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Constructing the 2024 AFCON: A Discursive News Values Analysis of Sports Reportage in selected Nigerian Newspapers

By

Mojirayo Patricia, Oyebamiji¹, Ayodele Tolulope, Asubiojo²

^{1,2}Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji Arakeji



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Corresponding author

**Mojirayo Patricia,
Oyebamiji**

Abstract

Football, also known as soccer in some regions, is the world's most popular sport, played and watched by millions of people across the globe. The Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) stands as one of the most prestigious football tournaments on the African continent, embodying the spirit of unity, competition and celebration among African nations. This study analyses the discursive construction of news values in media reports of the 2024 African Cup of Nations. Twenty (20) articles from five prominent newspapers were selected including The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, The Guardian, The Nation and Vanguard, published between January and February 2024. . The analytical framework was drawn from the Discursive News Values Theory. The findings showed that media coverage of AFCON 2024 employed a variety of linguistic strategies to frame the tournament in emotionally charged ways. Positive news values such as triumph, pride and historical achievements were juxtaposed with negative frames highlighting defeats, personification and superlative language, amplifies the emotional and cultural significance of the event, reinforcing national identities and cultural symbols. The study contributes to scholarship by extending the application of the DNV framework to African sports media discourse, an under-researched domain. It also provides insights into how media institutions construct meaning, reproduce ideological orientations, and influence audience perception through the discursive negotiation of newsworthiness.

Keywords: Football discourse, African Cup of Nations 2024, media discourse; Discursive News Values

1. Introduction

Football, also known as soccer in some regions, is the world's most popular sport, played and watched by millions of people across the globe (Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2023). It is a team sport played between two teams of eleven players each, with the objective of scoring goals by getting the ball into the opposing team's net. Football has ancient roots, with variations of the game being played by different civilisations such as the ancient Greeks, Romans and Chinese. The modern form of football originated in England in the 19th century, with the establishment of standardised rules by the Football Association (FA) (Suparto, 2015). From its humble beginnings on public school playing fields, football rapidly gained popularity and spread globally, becoming the world's most popular sport. Moreau, Roy, Wilson and Atlani Duault (2021) assume that football's popularity transcends geographical, cultural and socio-economic boundaries. It is played and followed avidly in

virtually every corner of the world, making it a truly global event. From bustling urban metropolises to remote rural villages, football is played and enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds. The sport accessibility and simplicity contribute to its widespread popularity, as all that is needed to play is a ball and an open space.

Football is organised into professional leagues at both national and international levels. These leagues feature top clubs competing against each other in regular football seasons, culminating in league titles and various domestic cup competitions. Some of the most renowned leagues include the English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, Italian Serie A and German Bundesliga. In addition to domestic leagues, international competitions play a significant role in the football calendar. The FIFA World Cup, held every four years, is the most prestigious tournament in football, featuring national teams from around the world competing for the title of world champions. Other notable international tournaments



include the UEFA European Championship in Europe, the Copa America in South America, the AFC Asian Cup in Asia, the CONCACAF Gold Cup in North America, the OFC Nations Cup in Oceania and the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) representing Africa.

The Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) stands as one of the most prestigious football tournaments on the African continent, embodying the spirit of unity, competition and celebration among African nations. Since its inception in 1957, AFCON has witnessed thrilling matches, iconic moments and the emergence of footballing legends, cementing its status as a cornerstone of African football heritage (Ndegwa, 2015). The tournament emerged against the backdrop of post-colonial Africa, providing newly independent nations with an opportunity to assert their identity and forge a sense of unity through sport. Over the years, from 1957 to present (2024), 14 countries have won the competition. Of the 14 countries, Egypt is a seven times winner (1957, 1959, 1986, 1998, 2022, 2008 and 2010); Cameroon has won five times (1984, 1988, 2018, 2022 and 2017) while Ghana has won four times (1963, 1965, 1978, 1982) (Kalumba, 2017; Ayayi et al, 2023; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016; Ghanasoccer.net, 2015; Football Bible, 2015). Nigeria has had three wins (1980, 1994 and 2013); Ivory Coast is a three times winner (1992, 2015, 2024), DR Congo has two wins (1968 and 1974) and Algeria (1990 and 2019). Eight countries namely Zambia (2012), Tunisia (2004), Sudan (1970), Algeria (1990), Morocco (1976), Ethiopia (1962), South Africa (1996) and Congo (1972) are one-time winners of the championship (Ajayi, Akinrinola and Ajayi, 2023). From Egypt's seven championship wins to Cameroon's unforgettable victories and Nigeria's proud triumphs, each tournament has made a lasting impact on African football. Notable editions include the historic 1996 tournament hosted and won by South Africa, the dramatic penalty shootout victories and the rise of underdog teams making unexpected runs deep into the competition.

The AFCON 2024 tournament represents the latest chapter in the storied history of African football, bringing together the continent's top national teams to compete for continental glory. The Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2024 took place in Côte d'Ivoire, showcasing the continent's top footballing talent and captivating audiences with thrilling matches and memorable moments. After weeks of intense competition, Côte d'Ivoire emerged as the champions of AFCON 2024, securing victory in a hard-fought final match against Nigeria. In the semifinals, Nigeria advanced to the final after a dramatic penalty shootout victory over South Africa. The match was tightly contested, with both teams displaying skill and determination. However, Nigeria prevailed in the shootout, earning their place in the final. In the final showdown, Côte d'Ivoire faced off against Nigeria in a highly anticipated match. The encounter lived up to expectations, with both teams delivering a spirited performance. In the end, Côte d'Ivoire emerged victorious with a 2-1 win over Nigeria, clinching the AFCON 2024 trophy and inscribing their name in footballing history. As the

tournament came to a close, AFCON 2024 left a lasting legacy, showcasing the talent, passion and fellowship that defines African football. With Côte d'Ivoire emerging as champions, AFCON 2024 will be remembered as a memorable chapter in the continent's footballing journey.

In the realm of sports journalism, the language and style employed in news reporting play a pivotal role in shaping public perception and understanding of significant sporting events (Meier-Vieracker, 2021). Football, being one of the most widely followed sports globally, gathered extensive media coverage, with news articles serving as a primary source of information and analysis for enthusiasts and spectators alike. The Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), as a prestigious football tournament showcasing the talent and passion of African nations, holds particular significance within the footballing world. Sports journalism, like any form of journalism, relies heavily on language and style to convey information, evoke emotions and engage audiences. Language serves as a powerful tool for sports journalists to narrate the events, analyse performances and capture the drama and excitement inherent in sporting competitions (Bradshaw and Minogue, 2019; Kubayi and Toriola, 2020).

In the era of globalisation, rapid growth in information and communication underscores the pivotal role of news media as a written language forum in developing human language skills. News media serves as a primary medium for accessing diverse information such as news, sports, entertainment and lifestyle. Journalists play a crucial role by employing stylistics to effectively communicate with their target audiences. Their language choices are instrumental in fostering connections with readers and accurately interpreting the world (Rhetorica, 2010). Distinct from technical fields like medicine or law, the language of journalism often referred to as journalese employs a specific register characterised by clarity, precision and avoidance of jargon (Crystal and Davy, 1969). This linguistic style aims to ensure information is accessible and understood by a broad audience, enhancing reader confidence in the media's reliability (Rhetorica, 2010). Each newspaper develops its unique style to cater to its audience's preferences and demography, emphasising clarity as the cornerstone of effective communication in journalism.

Sports journalism exemplifies how language and style are meticulously crafted to evoke specific responses from audiences (Perreault and Bell, 2022). Whether through descriptive imagery capturing essential moments or persuasive language in opinion pieces, sports journalists wield language to convey drama, passion, and intensity. Stylistic analysis in sports journalism reveals depth meanings, ideologies and discourses embedded in sports narratives (Akanmu, 2018). This analytical approach appreciates the artistry involved in constructing compelling stories that resonate with audiences. For instance, coverage of events like the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) showcases how stylistic choices shape narratives and influence audience perceptions of teams, players and key moments. By examining linguistic nuances and rhetorical

strategies in AFCON reporting, researchers illuminate cultural themes and storytelling techniques inherent in sports journalism discourse. This analysis underscores the role of language in mediating sports narratives and enhancing audience engagement with major sporting events

2. Theoretical Framework

Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) is a theoretical framework developed by Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple in their influential 2017 work, *The Discourse of News Values: How News Organizations Create Newsworthiness*. This framework is significant for media studies as it provides a systematic way to analyze how news values are discursively constructed and communicated through both linguistic and visual elements in media texts. By integrating insights from linguistics and media studies, DNVA offers a comprehensive tool for understanding the construction of newsworthiness in contemporary media.

Traditionally, news values have been seen as the criteria that guide journalists in selecting and presenting news stories. The classic study by Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified key news values such as timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, human interest and novelty. These values help determine what events are deemed newsworthy and how they are framed in the media. Bednarek and Caple build on these foundational concepts but move beyond treating news values as static and intrinsic properties of events. Instead, they emphasize that news values are dynamically constructed through discourse. This approach recognizes that what makes an event newsworthy is not merely its inherent characteristics but how it is represented and communicated through specific linguistic and visual strategies. This perspective aligns with the constructivist view in media studies, which posits that reality, as presented by the media, is mediated through language and visuals.

The core premise of DNVA is that news values are actively constructed through discourse. This means that newsworthiness is not a fixed attribute but is created through the use of language and visuals in news media. Journalists use specific linguistic choices to highlight certain aspects of a story, thereby constructing its newsworthiness. For example, the use of evaluative language, emotive expressions, metaphors, modality and rhetorical questions can enhance the perceived importance, urgency or emotional impact of an event. In addition, Images, videos and other visual elements are strategically used to convey news values. For instance, a dramatic photograph can underscore the conflict or human-interest value of a story. The structure and framing of news stories, including the order in which information is presented and the use of quotes and sources, play a crucial role in constructing newsworthiness. By focusing on these discursive elements, DNVA provides a framework for analyzing how journalists use linguistic and visual resources to create a sense of newsworthiness.

DNVA involves examining various linguistic devices that construct news values in media texts. Bednarek and Caple (2017)

identify several key categories of these devices. *Evaluative language*, for instance, uses words and phrases to express judgment or opinion, thereby enhancing the perceived importance or impact of an event, such as describing an event as "devastating" or "historic." *Emotive expressions* also play a critical role, as they evoke emotions that make the story more engaging and impactful, with terms like "heartbreaking" and "shocking" being prime examples. *Metaphors and similes* add depth to the discourse by conveying deeper meanings or vivid comparisons, such as referring to a significant change as "a tidal wave of change" or likening a team's play to "a well-oiled machine." *Modality* involves the use of modal verbs and adverbs to express possibility, necessity, or obligation, adding layers of certainty or speculation to the reporting. *Rhetorical questions* engage readers by provoking thought without expecting an answer, often used to highlight the broader implications of an event.

Furthermore, DNVA emphasizes the importance of *quotations and attributions* in constructing news values. *Direct quotes* from participants or experts add authenticity and authority to the report, while *reported speech* integrates their perspective while maintaining the reporter's voice. *Narrative techniques*, such as *storytelling and characterization*, craft the news as a narrative with a clear structure and relevant characters, enhancing its appeal and comprehensibility. Intertextuality, by *referencing* other events or texts, enhances the relevance and context of the news story. The use of *high and low modality* expresses varying degrees of certainty or doubt, influencing the reader's perception of the story's significance. *Repetition and emphatic structures* reinforce the importance of key phrases or ideas, guiding the audience's focus and engagement. *Visual language*, through imagery and symbolism, creates vivid mental pictures and represents broader concepts, such as national pride symbolized by a trophy. *Hyperbole*, through exaggerated statements, magnifies the significance or impact of an event, while contrast and comparison highlight differences by placing ideas or events side by side. *Temporal markers* emphasize timeliness and urgency, framing the news in a temporal context. By analyzing these linguistic features, DNVA reveals how news stories emphasize certain values over others, thereby guiding audience perception and engagement.

Additionally, allusion enriches DNVA by referencing familiar people, events, or cultural texts, drawing connections that add depth and enhance the audience's understanding. Juxtaposition places contrasting ideas or images close together, highlighting differences that might underscore the story's central theme. Anaphora, the repetition of initial words or phrases in successive sentences, emphasizes crucial points and can build emotional momentum, guiding readers' focus. Personification, by attributing human qualities to non-human subjects, can animate a narrative, making abstract concepts or events more relatable and impactful. By incorporating these linguistic features, DNVA illustrates how news stories prioritize certain values, guiding audience perception and shaping the emotional, intellectual and cultural engagement with the story.

The justification for incorporating stylistic analysis, discourse analysis and DNVA in the study of football discourse lies in their complementary strengths. Stylistic analysis provides insights into the linguistic features that shape the emotive and descriptive quality of football language. Discourse analysis offers a critical perspective on the broader social implications and power dynamics within football discourse. DNVA bridges these approaches by focusing on the construction of newsworthiness, integrating both linguistic and visual elements. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the multifaceted nature of football discourse, making them indispensable for a thorough and nuanced understanding of the subject.

3. Literature Review

The study of **Nwodo, Tochukwu and Subairu (2020)** explored the use of war and engagement metaphors in Nigerian sports newspapers, analysing six issues each of the *Sunday Sporting Sun* and *The Nation Sporting Life*. Using the Metaphor Identification Procedure and Critical Metaphor Analysis, it classifies metaphors into conceptual categories, finding that sports reporting often invokes persuasive, emotive and antagonistic language. This metaphorical framing suggests that sports are portrayed not merely as games but as arenas of competition, conflict, and engagement. By focusing on metaphors, the study provides insights into the persuasive power of language in shaping public perception and emotional involvement in sports. However, a limitation is its narrow temporal scope, as only a few issues were analysed over a short period. Future research could expand the sample size or consider other metaphorical categories to enhance the robustness of findings. Overall, the study effectively illustrates how metaphorical language in sports journalism serves not only as an expressive tool but also as a means of connecting with audiences on a deeper, affective level.

Olagunju (2015) examined the generic structure potential (GSP) of football matches reported in Nigerian newspapers. By analysing 108 match reports from three Nigerian sports newspapers, the study identifies ten macro-structural elements that characterise the text structure in football reporting, categorised into obligatory and optional elements. The study reveals that football reporting in Nigeria has a distinctive genre structure with elements like Title, Preamble and Online Thesis as core, while optional elements such as Voice Insertion and Prediction add narrative flexibility. This structural analysis highlights the function of GSP in framing sports news in a way that aligns with readers' expectations. However, the study could extend its contribution by considering more recent digital media structures and how these may differ from print-based GSP. Additionally, comparative analysis with other sports genres or across different cultures could deepen insights into the universality or specificity of the GSP in sports journalism. Despite these limitations, Olagunju's work provides a foundational framework for analysing the narrative structure of sports discourse within a Nigerian context.

On the non-linguistic front, **Osunyan (2017)** attempted at creating a photo-documentation of eccentric hairstyles of selected players and examines the use of these hairstyles in negotiating individual identity construction and as maker of self-actualisation in the AFCON, Gabon 2017. Descriptive research tool under the qualitative research approach constituted the research design for the study. Eleven players were purposively sampled for the study. In addition, forty-four (44) professional footballers were also sampled using simple random sampling technique. Instruments used in gathering data were photographs, observation checklist and questionnaire for the purpose of triangulation. Simple descriptive analysis and photographic analysis were the data analysis methods used. The study revealed that African football players use their eccentric hairstyles to construct their individual fashion identities, signal self-actualisation, become fashion role model to the youth and eventually influence hairstyle fashion

Nyikana and Tichaawa (2023) unpacked memorable sporting experiences associated with international events hosted in a resource scarce context. In this respect, the study examined the experiences associated with the hosting of the 2022 Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon. Based on empirical data from n=388 event attendees, supplemented with n=8 key informant interviews, the study shows that by and large, the event is associated with positive and highly memorable experiences for the attendees particularly linked to the planning and organisation aspects of the event. However, issues relating to the scheduling of some games, the ease into, and out of the stadiums and the perceived low quality of food and beverage supplies inside the stadiums were of concern. In addition to this, key differences were observed between those who were vaccinated against Covid-19 and those who were not particularly around insecurities whilst at the stadium and precinct. While the paper draws parallels with existing research on memorable experiences and sporting events, it does reveal the added challenges to hosting these events in a resource-scarce context. The present study is grounded in a robust foundation provided by various empirical studies that have explored different facets of sports journalism, particularly focusing on football coverage. These studies employ diverse theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches to investigate linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of football discourse, shedding light on its complex relationship with language, culture and identity. Based on these empirical studies, the present study aims to contribute to the field of football discourse analysis by examining specific aspects that have not been extensively explored. Drawing on insights from stylistic analysis, discourse analysis and critical stylistics, the study will focus on how linguistic strategies are used in football discourse to construct narratives, influence perceptions, and reflect socio-cultural dynamics.

4. Methodology

The research design for this study was qualitative, focusing on the analysis of discursive features in football news coverage related to the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) tournament within Nigerian media outlets. The data for this study was gathered from prominent

newspapers that extensively covered the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2024. Specifically, the study included articles from reputable Nigerian newspapers such as The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, The Guardian, The Nation and Vanguard. These newspapers are selected based on their established reputation and wide circulation, ensuring comprehensive coverage of AFCON 2024 events and matches.

5. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Discursive News Value Features in AFCON 2024 Media Coverage

5.1.1 Negativity

Negativity in the AFCON news reports is constructed through a combination of linguistic strategies that focus on fear, risk, negative outcomes and blame. By emphasising the vulnerability of teams to unexpected defeats, the uncertainty surrounding their performance and the emotional toll of losses, the reporting creates a narrative of high drama and tension. In the construction of negativity surrounding sports events, particularly in high-stakes tournaments like AFCON, the strategy of framing through fear and danger is pivotal. This strategy uses language that evokes anxiety, highlighting teams' vulnerability to unexpected or dramatic defeats thus intensifying the emotional weight of these moments.

Excerpt 1

The Pharaohs of Egypt were also victims of one of the upsets of this tournament as DR Congo sent them back home after a penalty shootout. And Bafana Bafana of South Africa shocked 10-man Morocco to reach the last eight..... Another blow in this tournament is Guinea's dramatic winner in the eighth minute of injury time as they beat 10-man Equatorial Guinea 1-0 on Sunday. The last-16 tie at the Ebimpe Olympic Stadium in Abidjan was heading for extra time when Bayo, of French Ligue 1 side Le Havre, struck right at the death to spark frenzied scenes of celebration among the Guinea team and their large support. (The Punch)

One such example appears in excerpt 1, where Egypt, traditionally one of Africa's strongest footballing nations, is described as a "victim" of a shock defeat by DR Congo, and South Africa's victory over Morocco is labeled a "shock." The word "victim" places Egypt in a passive and fragile position, as though their elimination was something done to them, adding an emotional depth to the portrayal of their defeat. Moreover, describing South Africa's triumph as a "shock" highlights the perceived improbability and danger Morocco faced, reinforcing the sense of risk inherent in the competition. This language choice heightens the tension, painting a picture of a tournament filled with upsets and unforeseen dangers.

Excerpt 2

Egypt finished the game with 10 players when defender Mohamed Hamdy was sent off in the first period of extra time with his second yellow card for a late challenge on Simon Bansa. In the shootout, Mohamed struck Egypt's second penalty to the right of the goal but Congo's Arthur Masuaku reciprocated by

sending his effort over, and no other players missed until Abou Gabal did. Congo will next face Guinea. **(The Guardian)**

The element of danger is further underscored in Excerpt 2, which recounts Egypt's struggle in a tense match against Congo. Here, fear is instilled not only through Egypt's eventual defeat in a penalty shootout but also through the dramatic loss of a player during extra time. The narrative focuses on the precariousness of the situation Egypt finished with 10 men and the decisive penalty shootout amplifies the sense of fear and danger surrounding the team's fate. The emotional toll of the penalties, particularly the final miss by Egypt's Abou Gabal, deepens the portrayal of the team as vulnerable and on the brink of disaster. This framing not only emphasises the high stakes of the game but also positions Egypt as a team at the mercy of fate, adding to the overall sense of foreboding and loss that accompanies their exit from the tournament.

5.1.2 Positivity

Positivity in the discourse surrounding the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) is constructed through various strategies that emphasise victories, achievements and significant moments of triumph for participating teams. This positive framing often highlights not just the outcomes of matches but also the cultural and emotional resonance of these victories for fans and nations alike. The table below outlines the specific strategies employed to construct positivity in the AFCON discourse. The positivity surrounding the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) is vividly illustrated through various narratives that highlight achievements, moments of triumph and celebratory milestones. This positivity emerges from different contexts, showcasing the spirit of the tournament and the emotional connections forged between teams and their supporters.

Excerpt 3

Their supporters packed out the stadium to its 60,000 capacity, with many fans having to watch the game from vantage points on stairways. Ivory Coast's success sees them add this year's title to those claimed in 1992 and 2015, while this win also allows them to join Nigeria on three Cup of Nations triumphs overall (The Vanguard)

In **excerpt 3**, the focus is on Ivory Coast's historical win, which allows them to join an elite group of nations with multiple AFCON titles. The packed stadium, with fans watching from stairways, underscores the significance of this victory. The atmosphere of celebration is palpable, as the success of the Ivorian team serves not just as a sporting achievement but as a moment of national pride and unity. The narrative captures the joy and elation of the fans, illustrating how such moments elevate the collective spirit of a nation.

Excerpt 4

AFCON 2024: Hosts Côte d'Ivoire achieve shock victory over Senegal to join Cape Verde in quarter-finals. After scraping into the round of 16, the Elephants managed the impossible when they knocked out the current title holders in a dramatic penalty shootout. Hosts Côte d'Ivoire stunned Senegal at the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) on Monday, January 29, knocking out the

reigning champions on penalties in the last 16 to keep their hopes of winning the title on home soil alive. Earlier on Monday, Cape Verde won an AFCON knockout tie for the first time in their history as a late Ryan Mendes penalty gave them a 1-0 victory over Mauritania in Abidjan. The tie was drifting towards extra time when Cape Verde won a spot-kick as substitute Gilson Tavares Benchimol was brought down in the box by Mauritania goalkeeper Babacar Niasse. (The Nigerian Tribune, January 30, 2024)

In **excerpt 4**, Côte d'Ivoire's "shock victory" over Senegal, the reigning champions, is depicted as a significant positive outcome. This unexpected win is a turning point for the host nation, reigniting their hopes in the tournament. The narrative emphasizes the thrill of an underdog triumphing over a formidable opponent, evoking feelings of pride and excitement among Ivorian supporters. The drama of the match, culminating in a penalty shootout, adds to the narrative of positivity, highlighting the unpredictable and exhilarating nature of sports. These news articles provided paints a vibrant picture of positivity in the AFCON discourse, constructed through celebratory achievements, historic milestones and unexpected victories. These narratives are not just about the outcomes of matches; they embody the spirit of competition, resilience and national pride.

5.1.3 Timeliness

Timeliness in the discourse surrounding the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) is crucial for understanding the unfolding narrative of the tournament. The coverage strategically emphasises the timing of matches, key events and team performances to enhance audience engagement and anticipation.

Excerpt 5

However, the Ivorians are also holding on tightly to their host-to-win ambition. Eight host countries have won the tournaments at various times in the past. They are Nigeria, Algeria, South Africa, Tunisia, Ghana, Sudan and Ethiopia (The Punch)

Excerpt 6

The mood of frankness was clearly catching. "Victory is the most important thing," said the man of the match, Simon (The Guardian)

Excerpt 5 notes Côte d'Ivoire's upcoming battle against Nigeria in the final, indicating the significance of this matchup within the broader context of the competition. The prominence of this clash is amplified by the historical rivalry and the stakes involved, as both teams are well-established in African football. The mention of "host-to-win ambition" places Côte d'Ivoire within a distinguished group of teams that have historically succeeded on home soil. The enumeration of past host winners, including "Nigeria, Algeria, South Africa", emphasises the eliteness of these teams, suggesting a legacy of success that Côte d'Ivoire aspires to join. By situating Côte d'Ivoire among these elite teams, the extract communicates the stakes of the competition while framing their ambitions within a historical context. This interplay of past and present reinforces the significance of achieving elite status not just through victory but also through the shared legacy of host nations.

In excerpt 6, the extract captures a sentiment of determination and prioritisation of success, with the quote from the "man of the match" highlighting the competitive spirit that characterises elite athletes. The phrase "victory is the most important thing" reflects a mindset that is often associated with top-tier competitors, where success is the ultimate goal. By framing Simon as a central figure in this narrative, the extract accentuates the importance of individual contributions to a team's elite status. The use of "mood of frankness" further suggests an environment where honesty and commitment to winning are valued, reinforcing the discourse of eliteness within the competitive setting. In Excerpt 21, the extract celebrates Côte d'Ivoire's unexpected triumph over Nigeria, a powerhouse in African football. The phrase "unlikely victors" underlines the surprise of their victory, highlighting the elite status of Nigeria, who are framed as formidable opponents. The term "dramatic late winner" evokes a sense of excitement and highlights the intensity of the competition, while "remarkable of major tournament turnarounds" emphasises the achievement's significance. By linking the victory to historical success "their third continental title" the narrative situates Côte d'Ivoire within the elite tier of African football. The mention of "Victor Osimhen's Nigeria" not only recognises Nigeria's elite players but also contrasts their status with that of the victorious Ivorians, enhancing the narrative of resilience and triumph. Furthermore, the extract in Excerpt 20 encapsulates the discussion of Côte d'Ivoire's unexpected triumph on home soil highlights both their elite status and the prominence of the victory. As they become the first host nation to win since 2006, the narrative underscores the significance of this achievement while also framing Côte d'Ivoire as an elite competitor capable of overcoming adversity.

The phrase "beats the odds" suggests overcoming significant challenges, reinforcing their status as a resilient competitor. By declaring "third title" and "continent's most prestigious title," the extract emphasises the significance of this victory and the eliteness associated with multiple championship wins. The words "unexpected" and "unthinkable" further amplify the achievement's magnitude, celebrating the triumph over Nigeria, an established powerhouse. Furthermore, the reference to Nigeria's "formidable" nature and the challenges they present reflects their elite status, while also establishing their prominence as favorites in the competition. This duality enhances the stakes of their encounters, particularly as they face off against another elite team in the final.

5.1.5 Impact

The discourse surrounding the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) utilises three primary strategies to convey the concept of 'impact.' The first strategy involves highlighting the immediate 'effects and impacts' of match outcomes, capturing the significance of victories and defeats. The second strategy focuses on 'predictions,' where statements reflect a high level of certainty about future performances or consequences following particular matches. Lastly, the third strategy involves 'speculation,' which conveys potential future scenarios using modals to indicate varying degrees of likelihood. This speculative nature allows for conjecture about

how current results might influence teams' trajectories in the tournament.

Impact in the discourse surrounding the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) is articulated through three primary discursive strategies: mentioning the effects of victories, making predictions about outcomes and exploring speculative possibilities. Each of these strategies contributes to a nuanced understanding of the tournament's significance for teams and their supporters. The first strategy involves directly mentioning the effects and impacts of various outcomes in the tournament.

Excerpt 7

In a tournament riddled with upsets, one of the biggest was South Africa winning 2-0 against 2022 World Cup semi-finalists Morocco in a last-16 encounter. Tovey says he is impressed with South Africa, who have reached the Cup of Nations semi-finals for the first time since the loss to co-hosts Nigeria 24 years ago. Nigeria are favourites for several reasons, including a perfect past record against South Africa in the competition with three victories. The west Africans won a 2000 semi-final in Nigeria 2-0, a 2004 group match in Tunisia 4-0 and a 2019 quarter-final in Egypt 2-1 through a late goal from current captain William Troost-Ekong.

Excerpt 8

Tunisia are the third-ranked African side at the tournament in the Ivory Coast behind Morocco and Senegal, but following a shock loss to Namibia in their opening game, they could only manage draws with Mali and South Africa." Sambia finished third in the group on two points, which was not enough to take one of the four places in the last-16 reserved for the best third-placed finishers. (The Guardian)

Excerpt 7, for instance, emphasises South Africa's impressive victory over Morocco, marking a significant achievement that advances them to the semi-finals for the first time in over two decades. . The use of words like "impressed" and "biggest upset" serves as linguistic pointers that highlight the magnitude of this victory. This win not only highlights South Africa's resurgence in football but also reflects on their historical journey, thereby instilling a sense of pride and accomplishment among fans. Similarly, Excerpt 22 frames Guinea's late goal in their match against Equatorial Guinea as a historic moment, showcasing their first knockout victory. The phrase "sparked frenzied scenes of celebration" conveys the emotional and cultural impact of such wins, resonating deeply within the national consciousness.

In excerpt 8, effects and impacts is evident. The phrase "Tunisia are the third-ranked African side at the tournament" positions Tunisia within a competitive framework, emphasising their standing relative to other teams like Morocco and Senegal. This ranking sets high expectations for Tunisia, making their "shock loss to Namibia" particularly noteworthy. The word "shock" indicates that the loss was unexpected, suggesting a failure to meet anticipated performance standards. The mention of Tunisia's subsequent "draws with Mali and South Africa" further underscores a narrative of disappointment. While draws may not be

outright losses, they imply an inability to secure crucial victories, highlighting the struggles of a team expected to perform better based on their ranking. This sets a tone of concern about Tunisia's prospects in the tournament, which resonates with fans and analysts alike. The structure of the sentences establishes a cause-and-effect relationship, where Tunisia's poor performance leads to potential implications for their advancement in the tournament. The narrative communicates that despite being a strong team on paper, their results do not reflect this strength, causing frustration among supporters and stakeholders. The second strategy is prediction, where outcomes of upcoming matches and potential pathways for teams are discussed with a sense of confidence.

Excerpt 9

Côte d'Ivoire was soundly beaten by Equatorial Guinea (4-0) on Monday, January 22, in Abidjan, This crushing defeat could deprive the host country of a place in the last 16 of "their" competition. If this happens, it would be reliving the nightmare of the last AFCON it organised, 40 years ago. With its high standard of play there have been no 0-0 draws so far and almost flawless organisation, the 34th Africa Cup of Nations is far from over. But after this "nightmare match," as Gasset repeated, it may not feel the same. If the host nation's team is eliminated, the tournament risks losing some of its magic and its sweet orange flavor (The Nigerian Tribune)

Lastly, speculation is particularly prominent in the discourse surrounding the potential future outcomes for Côte d'Ivoire following their disappointing performance. The phrase "could deprive the host country of a place in the last 16" suggests an uncertain future that hinges on their next performance. This is indicative of a broader trend in sports discourse where the outcomes of matches are not only viewed in isolation but are projected onto future events, thereby creating a sense of anticipation and tension. The inclusion of linguistic pointers such as "could" reinforces this speculative nature, highlighting the risks associated with their current trajectory. The introduction of phrases like "if this happens, it would be reliving the nightmare" demonstrates how conjectural language shapes the narrative around potential outcomes. Here, the modal "would" imply a strong likelihood of recurrence, intensifying the emotional stakes associated with the team's performance. This modal usage, coupled with conditional phrases like "if this happens," articulates the precariousness of Côte d'Ivoire's situation, creating a dramatic tension that permeates the coverage.

The phrase, "But after this 'nightmare match,' as Gasset repeated, it may not feel the same," introduces an element of uncertainty about the tournament's atmosphere and the host nation's emotional state. The use of the modal "may" indicate that the situation could lead to a significant shift in perception, suggesting that the experience of the tournament is contingent upon the team's success or failure. Furthermore, the statement, "If the host nation's team is eliminated, the tournament risks losing some of its magic and its sweet orange flavor," highlights the broader implications of their potential exit. Here, the use of "risks losing" underscores the precariousness of the tournament's enjoyment and significance, while the evocative



imagery of "magic" and "sweet orange flavor" enriches the narrative, framing the competition not just as a series of matches but as an emotionally charged event tied to national pride and identity.

5.1.6 Proximity

Proximity in the context of the AFCON discourse relates to the closeness of teams and fans to the action, as well as the broader regional and emotional connections to the tournament. This thematic element is reinforced through specific discursive strategies that evoke a sense of shared experience, anticipation and community engagement around the event.

Proximity in the 2024 AFCON news reports is achieved through a combination of localised contexts, broader anticipatory language and emotionally charged narratives. The discourse around AFCON constructs proximity not only in terms of physical closeness to the events but also through emotional and cultural connections that bind fans to their teams and to one another. The language used reinforces the importance of community and shared experiences, making the tournament a focal point of collective identity and celebration across the continent. This is seen below.

Excerpt 10

The Nigerian team held on to the lead though there were missed chances from both sides. Angola had a ball ricocheted off the post after a blunder from Alex Iwobi.

Excerpt 11

Football lovers around Africa and indeed worldwide are looking forward to Sunday's final for another pulsating game.

In extract 10, the use of the phrase "held on to the lead" conveys a sense of resilience and determination, suggesting a tight contest where every moment matters. The term "missed chances" introduces an element of tension and drama, indicating that both teams had opportunities to change the game's outcome, thus engaging the audience emotionally. The phrase "ricocheted off the post" adds a vivid, dynamic quality to the narrative, illustrating a near-miss that heightens the excitement. By mentioning "a blunder from Alex Iwobi," the extract personalises the narrative, focusing on individual actions that contribute to the game's stakes. This strategy fosters a connection between the audience and the players, invoking empathy and investment in their performance. The excerpt in extract 11 employs globalisation as a discursive strategy by expanding the audience's scope from a regional to a global context. The phrase "football lovers around Africa and indeed worldwide" highlights the sport's universal appeal, suggesting that the upcoming final is an event of significant importance beyond national borders. The term "looking forward" conveys anticipation and excitement, encouraging readers to share in the enthusiasm leading up to the final. The adjective "pulsating" implies a high-energy match filled with action, further engaging the audience's emotions and setting expectations for an exhilarating experience. This extract effectively utilises inclusive language to foster a sense of community among football fans, creating a shared emotional investment in the event.

Excerpt 12:

Afcon roundup: Morocco win keeps host Ivory Coast alive as Tunisia exit

Morocco's stand-in captain left the pitch with an ankle injury at half-time but not before a smart close-range finish in the 38th minute lifted Morocco to seven points.... The Congolese finished second in the pool with three points following a trio of draws and advance along with Morocco, who take on South Africa in the next round.

Excerpt 13:

AFCON 2024 Host Côte d'Ivoire on brink of nightmare elimination. In front of its home crowd, Côte d'Ivoire was soundly beaten by Equatorial Guinea (4-0) on Monday, January 22, in Abidjan, in its final group match at the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). This crushing defeat could deprive the host country of a place in the last 16 of 'their' competition

In excerpt 12, personalisation and individualisation are prominent as the focus shifts to specific players and their contributions. The mention of "Morocco's stand-in captain" and the detailed description of his "smart close-range finish" humanises the narrative, emphasising individual achievement within the team context. The phrase "left the pitch with an ankle injury" adds a layer of drama and concern for player welfare, engaging the audience's empathy. Additionally, the summary format, "AFCON roundup," effectively consolidates information, making it accessible for readers looking for quick updates. The contrast between Morocco's success and Tunisia's exit encapsulates the unpredictable nature of the tournament, further heightening the emotional stakes as teams vie for survival. Also, the extract in excerpt 13 uses emotional appeal to convey the gravity of Côte d'Ivoire's situation. The phrase "on brink of nightmare elimination" emphasises the dire consequences of their performance, creating a sense of urgency and despair. By stating they were beaten "soundly," the language suggests a dominant loss, which further amplifies the emotional weight of the situation. The reference to the "home crowd" personalises the experience, implying that the disappointment is felt not just by the players but by the entire nation, thereby reinforcing national identity and collective sentiment. The modal verbs "could deprive" and "if" introduce speculation regarding future outcomes, hinting at the uncertainty that looms over the team's chances for advancement. This combination of emotional language and speculative elements captures the tension and stakes of the tournament for Côte d'Ivoire, engaging readers in the unfolding drama.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive discourse analysis of media reports on the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), drawing from five prominent Nigerian newspapers: *The Punch*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard*. The analysis focused on the key objective which is to identify the discursive news value features in the texts. The study found out that the producers make use of the discursive news values such as negativity, positivity, eliteness, timeliness, proximity and

superlativeness, which were used to frame various AFCON events. For instance, negativity was often constructed through linguistic strategies that emphasised defeat, humiliation and disappointment, especially when reporting on teams that failed to meet expectations. In contrast, positivity was conveyed through celebratory language highlighting victories, historical milestones and national pride, showing how media coverage can elevate the emotional stakes of football events. Additionally, the study uncovered the strategic use of eliteness and prominence in the portrayal of certain teams and players, particularly those with strong historical performances or standout individual players. The media emphasised the status and expectations placed on teams like Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal, framing them as elite contenders. This highlights how media narratives reinforce the cultural and symbolic importance of football, projecting a sense of prestige around these teams and fostering a deep sense of attachment and expectation among readers and fans. This study contributed to both academia and society by enhancing understanding of how language and style in media shape perceptions of African sports and culture, specifically through an analysis of AFCON 2024 media reports.

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