodied collective practices observed during Morocco's 2022 World Cup campaign with processes of symbolic learning, emotional circulation, and media amplification.

Tableau 3: Habitus revisited, and public pedagogy reconceptualized
in the context of mediatization of Morocco's participation in World Cup 2022

Rethinking Habitus and Public Pedagogy in Mediatized Contexts	
Habitus Revisited:	Public Pedagogy Reconceptualized:
- Habitus is now mediated, not only social - Repetition of mediated images - Emotional training through circulation - Symbolic conditioning of perception	- Pedagogy without institutions - Learning through visibility - Identity through repetition - Belonging through circulation

This study argues that Morocco's participation in the FIFA World Cup 2022 should be understood not merely as a sporting achievement, but as a mediatized pedagogical event through which national identity, collective affect, and symbolic belonging were publicly produced, circulated, and learned. The thematic analysis of football mediatization in Morocco, as shown in Figure 2, reveals a dynamic interplay between spontaneity and structure, emotion and communication, popular expression and mediated representation. The findings suggest that football functioned as a cultural site where meanings were collectively negotiated across media discourse, digital platforms, and embodied public performances.

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, this study revisits the notion of embodied dispositions in the context of contemporary mediatized culture. Traditionally, habitus refers to historically sedimented ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that emerge through socialization and become embodied as durable dispositions. However, the Moroccan World Cup case demonstrates that habitus is not only inherited and reproduced through long-term social structures, but can also be intensified, activated, and publicly reconfigured through high-intensity media events. The widespread circulation of national symbols, public celebrations, religious gestures, chants, and

emotional media coverage showed how a shared sense of national identity was actively expressed and reinforced during the World Cup. Stated differently, public celebrations in streets, cafés, stadiums, and digital platforms transformed symbolic practices, like Moroccan Jewish celebrations and Boufal's dance with his mom (Table 2), into visible collective performances through which Moroccans articulated belonging, solidarity, pride, and historical recognition, thus giving voice to the untold and making visible unheard perspectives. These practices were not confined to physical space; rather, they were amplified through continuous media circulation, allowing symbolic meanings to move rapidly between televised broadcasts, social media discourse, and embodied public gatherings.

In this sense, *habitus* appears not only as a relatively stable system of dispositions, but also as a performative and affective process shaped through mediatized visibility and collective emotional intensification. The findings therefore extend conventional understandings of *habitus* by emphasizing its dynamic and communicative dimensions within digitally saturated public culture.

At the same time, the study reconceptualizes public pedagogy beyond formal educational institutions and traditional sites of learning. Existing scholarship on public pedagogy often (e.g. Giroux, 2004) focuses on how culture and public discourse shape informal learning processes. The Moroccan World Cup case demonstrates that mediatized sporting events can themselves function as pedagogical environments in which collective identities, emotional orientations, and symbolic narratives are publicly taught, learned, and normalized.

Through repeated media framing, symbolic imagery, and ritualized public participation, audiences were exposed to narratives of national dignity, Arab and African representation, resilience, collective unity, and cultural pride. These meanings circulated pedagogically across multiple communicative spaces, and enabled individuals to learn not through formal instruction, but through emotional participation, symbolic repetition, and mediated collective experience.

A key insight of this study is the centrality of emotion in the transformation from feasting to message conveying (Figure 1). Unlike formal political discourse, which relies on rational argumentation, football-based communication operates primarily through affective engagement. This observation reinforces the idea that symbolic communication is most effective when it is felt rather than explicitly articulated, allowing messages to be internalized without resistance. The pedagogical force of the event therefore emerged through the convergence of media amplification, affective intensity, and embodied participation. Football became a public cultural classroom in which meanings about nationhood, identity, belonging, and recognition were collectively produced and internalized. In this context, public pedagogy operates not only through discourse, but also through images, emotions, rituals, circulation, and performative visibility. Importantly, this form of pedagogy is not imposed in a direct or explicit manner. Instead, it emerges through participation in collective rituals and engagement with media content.

As such, it reflects a subtle yet powerful mode of cultural transmission. Put differently, this pedagogical process is characterized by:

- informality (learning occurs outside institutional settings),
- repetition (meanings are reinforced through recurring images and narratives),
- embodiment (learning is experienced emotionally and physically).

Therefore, the findings of this work challenge reductive understandings of football as merely a form of entertainment or leisure. Instead, they position football as a multifaceted communicative system where the concepts of habitus and public pedagogy provide a framework for understanding how mediatized sporting events operate as sites of symbolic production and collective learning. Morocco's 2022 World Cup campaign illustrates how global football spectacles can generate temporary yet powerful pedagogical formations in which media, emotion, and embodiment interact to reshape public consciousness and national imagination.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined the mediatization of football in Morocco as a cultural process through which collective celebration is reorganized into symbolic communication and public pedagogy. It has argued that football operates as a mediated system in which emotion, narrative, and representation intersect to produce shared meanings of belonging and national identity.

The analysis has shown that mediatization does not diminish popular celebration but reconfigures collective affect into structured and publicly legible narratives. What begins as collective emotion is shaped through media into forms of mediated visibility, symbolic coherence, and affective belonging. In this process, celebration becomes representation, and representation becomes narrative, a translation of lived experience into cultural form.

The Moroccan World Cup experience illustrates this dynamic, where street-level celebrations and digital circulation converge to produce a layered field of collective memory and national imagination. At the same time, mediatization is not neutral, as it structures what becomes visible and narratable in the public sphere while rendering other experiences less prominent.

Ultimately, football in Morocco emerges as a cultural arena in which media, emotion, and narrative co-produce meanings of collective identity. From feasting to message conveying, it functions not only as spectacle but also as a pedagogical practice through which collective identity is experienced, interpreted, and learned.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides a conceptual and empirical analysis of the mediatization of football in Morocco, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the research adopts a qualitative case study design based on media discourse analysis and symbolic interpretation. Although this approach is appropriate for

examining meaning-making processes, it does not allow for measurement of audience reception or the quantification of media effects. As a result, the study offers analytical depth but limited generalizability in statistical terms.

Second, the empirical focus is primarily centered on highly visible and emotionally intense events, particularly the 2022 FIFA World Cup. While this allows for the examination of peak moments of mediatized celebration, it may underrepresent everyday, less spectacular forms of football consumption and meaning production.

Third, the analysis concentrates on media representations rather than directly incorporating ethnographic fieldwork or audience interviews. Consequently, interpretations of public pedagogy remain grounded in mediated texts rather than lived reception practices.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a robust conceptual framework that can be extended in future research. Further studies could adopt comparative cross-national designs to examine whether the proposed model of *“from feasting to message conveying”* applies in different cultural and political contexts beyond Morocco. Comparative work involving European, Latin American, or African football cultures would be particularly valuable for testing the generalizability of the framework.

Finally, quantitative approaches such as digital media analytics, sentiment analysis, or network diffusion studies could complement the present qualitative framework by examining the scale, intensity, and circulation patterns of football-related symbolic communication across platforms. Therefore, these extensions would contribute to a more comprehensive and multi-method understanding of how football operates as a mediatized cultural and pedagogical system.

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Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no data were created or analysed in this research.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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