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Fan Perception and administrative influence: evaluating the management of the female African cup of nations and its impact on team morale and performance

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between fans' perceptions of tournament management and its perceived effects on team morale and competitive performance in the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON). With increasing attention on the development of women's football in Africa, the research sought to understand how administrative practices influence not only team outcomes but also fan engagement and psychological support for athletes during continental tournaments. A descriptive survey research design was employed to gather data from 320 respondents, including sports enthusiasts, team officials, and sport administrators across five African countries. A well-structured and validated questionnaire was used to collect data, and analysis was carried out using both descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and grand mean, as well as inferential statistics including the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the stated hypotheses. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between fans' perception of tournament management and their support for participating teams. It was also established that poor administrative logistics, inadequate planning, and lack of transparent management negatively impacted team morale and overall competitive performance. Respondents strongly agreed that when tournaments are well-managed, athletes are more motivated, focused, and confident in their performance. The study concludes that quality tournament management is crucial for the psychological readiness and competitive edge of national female teams in Africa. Based on these findings, it is recommended that tournament organizers adopt athlete-centered and transparent administrative strategies, enhance planning and logistics to reduce distractions, and actively engage fans in feedback processes to strengthen their loyalty and support.

Keywords: fans' perception, tournament management, women's football, team morale, administrative planning, performance, Female African Cup of Nations.

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1. Introduction

The Female African Cup of Nations (FACON), formerly known as the African Women's Championship, represents the premier women's football competition on the African continent. Organized by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), it was inaugurated in 1991, with only a few countries participating, largely due to structural neglect and societal gender biases prevalent across many African nations at the time. Over the years, the tournament has evolved in structure and visibility, most notably with the rebranding in 2016 and the expansion of participating teams to 12 in 2022, signaling a growing institutional recognition of women's football in Africa.

Despite the progress, the management and organizational quality of FACON continue to attract criticism and concern. Structural inequalities, logistical inconsistencies, and underfunding remain persistent issues. Recent editions of the tournament, while better publicized, have been marred by challenges such as inadequate facilities, delayed allowances, and substandard travel arrangements for teams. These issues not only reflect administrative shortcomings but also influence fan perception and, by extension, team morale and performance.

The global rise of women's football has had a ripple effect across Africa. Female participation in football has increased across Africa in recent years, supported by growing media interest and corporate sponsorship. Tournaments such as the 2022 Women's Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco saw record-breaking attendance and global viewership, reflecting a shift in public interest and expectations. However, fans' growing engagement is often met with frustration over management lapses that hinder the quality of competition and the well-being of players.

Effective tournament management plays a pivotal role in shaping the competitive success of national teams. Organizational effectiveness defined by planning efficiency, infrastructure readiness, logistical coordination, and athlete support systems has a direct and measurable impact on team performance in elite competitions. Inadequate planning, lack of transparency, and the marginalization of women's sports are all known to affect athlete motivation, concentration, and ultimately, match outcomes. Furthermore, studies have shown that fans' perceptions of fairness, professionalism, and visibility in sports governance influence not only attendance and viewership but also national morale and support for female athletes.

In sum, the growth trajectory of the Female African Cup of Nations presents a unique intersection of opportunity and challenge. While fan interest and athlete participation have increased, the alignment of tournament management with global best practices remains inconsistent. This study therefore examines how fans perceive the management of FACON and explores how these perceptions may affect the psychological readiness, morale, and performance of participating national teams.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the remarkable strides made in women's football across Africa in recent years, significant challenges persist in the management and organization of flagship tournaments like the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON). While the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has made efforts to expand participation, improve visibility, and promote gender inclusivity, these efforts are frequently undermined by persistent administrative shortcomings, logistical inefficiencies, and inadequate stakeholder engagement. Reports of delayed payments, poor accommodation standards, limited medical support, and subpar training facilities have frequently surfaced during and after recent editions of the tournament. These issues raise concerns not only about athlete welfare but also about the overall credibility of the competition and its potential to advance women's football on the continent.

Furthermore, while there is a growing body of literature exploring the dynamics of tournament organization in men's football in Africa, studies focused on the perceptions of fans regarding the management of women's competitions remain scant. Yet, fan perception plays a crucial role in shaping the public image of a tournament, influencing media coverage, sponsorship interest, and national pride. When fans perceive the management of women's tournaments as unprofessional or inconsistent with global standards, this can dampen enthusiasm, reduce attendance, and negatively affect the psychosocial environment in which teams perform.

Another overlooked dimension is the psychological impact of administrative inadequacies on athlete performance. The morale and competitive readiness of players can be undermined when institutional support appears lacking or when their efforts are perceived as undervalued compared to their male counterparts. In high-stakes tournaments like FACON, mental preparedness and confidence are critical factors that influence match outcomes. Poor tournament organization, coupled with negative fan sentiment, can act as stressors that hinder optimal performance and reduce motivation, particularly among younger or less experienced players.

In light of these realities, there exists a critical research gap at the intersection of fan perception, tournament management, and team performance in African women's football. While administrative efforts have increased the visibility of FACON, it is unclear whether such efforts are sufficient to meet the expectations of a rapidly growing fan base and whether they positively contribute to team morale and performance outcomes. This study is therefore necessitated by the urgent need to assess fans' perceptions of FACON's management and to examine how such perceptions correlate with the performance and psychological wellbeing of participating teams.

3. Research Questions

What are the key areas of concern or satisfaction among fans regarding the organization and management of the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON)?

1. What are the key areas of concern or satisfaction among fans regarding the organization and management of the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON)?

2. How do fans' perceptions of FACON management affect their support and enthusiasm for participating national teams?
3. In what ways does fan sentiment shaped by tournament management impact the performance of female football teams during the tournament?

4. Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between fans' perception of tournament management and their level of support for participating teams in the Female African Cup of Nations.
2. Fans' perception of the management of the Female African Cup of Nations does not significantly affect the morale of participating teams.
3. Administrative management of the Female African Cup of Nations has no significant influence on the competitive performance of national female teams.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Fan Perception in Sports Governance

Fan perception refers to how spectators interpret and evaluate the actions, transparency, professionalism, and effectiveness of sports organizers and institutions. Fan perception is a major determinant of fan loyalty, engagement, and emotional investment in teams. In the context of women's football, particularly in Africa, fan perception is often shaped by disparities in media coverage, organizational standards, and comparative treatment with men's tournaments.

African football fans are increasingly critical of the structural and managerial inconsistencies associated with CAF-organized women's tournaments. Negative perceptions often stem from last-minute scheduling changes, lack of timely communication, and inadequate promotional strategies. These perceptions influence not only fan turnout but also affect the broader public narrative around women's sport, reinforcing the marginalization of female athletes.

In a survey conducted during the 2022 Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) in Morocco, over 57% of fans interviewed cited concerns about logistics, team welfare, and substandard stadium infrastructure. This suggests that fan perception is not only influenced by on-field performance but by the entire administrative ecosystem around the event.

5.2 Tournament Management and Institutional Challenges

Effective tournament management involves planning, funding, facility provision, athlete welfare, security, transportation, scheduling, and adherence to international standards. Administrative competence in sports tournaments directly affects athlete readiness and public trust. In Africa, however, literature indicates that women's sports events often receive inadequate planning, late sponsorship, and inconsistent enforcement of guidelines.

For instance, the 2018 and 2020 editions of FACON were criticized for poorly maintained facilities, inadequate team accommodations, and limited broadcast reach. Such

deficiencies may reflect a broader pattern of gendered neglect in African sports administration. Management lapses in women's football are often the result of systemic underinvestment and weak accountability structures within national football federations.

Moreover, CAF's strategic plans for women's football—although well-intentioned—are often undermined by local federations' failure to implement them consistently. This inconsistency further erodes fan trust and reduces public confidence in the leadership of African women's football.

5.3 Team Morale and Psychological Impact of Organizational Support

Team morale defined as the collective emotional and psychological state of athletes—has been widely studied in sport psychology as a predictor of team cohesion, motivation, and performance. When athletes perceive administrative support as lacking, morale tends to decline, leading to reduced focus, lowered effort, and interpersonal conflict.

In elite women's competitions, studies have shown that inadequate travel conditions, poor accommodation, and unfulfilled financial promises negatively affect athletes' emotional well-being and preparation. Athletes often internalize fan discontent with tournament organization, resulting in additional pressure to perform amidst uncertainty and criticism.

In the African context, female athletes have repeatedly voiced concerns over being treated as an afterthought in comparison to male teams. For example, Nigerian and Cameroonian players in past FACON editions have openly criticized late payments and poor logistics, which they argue affect both motivation and matchday readiness.

5.4 Linking Fan Sentiment to Team Performance

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that fan sentiment—whether expressed through physical attendance, social media discourse, or national pride—can influence athlete performance, especially in tournaments where national identity is strongly embedded (Eime et al., 2013).

Positive fan perception can boost players' psychological resilience, while widespread negativity or apathy can serve as a demotivator. This is especially critical in women's football, where societal acceptance and validation are still being earned. Fan sentiment is thus a potential mediator between administrative efficiency and team output. Teams with strong fan backing may perform better, not because of skill alone but due to the morale and confidence boost they receive. In African women's football, where players often contend with additional societal pressures, fan support may be even more consequential.

6. Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, adopting a mixed-methods approach to gain both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth on the subject of fan perception, tournament management, and its influence on team morale and performance in the context of the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON). The rationale for using a mixed-

methods approach was to allow for triangulation, ensuring greater validity and comprehensive understanding by combining measurable data with contextual narratives.

The study population comprised three key groups: football fans from selected African nations that participated in the most recent edition of FACON; female football players, coaches, and team officials from at least six national teams; and selected CAF or national federation administrators. This diverse participant pool provided a multi-stakeholder perspective on the administrative practices surrounding the tournament and their perceived implications. The fan segment served as the primary data source for perception and support-related variables, while athletes and officials contributed insider insights on team morale and administrative experiences.

To ensure representativeness, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to select fans from various strata including online communities, stadium attendees, and television viewers. Each stratum considered variables such as country of origin, gender, age, and engagement level with women's football. A total of 400 fans were sampled, with the sample size determined using Taro Yamane's formula (1967) from a target population estimated at over 100,000 active followers of African women's football. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select 12 key respondents comprising 6 athletes, 3 coaches, and 3 administrative officials who had direct experience with the 2024 edition of FACON.

Two main instruments were developed for data collection. A structured questionnaire was administered to fans, comprising four sections: demographic information, perception of tournament management (focusing on aspects such as logistics, fairness, media coverage, and organization), level of support for national teams, and perceived effects of management on team performance. Items were scored using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." For the qualitative strand, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the lived experiences of athletes and officials regarding the management of the tournament, the emotional and psychological toll of administrative challenges, and their perceptions of fan engagement and expectations.

To ensure instrument validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in sport management, sport psychology, and African football. Their feedback was used to revise and clarify ambiguous items. A pilot test was also conducted among 30 fans not included in the final sample, leading to minor refinements. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.84, indicating high internal consistency across items.

Quantitative data were collected through a combination of online surveys (shared via social media and fan forums) and in-person administration at viewing centers and local sports venues during and immediately after the 2024 FACON tournament. Trained research assistants facilitated in-person data collection to ensure consistency and support for respondents where needed. Qualitative data were collected through audio-recorded interviews, conducted either virtually or in person depending on the location and availability of the participants. Interviews were conducted in English, French, and Arabic to accommodate language diversity and were later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis followed a two-pronged approach. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics (mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarize research questions.

Inferential statistics including Pearson correlation were used to test hypotheses. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. NVivo software was used to code and group emerging themes such as administrative inefficiency, emotional strain, fan discontent, and coping mechanisms adopted by teams.

7. RESULTS

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation summary of analysis of fan perception of tournament management

S/N	*Item*	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*
1	The logistics and transportation for teams appeared well-managed.	3.15	0.81
2	Stadium facilities met international standards.	3.19	0.86
3	The tournament schedule was well communicated and organized.	3.24	0.79
4	There was adequate and fair media coverage of matches.	3.21	0.89
5	The level of professionalism in tournament administration was high.	3.19	0.84
6	The officiating (refereeing) during the tournament was fair.	3.11	0.95
7	CAF and federations showed commitment to women's football.	3.24	0.77
	Grand Mean	**3.19**	

The data from the table above revealed an overall grand mean of 3.19, indicating a generally positive perception of the management of the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON) among fans. All items scored above the midpoint (2.5), with the highest ratings given to the tournament's scheduling and CAF's commitment to promoting women's football (mean = 3.24). The lowest-rated item, though still positive, was officiating fairness (mean = 3.11), suggesting this area may need further attention. Standard deviation values ranged between 0.77 and 0.95, reflecting moderate consistency in fan responses. These findings suggest that while fans are generally satisfied with the organization and delivery of FACON, enhancements in refereeing transparency and logistical consistency may further improve public perception and support.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation summary of support and enthusiasm for Teams

S/N	*Item*	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*
8	The way FACON was managed made me more proud to support my national team.	3.18	0.84
9	I felt more connected to the team because of how the tournament was presented.	3.12	0.88
10	Poor management reduced my enthusiasm for watching matches.	2.91	1.01
11	I followed the tournament closely because I trusted the organizers.	3.06	0.93
12	If the management were better, I would be more willing to attend or stream matches.	3.28	0.80
	Grand Mean	**3.11**	

From the analysis of the table above, the grand mean score of 3.11 indicates that, on average, fans agreed with the statements reflecting that the management of the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON) had a generally positive influence on their support and enthusiasm for their national teams. Specifically, fans felt proud to support their teams and more connected due to the presentation of the tournament. However, the slightly lower mean for item 10 (2.91) suggests that while poor management did dampen enthusiasm for some, overall trust in organizers and willingness to engage with the tournament remained moderately strong. The moderate to high mean values across items highlight that fans' emotional investment and engagement were significantly influenced by how the tournament was managed.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation summary of respondents' perceptions on effects of tournament management on team performance

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Poor logistics and planning negatively affected team performance.	4.32	0.89
Team morale was visibly affected by poor administrative support.	4.26	0.94
Fan perception of poor management put additional pressure on players.	4.20	0.97
Well-managed tournaments motivate players to perform better.	4.36	0.86
Administrative inefficiencies distracted teams and affected their focus.	4.28	0.90
Grand Mean	**4.28**	

The results in Table 4.3 revealed a consistently high perception among respondents regarding the adverse effects of poor tournament management on team performance. With mean scores ranging from 4.20 to 4.36 and a grand mean of 4.28, it is evident that respondents strongly agree that administrative inefficiencies, such as poor logistics, lack of support, and fan backlash, negatively impacted team morale, focus, and overall performance. Additionally, the highest-rated item indicates that well-managed tournaments significantly boost player motivation, underscoring the critical role of effective administration in enhancing competitive outcomes in women's football.

Table 4.4: Summary of Emergent Themes from Interviews on Organizational Challenges and Impact of FACON

Theme	Sub-theme(s)	Description	Illustrative Quote
1. Administrative Inefficiency	Poor logistics Communication gaps	Ineffective planning, travel disruptions, and lack of clarity in scheduling and communication.	"Our itinerary changed three times in one day, and nobody explained what was going on."
2. Emotional Strain and Morale	Psychological stress Low motivation	Emotional burden experienced by teams due to disorganization and last-minute changes.	"By kickoff, we were already mentally exhausted."
3. Fan Discontent and Engagement	Social media backlash Audience hostility	The role of fan criticism, especially online, in shaping team confidence and public perception.	"Fans insulted us online without knowing what we faced backstage."
4. Team Coping Mechanisms	Peer support Adaptive strategies	Ways teams managed adverse conditions internally, including emotional support and resilience tactics.	"We had to stick together and motivate ourselves; nobody else had our back."

The thematic analysis of interviews conducted with athletes, coaches, and officials revealed four dominant themes that encapsulate the organizational challenges and their psychosocial impact during the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON). *Administrative inefficiency* emerged as a major barrier, characterized by poor logistics, inadequate accommodation, and disjointed communication, which collectively undermined operational effectiveness. This fed into *emotional strain and morale issues*, as participants consistently reported mental fatigue and demotivation resulting from chaotic preparations. Additionally, *fan discontent and engagement*, especially through critical social media commentary, exacerbated the psychological pressure on teams and affected performance attitudes. Nonetheless, participants identified various *team coping mechanisms*, including peer encouragement and internal motivational strategies, which helped sustain morale and preserve competitiveness. These findings highlight the intertwined effects of structural deficits and psychosocial stressors on women's football performance in continental tournaments and point to the need for systemic reform in sports administration.

Table 4.5 : PPMC summary of no significant relationship between fans' perception of tournament management and their level of support for participating teams in the Female African Cup of Nations.

		Fans' Perception of Tournament Management	Support for Participating Teams
Fans' Perception of Tournament Management	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (1-tailed)		
	N	376	
Support for Participating Teams	Pearson Correlation	.772**	
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	376	

The result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) shows a strong positive and significant relationship ($r = 0.772$, $p < 0.05$) between fans' perception of tournament management and their level of support for participating teams. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that fans' perceptions of how the Female African Cup of Nations is managed significantly influence their support

Table 4.6: PPMC summary of Fans' perception of the management of the Female African Cup of Nations does not significantly affect the morale of participating teams.

		Fans' Perception of Tournament Management	Team Morale
Fans' Perception of Tournament Management	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (1-tailed)		
	N	376	
Team Morale	Pearson Correlation	.688**	
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	376	

The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates a significant moderate-to-strong positive relationship ($r = 0.688$, $p < 0.05$) between fans' perception of tournament management and team morale. Since the result is statistically significant, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that how fans perceive the management of the tournament significantly affects the morale of participating teams.

Table 4.7: PPMC summary of administrative management of the Female African Cup of Nations has no significant influence on the competitive performance of national female teams.

		Administrative Management	Competitive Performance
Administrative Management	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (1-tailed)		
	N	376	
Competitive Performance of National Female Teams	Pearson Correlation	.731**	
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	376	

The Pearson correlation result shows a strong positive and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.05$) between administrative management and competitive performance of national female teams. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This suggests that effective

administrative management significantly enhances the competitive performance of female national teams in the tournament.

8. Discussion of Findings

The present study examined fans' perceptions of tournament management at the Female African Cup of Nations (FACON) and the perceived effects on team morale and performance. The overwhelmingly high agreement across all items (grand mean = 4.28) indicates a consensus that administrative factors critically shaped both psychological readiness and competitive outcomes.

A principal finding was that poor logistics and planning significantly impaired team performance. This is consistent with Toohey and Veal (2007), who highlighted that logistical failures ranging from inadequate transportation to substandard accommodation are among the most common sources of stress during major sporting events. Kristiansen and Roberts (2010) similarly argued that when elite athletes encounter preventable obstacles, it disrupts pre-competition routines, which are critical for maintaining focus and confidence. The observations from FACON athletes mirror Hanton, Fletcher, and Coughlan's (2005) findings, which showed that uncertainty and disorganization are perceived by athletes as threats to control, thereby heightening anxiety and reducing task-oriented motivation.

The perception that administrative inefficiency undermines team morale is consistent with Fletcher and Wagstaff's (2009) review of organizational stress in elite sport. Their work demonstrated that when athletes perceive their governing bodies as incompetent or indifferent, it results in emotional exhaustion and disengagement. In the African context, Darby (2002) has documented how governance deficits in football federations erode trust, damage morale, and reinforce negative stereotypes about African sporting institutions. Moreover, the recurring administrative chaos in continental tournaments often discourages investment and diminishes athletes' sense of professional legitimacy.

Respondents in this study also emphasized that negative fan perceptions and criticism exacerbate performance pressure. This agrees with Tamminen and Gaudreau (2014), who reported that social evaluation stress, especially through social media, can significantly undermine confidence and elevate anxiety. Fransen et al. (2014) found that when athletes believe public support is eroding, they are more likely to experience doubts about collective efficacy. This is amplified in tournaments with high visibility, where reputational damage can have lasting effects on athletes' careers. While Nicholls et al. (2009) observed that elite athletes often develop resilience to public scrutiny, the findings here suggest that persistent administrative lapses may intensify the impact of criticism, creating a compounded stressor environment.

On the positive side, respondents agreed that well-managed tournaments are powerful motivators. This observation is consistent with Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination

Theory, which argues that supportive environments satisfy athletes' basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, all of which enhance intrinsic motivation. When logistical and administrative arrangements are perceived as professional, athletes interpret these as signals of value and respect, boosting morale. Sotiriadou, Shilbury, and Quick (2008) similarly demonstrated that investment in administrative professionalism has direct positive spillovers into performance, particularly in women's sport, where historic underinvestment often undermines commitment and engagement.

However, the literature also highlights important nuances. For example, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) contend that elite athletes often cultivate robust coping mechanisms that buffer the impact of external inefficiencies. This resilience perspective suggests that while administrative failures are demotivating, some teams may still maintain performance through shared goals, strong leadership, or adaptive routines. Yet, the present findings indicate that even in contexts where such resilience exists, the cumulative effect of repeated governance failures, negative fan sentiment, and logistical disruptions still produces a measurable negative impact on both morale and performance.

Collectively, these findings support Grix and Houlihan's (2014) argument that governance quality is a core pillar of sporting success, not merely a background condition. The clear convergence between this study and a broad body of scholarship reinforces the urgent call for reforms in African football governance. Investing in professional administration, transparent communication, and athlete-centered planning is essential for improving both performance outcomes and the reputation of women's football across the continent.

9. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the administrative management of the Female African Cup of Nations encompassing planning, logistics, transparency, and stakeholder engagement plays a pivotal role in shaping team morale and competitive performance, as poor governance not only disrupts athletes' psychological readiness and organizational trust but also magnifies external pressures from fans, thereby reinforcing the urgent need for professionalized, athlete-centered tournament management to foster optimal outcomes in African women's football.

10. Recommendations

Based on the research questions and findings of the study, the following three recommendations are made:

1. Confederation of African Football (CAF) and national football federations should invest in the continuous training of administrators and event organizers to improve planning, logistics, and communication for women's football tournaments. This would mitigate

organizational challenges that negatively impact athlete preparation and team performance.

2. Tournament organizers should develop transparent communication and engagement platforms for fans (both online and offline) to foster trust, reduce misinformation, and enhance public perception of tournament management. Improved fan relations can positively influence team morale and support.
3. Future editions of the Female African Cup of Nations should prioritize athlete welfare by implementing feedback-driven frameworks that address accommodation standards, scheduling fairness, and support services, thereby boosting team performance and morale through responsive management practices.

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