

Original Article

From Viral Visibility to Platform-Mediated Celebrity Capital: Media Amplification and the Institutional Legitimation of Cape Verde's Vozinha

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Abstract - Sporting mega events concentrate global attention briefly, yet the processes through which such attention becomes durable resources for individual athletes remain insufficiently specified, particularly for competitors from small football nations. This article examines the Cape Verdean goalkeeper Josimar Jose Evora Dias, known as Vozinha, whose Instagram audience moved from a documented state of approximately fifty thousand followers to a captured observation of 29.5 million within seven weeks of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. A temporally ordered multimodal digital case study reconstructs this event-driven attention surge across a coded analytical corpus of twenty three platform captures and six video files, that is twenty nine analytical items, combining follower milestone reconstruction, engagement transcription, caption and institutional communication analysis, and external verification. The account's platform disclosure panel records a date joined of December 2013 and verification in October 2020 (S19), and the captured amplification content was predominantly external to the athlete's own account. Intermediary framing organised attention around age, underdog position, national identity and emotional resonance. Captured engagement was lower in the sampled transfer-phase posts than in the tournament-phase posts, while institutional, contractual and promotional outcomes were documented within the same visibility cycle. The article proposes an Event-Driven Platform-Mediated Celebrity Capital Model. The analysis is associational and process-reconstructive.

Keywords - Athlete Branding, Media Amplification, Networked Celebrity, Platform-Mediated Celebrity Capital, Sports Communication.

1. Introduction

Athlete visibility no longer depends on the scheduling decisions of broadcasters alone. Digital platforms have redistributed the capacity to circulate sporting images, to comment upon them and to accumulate measurable audiences around individual competitors, producing a media sport environment in which speed, quantification and participatory circulation have become defining features. [1] Research on sport and social media has grown accordingly, mapping how athletes present themselves, how audiences engage and how brands are constructed through recurrent posting. [2] Much of this work assumes a gradual accumulation of followers through sustained self presentation, and it has been developed predominantly in contexts where athletes already possess substantial commercial infrastructure.

Mega events disturb this assumption. A single tournament fixture concentrates a global audience on a small number of performances, and the resulting attention can be redirected towards individual accounts at a scale and speed that ordinary posting cannot generate. Recent scholarship has begun to treat events as discrete opportunities for follower growth rather than as background conditions, showing that competitive occasions can produce step changes in athlete audience size. [3] Yet the literature still explains the accumulation of followers more convincingly than it explains what happens next. Engagement research demonstrates which content types attract likes and comments, [4] but the movement from a quantified audience to institutional recognition, career opportunity and commercial engagement remains comparatively underspecified.

Intermediaries complicate the picture further. Classical communication research established that influence often travels through opinion leaders who interpret media content for wider publics. [5] In platform environments these intermediaries are themselves quantified actors with verified identities and audiences that rival those of institutions. Where such actors direct attention explicitly towards a named account, the two step logic acquires a technical instrument: an addressable destination. The resulting configuration of event, intermediary and audience produces a form of fame that is collectively manufactured rather than individually authored, which the literature has described as networked celebrity, [6] and which raises the question of whether accumulated visibility can be converted into other resources. [7] Platform studies has meanwhile shown that cultural production is increasingly organised by the affordances, metrics and commercial arrangements of platforms themselves, [8] which means that any account of conversion must attend to the infrastructure through which visibility is measured and displayed.

These questions are especially consequential for athletes from smaller football nations. Scholarship on African football labour has documented the structural channels through which players move towards European markets and the asymmetries that shape those movements, [9] the transnational division of football labour that concentrates value in a limited number of leagues, [10] and the aspirational logics that sustain migratory ambition among young players. [11] This body of work has concentrated on physical mobility and contractual circulation. It has attended far less to digital visibility as an independent resource that may itself reorganise an athlete's position, particularly when that visibility arrives suddenly and late in a career.

The case examined here presents an unusually clear instance of the process. A forty year old goalkeeper from Cape Verde, an archipelago nation of roughly half a million people, produced an exceptional performance on his country's World Cup debut. His Instagram audience subsequently moved from a documented state of approximately fifty thousand followers to a captured observation of approximately 29.5 million. Within weeks he was signed by one of South America's most decorated clubs, received at an airport by hundreds of supporters, presented through institutional and commercial imagery, and engaged as the face of an international film campaign. The case is extreme in the methodological sense: its magnitude and compression make visible a sequence that is ordinarily slow, diffuse and difficult to observe, which is precisely the condition under which intensive single case work contributes to theory. [12]

The research problem is therefore not that an athlete acquired a large audience. It is that the mechanism connecting a sporting performance to platform visibility, and platform visibility to institutional and commercial recognition, has not been adequately specified, and that existing frameworks each explain part of the sequence while leaving the remainder unaccounted for. The aim of this study is to examine how an exceptional sporting performance, influential media amplification, participatory audience mobilisation, Instagram visibility, identity based storytelling and institutional media activity contributed to the transformation of Vozinha from a comparatively low visibility Cape Verdean goalkeeper into a globally recognised digital sports celebrity.

Six objectives follow. The first is to reconstruct the documented development of the athlete's Instagram visibility before and after the triggering performance. The second is to examine how influential sports media accounts framed and amplified that performance and directed attention towards his Instagram presence. The third is to analyse the narrative construction of the athlete through themes of sporting excellence, age, underdog achievement, Cape Verdean identity, African representation, authenticity, emotion and delayed recognition. The fourth is to investigate how audience engagement and cross platform circulation contributed to his construction as a networked sports celebrity. The fifth is to examine how the receiving club's institutional communication contributed to legitimation and post viral repositioning. The sixth is to develop an integrated event driven platform-mediated celebrity capital framework explaining the movement from performance visibility to potential platform-mediated celebrity capital.

Five research questions guide the analysis. RQ1 asks how the athlete's documented Instagram visibility developed following the triggering World Cup performance. RQ2 asks how influential sports media accounts framed and amplified his performance and digital popularity. RQ3 asks which narratives and symbolic attributes contributed to his construction as a globally recognisable sports celebrity. RQ4 asks how the club's institutional communication contributed

to post viral legitimization. RQ5 asks what the case reveals about the conversion of event driven sports visibility into networked celebrity and platform-mediated celebrity capital.

The study contributes in three ways. Empirically, it assembles a verified multimodal record of a rapid visibility transformation, treating platform metrics with the evidentiary caution their rounding and volatility require. Theoretically, it integrates media event theory, two step flow, networked celebrity and a platform adapted reading of Bourdieusian capital into a single processual model that specifies both conversion and attention decline. Methodologically, it demonstrates an interval censored approach to platform chronology that manages, rather than conceals, the uncertainty introduced by relative timestamps and rounded metrics. The remainder of the article reviews the relevant literature, develops the theoretical framework and conceptual model, sets out the methodological design, presents the findings across twelve analytical stages, discusses their implications, states the study's limitations and concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sporting Events and the Concentration of Attention

Scholarship on media events established that certain broadcasts interrupt ordinary programming, assemble mass simultaneous audiences and invite ceremonial rather than routine viewing. [13] Subsequent work has questioned whether that framework survives fragmentation, arguing that the mediated centre persists but is now produced through distributed and continuous rather than singular and interruptive attention. [14] Sport occupies an unusual position in this debate because its major tournaments retain genuine simultaneity while their circulation has become thoroughly platformed. The acceleration of media sport culture has compressed the interval between an on field action and its global commentary to the point where the event and its mediation are effectively co temporal. [1] What the media event tradition explains well is the concentration of attention. What it explains less well is the destination of that attention once the broadcast ends, because the framework was developed when audiences had no addressable place to go.

Platform infrastructures supply that destination. The proliferation of social buttons and counters has produced an economy in which participation is registered, aggregated and displayed as a public number, [15] so that attention becomes not merely felt but visibly accumulated. Visibility itself is thereby rendered a scarce and contested resource, distributed by systems whose operation is opaque to those subject to them. [16] Creators respond by developing practical theories about how visibility is allocated and by acting on those theories. [17] This literature clarifies that a surge in followers is never simply an aggregation of individual decisions; it is a decision pattern shaped by an infrastructure that makes some accounts findable and others not. The implication for the present study is that the athlete's audience growth must be read as jointly produced by human circulation and platform mediation, while acknowledging that the latter cannot be directly observed.

2.2. Intermediaries, Opinion Leadership and Platform Circulation

The two step flow model proposed that media influence is mediated by opinion leaders who interpret content for their own social circles. [5] Later revisions argued that contemporary conditions permit a one step flow in which strategically produced messages reach audiences directly, bypassing interpretive intermediaries. [18] Platform environments complicate both accounts. Network media logic describes a hybrid condition in which professional editorial selection and algorithmic or participatory circulation operate simultaneously and shape one another. [19] Within this condition, verified journalists and broadcasters function neither as classical opinion leaders embedded in interpersonal networks nor as bypassed intermediaries, but as quantified nodes whose own audiences confer reach.

Two features of platform intermediation matter for the present case. The first is that intermediaries can issue explicit, addressable instructions. A recommendation to follow a named account converts diffuse admiration into a single executable action, which is a materially different communicative act from praising a performance. The second is that the effects of intermediary action are modulated by ranking and recommendation systems whose selection criteria are neither disclosed nor stable. [20] The literature consequently supports a reading in which intermediaries initiate and

direct attention flows while platforms condition their propagation, but it does not support claims that either factor can be isolated as a cause from publicly observable data alone.

2.3. Networked Celebrity, Microcelebrity and Athlete Branding

Celebrity research has moved decisively away from models of fame as an emanation of individual charisma. The demotic turn described the mass production of momentary celebrity figures whose visibility derives from media systems rather than from achievement or talent. [21] Microcelebrity research then documented the practices through which ordinary users cultivate audiences by managing an imagined public and performing calibrated authenticity, [22] and showed how visibility itself becomes a form of labour requiring continuous investment. [23] Studies of self branding have described the resulting condition as one in which promotional selfhood becomes a general requirement rather than a specialised occupation, [24] and analyses of platform fame have traced how quantified visibility acquires its own aspirational logic. [25] Networked celebrity extends this line by emphasising that contemporary prominence is produced through the coordinated activity of media actors, institutions, audiences and infrastructures rather than through individual self presentation. [6]

Sport communication research has applied these ideas to athletes with considerable empirical success. Content analyses of athlete social media have identified recurrent self presentation strategies and their relation to audience response, [26] mapped the visual repertoires through which athletes construct sporting and personal identities, [27] and examined how athletes use platforms to communicate with publics and sponsors. [28] Work on emergent platforms has shown that short form video reconfigures relationship marketing between athletes and fans. [29] Conceptual models of athlete brand image have specified the dimensions along which athletic performance, attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle combine, [30] and later studies have shown that brand development can proceed through non sporting activity such as strategic philanthropy. [31] Event focused research has demonstrated that competitive occasions can produce discontinuous rather than incremental follower growth. [3]

A tension runs through this literature. Athlete branding research generally presumes agency: the athlete selects content, manages self presentation and cultivates an audience. Networked celebrity research presumes distributed production: visibility is manufactured by many actors, of whom the celebrity is one. The case examined here sits closer to the second position than the athlete branding literature typically accommodates, because the decisive amplification originated outside the athlete's own communicative activity. The literature has not resolved how to analyse athletes whose audiences are built for them rather than by them.

2.4. Metrics, Attention and Interpretive Limits

Any study relying on platform counters must confront what those counters do and do not represent. Critical work on social media metrics has argued that visible numbers measure the platform's own registration of activity rather than any underlying construct such as attention, affection or influence, and that treating them otherwise imports a category error into the analysis. [32] Broader methodological critique has warned that the availability of large digital datasets encourages claims that the data cannot sustain, particularly regarding representativeness and inference. [33] The attention economy tradition has meanwhile theorised attention as a genuinely scarce resource subject to accumulation and exchange, [34] which supplies a vocabulary for conversion arguments while also cautioning that attention is inherently transient.

Three practical constraints follow. Displayed counts are rounded, so precision beyond the displayed digits is unavailable. Counts are cumulative and revisable, so a captured value is a statement about a moment rather than a stable property. Counts are also strategically produced, since accounts and intermediaries have incentives to publicise favourable figures. These constraints do not preclude analysis, but they determine its form: milestone reconstruction rather than time series modelling, descriptive comparison rather than inferential testing, and explicit separation of what a screenshot shows from what a caption claims.

2.5. Capital, Conversion and the Platform Question

Bourdieu's account of capital proposed that resources take economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms and that their significance lies substantially in their convertibility. [35] Applied to sport, the framework showed how bodily practices and sporting dispositions are structured by and reproduce social position. [36] Media scholarship extended the framework by arguing that media institutions exercise a meta capital capable of consecrating value across other fields, [37] and by theorising visibility itself as a distinct form of power in mediated societies. [38] Celebrity capital was subsequently proposed as accumulated media visibility arising from recurrent representation, explicitly conceptualised as convertible into economic, political and social resources. [7]

Platform theory adds a further layer. The platformisation of cultural production describes how the terms of cultural circulation are increasingly set by infrastructural intermediaries whose commercial models depend on data and attention, [8] a process now analysed across economic, infrastructural and governmental dimensions. [39] Political economic accounts characterise the platform as a distinctive corporate form organised around the extraction and monetisation of interaction, [40] while empirical work with content creators shows how platform requirements structure their labour and their sense of viable practice. [41] Taken together, this literature supports the proposition that quantified visibility may function as a proto capital, but it also insists that visibility becomes capital only when it is actually exchanged. A follower count that is never converted is a display, not a resource. This distinction is central to the present analysis and is retained throughout.

2.6. African and Small Nation Athlete Visibility

Research on African football has documented the structural conditions under which players circulate internationally, including the colonial and post colonial pathways connecting Lusophone African players to Portuguese football, [9] the transnational organisation of football labour markets, [10] and the aspirational and precarious logics that sustain migratory projects. [11] Broader scholarship has examined the relationship between football, identity and nation across the continent. [42] This literature establishes that visibility for African players has historically been mediated by scouting networks, club structures and European broadcasting, all of which are institutionally gatekept.

Digital platforms alter the gatekeeping structure without dissolving it. An athlete may now become visible through channels other than institutional sponsorship, but the resulting visibility remains dependent on infrastructures owned elsewhere and on intermediaries whose audiences are concentrated in particular linguistic markets. The literature has not systematically examined what happens when a player from a small African nation acquires a platform audience that exceeds those of the institutions around him. That configuration inverts the customary asymmetry and is empirically rare, which makes it analytically valuable.

2.7. The Gap Addressed

Three gaps emerge from this review. First, sports celebrity research has concentrated on already prominent athletes in major football nations, leaving the rapid emergence of previously low visibility athletes from small nations comparatively unexamined. Second, event based follower growth has been documented but the subsequent conversion of that growth into institutional and commercial outcomes has not been modelled as a process with alternative trajectories. Third, existing frameworks explain adjacent segments of the sequence without articulating the transitions between them: media event theory explains attention concentration but not its destination, two step flow explains intermediation but not quantification, networked celebrity explains distributed production but distinguishes numerical visibility from durable resources only weakly, and capital theory explains convertibility but was not developed for infrastructures that display accumulation publicly and in real time. The present study addresses these gaps through an intensive case analysis and an integrated processual model.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Media Event Theory

Media event theory contributes the proposition that certain occasions suspend routine and assemble an exceptional simultaneous audience around a shared script of contest, conquest or coronation. [13] Its relevance to the

present case is direct. A World Cup fixture between a debutant nation and a leading football power supplied precisely the contest script the framework describes, and the resulting attention was concentrated within a defined temporal window. The framework also explains why an ordinary professional performance acquired extraordinary salience: the event conferred significance that the same performance in a domestic second division fixture would not have carried.

Its limitation is that the framework theorises attention as directed towards the event and its ceremonial meaning, not towards a persistent, addressable account belonging to a participant. Media event theory has no mechanism for explaining why attention migrated specifically to one goalkeeper's Instagram profile rather than dispersing after the broadcast. That migration requires an account of intermediation, which the framework does not supply. Within the integrated model developed here, media event theory therefore occupies the first position: it explains performance salience and the creation of an attention opportunity, and hands the sequence to the next mechanism.

3.2. Two-Step Flow and Digital Opinion Leadership

The two step flow model contributes the proposition that media effects are mediated by intermediaries who select, interpret and relay content. [5] Its relevance here is that the attention generated by the fixture was organised and redirected by verified accounts with large followings, which framed the performance through specific narrative categories and, critically, identified a destination for audience action. The framework accommodates the observation that the athlete himself did not initiate the amplification. Its limitation is twofold. The model was developed for interpersonal relay within bounded social networks and does not anticipate intermediaries whose own audiences are measured in tens of millions, nor does it theorise the technical affordances through which a recommendation becomes an executable instruction. It also cannot account for algorithmic circulation, participatory imitation across accounts, or the subsequent construction of the athlete as a celebrity figure, since it concerns the transmission of influence rather than the manufacture of persona. A further mechanism is therefore required, and the framework occupies the second and third positions in the integrated model: narrative resonance and intermediary amplification.

3.3. Networked Celebrity Theory

Networked celebrity theory contributes the proposition that prominence is collectively produced through the coordinated activity of media actors, audiences, institutions and infrastructures rather than authored by the celebrated individual, [6] building on demotic accounts of mass produced celebrity [21] and on microcelebrity research concerning audience management and calibrated authenticity. [22] Its relevance is substantial: the case displays intermediary framing, mass audience participation, institutional adoption and commercial appropriation operating together, with the athlete positioned largely as the object rather than the author of these operations. Its limitation is that the framework tends to treat visibility as the outcome to be explained, and consequently distinguishes only weakly between quantified attention and its transformation into durable resources. It can describe how an athlete became widely recognised without specifying whether that recognition yielded anything beyond itself, or under what conditions recognition decays. Since the central question of this study concerns conversion, a framework oriented to resources and exchange is required. Networked celebrity theory therefore occupies the fourth, fifth and sixth positions in the integrated model: audience mobilisation, platform quantification and celebrity reconstruction.

3.4. Bourdieu's Forms of Capital Adapted to Platform Environments

Bourdieu's framework contributes the proposition that resources exist in multiple forms whose principal significance lies in their convertibility, and that symbolic capital consists in recognition conferred by others within a field. [35] Its extension to media contexts established that media institutions wield a consecrating meta capital [37] and that visibility functions as a distinct modality of power. [38] Celebrity capital adapted the framework further by conceptualising accumulated media visibility as itself a form of capital subject to conversion. [7]

Its relevance to the present case lies in the conversion question. The framework permits an analysis in which platform visibility is examined for evidence of exchange into symbolic recognition, social relationships, institutional access, career opportunity and commercial value. Its limitation, when applied without adaptation, is that Bourdieusian capital was theorised for fields with relatively durable structures of consecration, whereas platform visibility is volatile,

publicly quantified, revisable and dependent on infrastructures external to the field. A follower count is not a credential. This study therefore adopts a deliberately cautious definition: platform-mediated celebrity capital denotes the capacity of quantified platform visibility to be converted into symbolic recognition, social connections, institutional access, career opportunities and possible commercial value. Follower count alone does not constitute platform-mediated celebrity capital. Capital theory occupies the seventh and eighth positions in the integrated model: institutional legitimation and capital conversion or attention decline.

3.5. *Theory Integration*

The four frameworks are not alternative explanations of the same phenomenon but sequential explanations of adjacent segments of a single process, each of which fails at the point where the next becomes necessary. Media event theory explains why an exceptional performance generated an attention opportunity, but it cannot explain why that attention moved towards one participant's personal account. Two step flow explains the intermediary work of selecting, framing and directing attention, but it cannot explain the platform mechanisms through which a directive becomes a measurable audience, nor the subsequent manufacture of persona. Networked celebrity theory explains the distributed production of that persona by intermediaries, audiences, institutions and infrastructures, but it does not adequately separate numerical visibility from durable resources or theorise the conditions under which visibility decays. Bourdieusian capital theory, adapted with care to platform conditions, provides a vocabulary for examining possible convertibility and extends the integrated proposition to its final stage, while itself requiring the preceding frameworks to specify how the convertible resource was generated in the first place. The integration is therefore processual rather than additive: each framework contributes a transition, and the model's contribution lies in specifying the junctions between them.

3.6. *Core Theoretical Proposition*

The proposition assessed in this article is as follows. Exceptional sporting performance creates an attention opportunity. Influential media intermediaries narrativise and amplify that opportunity. Participatory audiences convert mediated attention into measurable platform visibility. Platforms and institutional actors subsequently contribute to transforming visibility into networked celebrity, symbolic recognition, institutional legitimacy and potentially durable platform-mediated celebrity capital. This proposition is advanced as the object of investigation and is not asserted as established prior to the presentation of results. The analysis that follows examines which of its segments the available evidence supports, which it supports only partially, and which remain undetermined.

3.7. *Conceptual Framework*

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework as an ordered process with a terminal divergence. Three antecedent components are shown as parallel conditions rather than as a temporal chain: an exceptional sporting performance within a media event, which generates performance salience and a concentrated attention opportunity; a discoverable, verified and populated athlete account already in place; and a grouped set of contextual intensifiers comprising age and career longevity, underdog positioning, small-nation context, national identity, emotional resonance and pre-existing account credibility. None of the three produced the others, and the contextual intensifiers are not independently estimated causes. The three converge on the beginning of the platform-mediated process. Five ordered mechanisms follow: narrative resonance and intermediary framing, intermediary amplification and audience direction, audience mobilisation, platform quantification, and networked celebrity reconstruction. Networked celebrity reconstruction connects directly to the documented outcomes observed within the visibility cycle, namely symbolic recognition, institutional legitimation and access, career opportunity and commercial engagement. The documented outcomes lead to a longitudinally unresolved divergence between two alternative trajectories: attention dissipation, leaving an inflated residual follower count of undemonstrated durability, or potential conversion into platform-mediated celebrity capital, in which visibility becomes more durable symbolic, relational, institutional, career or commercial resources. The two trajectories branch independently from the same divergence point. They are mutually alternative, neither precedes or causes the other, and neither is established longitudinally by this case. The eight stages of the model remain recoverable. Performance salience appears among the antecedent conditions; narrative resonance, intermediary amplification,

audience mobilisation, platform quantification and celebrity reconstruction appear as the five ordered mechanisms; institutional legitimisation appears among the documented outcomes; and capital conversion or attention decline appears as the two terminal branches. Line style carries meaning. Solid boxes and solid connectors mark documented sequential associations, that is, transitions for which the corpus and the external verification record supply evidence. Dashed boxes and dashed connectors mark the two terminal branches, which are theoretical or longitudinally unresolved. Connectors represent process ordering and documented association, not estimated causation, and no connector represents an estimated causal effect. A theory key beneath the model records where each framework contributes: media event theory to performance salience, two-step flow to intermediary framing and audience direction, networked celebrity theory to audience mobilisation, platform quantification and celebrity reconstruction, and adapted capital theory to institutional legitimisation and possible conversion or decline. Algorithmic amplification does not appear as a node.

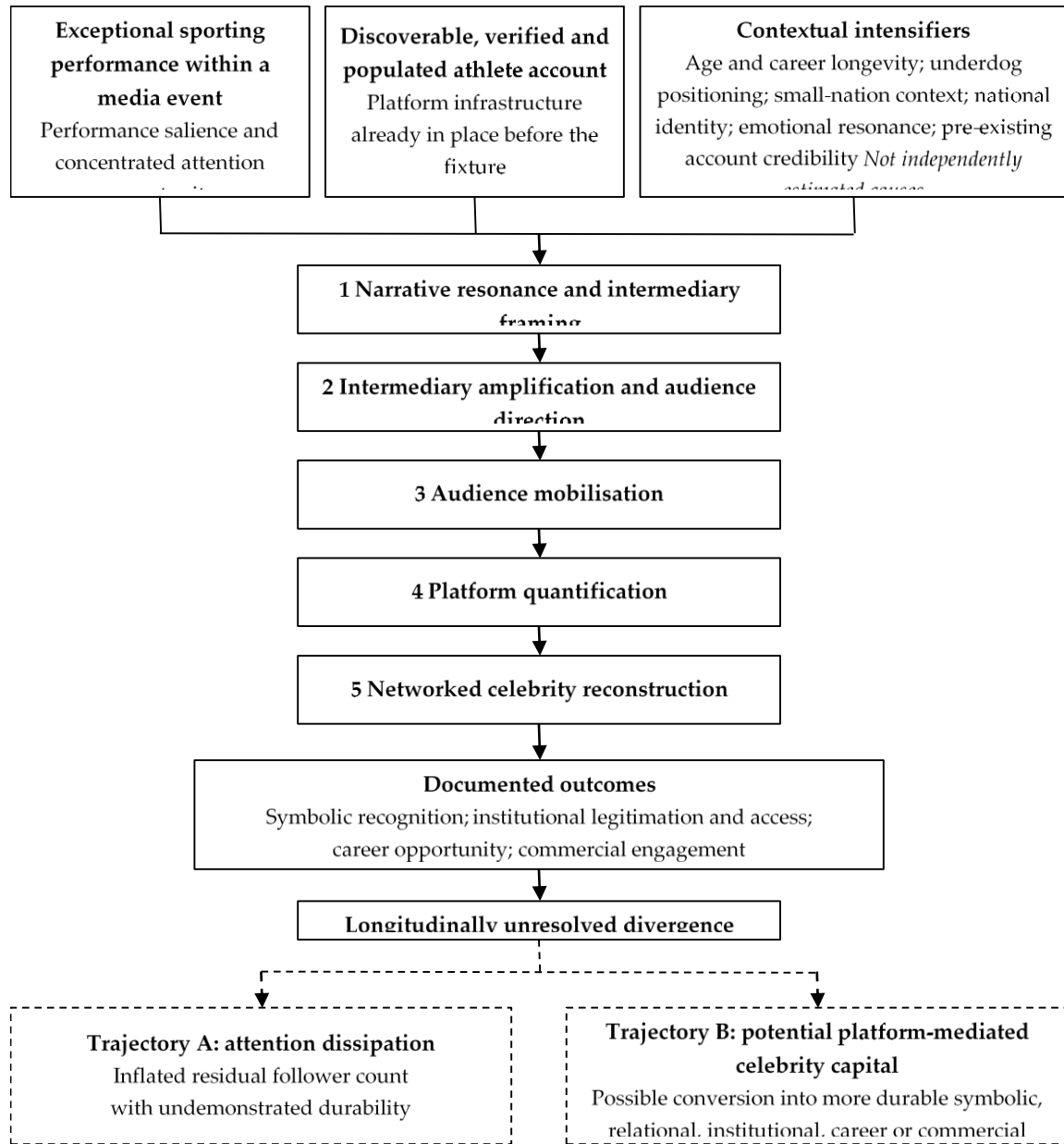


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of Media-Driven Athlete Celebrity Construction and Longitudinal Divergence

Solid box and solid connector = documented sequential association. Dashed box and dashed connector = theoretical or longitudinally unresolved trajectory. Connectors represent process ordering and documented association, not estimated causation.

Theory key: Media event theory: performance salience. Two-step flow: intermediary framing, amplification and audience direction. Networked celebrity theory: audience mobilisation, platform quantification and celebrity reconstruction. Adapted capital theory: institutional legitimation and possible conversion or decline.

Note: Platform ranking and recommendation processes were not directly observable and are therefore not represented as a documented mechanism.

4.1. Research Design

The study applies a temporally ordered, multimodal, explanatory digital case study using a purposive event-centred corpus and process-tracing-informed reconstruction. The term temporally ordered denotes that the evidence spans a documented sequence from the triggering fixture to the athlete's institutional presentation at a new club, and that the analysis is organised temporally. It does not denote a statistical longitudinal panel, and no such design is claimed, because only selected milestone observations of the principal outcome variable are available. The design combines seven procedures: discrete follower milestone reconstruction, transcription of public engagement metrics, qualitative caption analysis, visual and multimodal analysis of video material, institutional communication analysis, temporal process tracing and external factual verification. Process tracing is applied in its diagnostic sense, examining whether the observable implications of the proposed mechanism are present in the sequence rather than estimating effects. [43]

4.2. Case Selection and the Logic of the Single Case

A single case design is appropriate here for five reasons. First, the case is extreme in the methodological sense, since the magnitude and compression of the transformation exceed ordinary variation and thereby render visible a process that is normally gradual and obscured. [12] Second, the rapidity of the follower transformation is itself the phenomenon requiring explanation, and averaging it against typical cases would eliminate the object of study. Third, the case exhibits an unusually extensive but incomplete public record of several stages in the proposed process, spanning a sporting event, intermediary framing, audience mobilisation and institutional communication, so that several theorised mechanisms are observable within one sequence. Fourth, intensive cases are well suited to developing and refining theory where existing frameworks explain segments but not transitions. Fifth, the study pursues analytical generalisation towards theoretical propositions rather than statistical generalisation towards a population, and no claim of representativeness is made.

4.3. Units of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis is the individual public Instagram post, Reel, video or documented profile observation. Eight embedded analytical units are distinguished within each primary unit: captions, visual frames, engagement indicators, follower observations, narrative claims, account level institutional information, temporal events, and transfer and arrival communications. This distinction permits a single capture to contribute evidence to several analytical strands without conflating, for example, an observed metric with a claim made in the caption accompanying it.

4.4. Account Sample

Four sources of public content were analysed. The first is the athlete's official Instagram account, which carries a platform verification badge. The second is the account of a verified transfer journalist whose posts constitute the principal intermediary material in the corpus. The third is the receiving club's official verified account. The fourth is a third party commercial account responsible for a promotional film in which the athlete appears; this source was included because it supplies the only direct evidence in the corpus of commercial conversion, which is central to RQ5, and its inclusion is justified on evidentiary rather than volumetric grounds.

One consequence of this sample requires explicit statement. External verification established that a Brazilian broadcaster and its associated streamer issued the decisive public instruction to follow the athlete during live coverage of the triggering fixture, and that the broadcaster publicly claimed responsibility for the resulting surge. That intermediary is not represented in the captured corpus. The corpus therefore documents intermediary amplification but does not contain the specific intervention that independent reporting identifies as its principal trigger. This is treated as a material limitation and is carried forward into the results and the discussion rather than being minimised.

4.5. Corpus and Data Extraction

The coded analytical corpus comprised twenty-three platform captures and six video files, yielding twenty-nine analytical items. All twenty-nine analytical items were processed. The revised data-collection document additionally contained three profile-header captures, designated D01-D03. These supplementary captures were retained solely as denominator and account-scale provenance records. They were not subjected to qualitative coding and were not added to the 29 x 51 coding matrix. The complete retained collection therefore comprised thirty-two evidence objects, of which twenty-nine formed the coded analytical corpus. A forensic evidence register was constructed before the findings were drafted, recording for each item an evidence identifier, source file, location or duration, account, post type, visible or relative date, inferred or verified date, collection date status, engagement figures, follower counts, caption or visible text, narrative codes, visual codes, sponsor and institutional markers, evidence tier, verification source, uncertainty note and the manuscript section in which the item is used. The register is provided as a separate structured supplementary file. Values obscured by cropping or image quality were not estimated. Values displayed in abbreviated notation were retained at their displayed precision and are identified throughout as Instagram rounded metrics.

4.6. Chronology and Interval Censoring

The revised source document records four collection dates at document level: 25 July 2026, 3 August 2026, 4 August 2026 and 6 August 2026. The first twenty-three platform captures are not individually mapped to the first three dates within the document. Accordingly, no exact collection date is assigned to an individual analytical capture unless separately established. The three supplementary profile-header captures, D01-D03, are associated in the revised collection with the 6 August 2026 session, although no independent per-capture metadata was supplied. These records are therefore used as denominator and account-scale provenance observations rather than as additional coded analytical items. Captures were grouped by device clock and interface characteristics into internally consistent sets, and each set is reported without being anchored to a specific calendar date.

Five captures display relative rather than absolute publication times. For these, absolute publication dates were sought from independent reporting. Where corroboration established a window, both the corroborated window and the verbatim relative display are recorded. Where corroboration was unavailable, the entry states that the publication date was not independently established. Exact publication times were not reverse engineered from device clocks, because the collection date of the relevant capture is not independently attributable and any such reconstruction would inherit that uncertainty while presenting a false appearance of precision. Five distinct temporal categories are kept separate throughout: post publication date, screenshot collection date, video file creation date, file export date and event date. This interval censored treatment is applied consistently in the register, the results and the limitations.

4.7. Evidence Hierarchy

Every factual statement is classified according to a six level hierarchy. Tier A denotes direct researcher captured platform observation, including platform generated disclosure panels and supplied media files. Tier B denotes an official institutional statement published by a verified institutional account. Tier C denotes a verified intermediary or journalist claim. Tier D denotes reputable independent media verification. Tier E denotes interpretive inference by the researcher. Tier F denotes an unresolved or unverified claim. A platform verification badge establishes that the platform recognises the account's identity; it does not convert statements made by that account into independently confirmed fact, and no such conversion is performed anywhere in this analysis. Four categories are held apart at every point: what the capture shows, what the caption claims, what external sources verify, and what the analysis infers.

4.8. Quantitative Treatment

Quantitative work is descriptive. Absolute and percentage differences between documented follower states were calculated from displayed values and inherit their rounding. Post level interaction is reported as likes plus comments, with reposts and shares recorded separately because their platform semantics differ. For institutional posts, follower normalised interaction was calculated using the club's 2.7 million follower count captured in the applicable collection batch. The revised data collection contained a supplementary profile capture showing 48.6 million followers for the intermediary account, associated with the 6 August 2026 collection session. This value was used to calculate proxy follower normalised interaction for the intermediary posts. Because the intermediary denominator postdates the engagement observations and no earlier account level follower count was documented, these percentages are descriptive rescalings using the nearest available verified denominator, not contemporaneous engagement rates at post publication. No follower value was interpolated or reverse engineered. No percentage is reported for the athlete's account, because no post level metrics for that account are present in the corpus. Medians are reported for grouped comparisons. No inferential test was conducted, no difference is described as statistically significant, and no continuous follower series, daily value or hourly growth rate was constructed.

4.9. Qualitative Codebook

This study is an exploratory interpretive multimodal analysis using a structured codebook. No intercoder reliability estimate is available. A codebook of nine categories with fifty one codes was developed and applied: performance framing, underdog framing, age and longevity, emotional framing, identity framing, celebrity construction, institutional legitimization, platform-mediated celebrity capital indicators and platform affordances. The instrument defines fifty one codes, of which forty seven are applied in this corpus. A reconciliation against the coding framework identified twenty four code and item pairings that appeared as worked examples in the framework but were not recorded as applications in the evidence register. All twenty four were adjudicated against the original captures and video files under a single manifest-content rule, under which a code applies where the manifest content of the original item satisfies the codebook definition, irrespective of what the register transcription recorded. Twenty two were confirmed as applications and two were rejected, the rejected examples being relabelled as boundary illustrations. Forty seven of the fifty one codes are applied at least once, producing one hundred and thirty one code applications across the twenty nine analytical items. Four codes are defined but not applied. The adjudication also established that several register transcriptions were incomplete rather than the coding being wrong; the S03 transcription, for instance, had omitted a visible audience comment that supplies the manifest basis for E2. The codebook version used during the original coding is not documented in the study records. Codes were applied to captions, on screen text and visual content, with the coding unit being the embedded analytical unit rather than the whole post, so that a single capture could receive codes across several categories. Operational definitions, inclusion and exclusion rules, worked examples and the code hierarchy are provided in the anonymised coding framework supplied as a supplementary file document.

4.10. Multimodal Video Analysis

All six video files were processed sequentially. Each file was inspected in full through systematic keyframe extraction at regular intervals across its duration, supplemented by targeted extraction at scene transitions and at points where on screen text appeared. For each file the analysis recorded duration, technical characteristics, originating account where a watermark or attribution was visible, burned in on screen text, visual framing, institutional symbols, sponsor visibility, clothing, location, audience behaviour, camera treatment, editing and emotional expression, and assigned a process role.

One constraint requires explicit disclosure. No automatic speech recognition capability was available in the analysis environment, and no external speech model could be retrieved. Spoken audio was therefore not transcribed. Only directly observable audio characteristics are reported, namely whether speech, crowd sound or background music is audible. No numerical acoustic measure is reported and no claim is made about verbal content. Where a video carried burned in subtitles, those subtitles were transcribed directly from the image and are the only textual material quoted

from video sources. No speaker is quoted, no language of unsubtitled speech is asserted, and no person, location or event is claimed as definitively identified where the visual evidence is insufficient.

4.11. External Verification

Targeted verification was conducted against tournament reporting, national and international news agencies, established sports broadcasters and a professional advertising campaign registry. Wikipedia was used only to locate stronger sources and is not cited. Where authoritative sources conflicted, the conflict is reported rather than resolved by selection. Externally verified statements carry an EV identifier referring to the external verification register supplied as a supplementary file, which records for each claim the publisher, title, publication date, URL and access date. Three material conflicts are carried into the results: the pre tournament follower baseline, reported as approximately 46,000 to 50,000 (EV04, EV05); the sub twenty four hour follower state, reported variously as five million by the intermediary, nearly ten million by the Associated Press and almost fourteen million by other reporting (EV06, EV07); and the reported length of the club contract (EV18a, EV18b). The apparent conflict over the date of the signing announcement has been resolved and is restated in Section 5.9. No shot location breakdown of the decisive save sequence was recovered during verification, and no such breakdown is reported.

4.12. Ethical Considerations

The study analyses publicly accessible content published by a public figure, a professional journalist, an institutional account and a corporate account. Public accessibility is not treated as equivalent to unrestricted ethical use, and the analysis follows the established position that contextual norms rather than technical availability should govern the research use of social data, [44] alongside broader cautions concerning inference from digital trace data. [33] Seven safeguards were applied. Ordinary commenters are not identified. No ordinary user handle is reproduced. Comments by ordinary users are paraphrased rather than quoted where they are used at all. Personal information beyond what is analytically necessary is excluded. Screenshots are described rather than reproduced except where reproduction is analytically necessary. Secure copies of the evidence are retained without modification to the original files. Supporters appearing in video material, including minors visible in crowd footage, are not named, described identifiably or quoted.

The study involved no recruitment of participants, no interaction or communication with account holders, no intervention, and no collection of private messages or restricted content. All material analysed was publicly accessible at the point of capture. Publicly visible platform metrics were transcribed as displayed and were not linked to any private identifier. The supplied research records do not contain an institutional ethics approval, exemption or determination identifier, and no formal approval or exemption is therefore claimed here. The absence of a formal determination does not remove the ethical obligations set out above, which were applied irrespective of the public availability of the material. Confirmation of the applicable institutional requirement remains the responsibility of the author and of the author's institution.

5. Results

5.1. Pre-Existing Verified Platform Infrastructure

The transformation examined here did not begin with the construction of a platform presence. Platform generated disclosure panels captured directly from the interface record that the athlete's account was created in December 2013 and received platform verification in October 2020, approximately five years and eight months before the triggering fixture, and that the platform lists the account as based in the United States (S19). The first documented follower state records 432 published posts (S05). The account was therefore established, verified, actively populated and discoverable by name long before the tournament.

This finding is analytically consequential and cuts against a common reading of viral emergence. The account did not have to be built, found, verified or made credible during the surge; it had to absorb one. The verification badge in particular functioned as a platform recognised authenticity cue, allowing an audience arriving within minutes to identify the correct destination without the disambiguation problems that ordinarily attend sudden fame. The two intermediary accounts display comparable tenure, having been created in November 2013 and June 2012 and verified in October 2019

and October 2016 respectively (S20, S18). The infrastructure through which the entire subsequent sequence operated was thus mature and stable before the event occurred, and none of it was a response to the event.

5.2. The Triggering Sporting Event

Independent reporting establishes the triggering fixture as a group stage match played in Atlanta on 15 June 2026, in which Cape Verde drew nil nil with Spain on the nation's World Cup debut. The goalkeeper, then aged forty, faced twenty seven shots, made seven saves, kept a clean sheet and was named player of the match. Independent reporting confirms the seven saves (EV10b). No shot location breakdown of the save sequence was recovered during verification, and none is reported here. The intermediary caption at S04 claims that he became the oldest goalkeeper to keep a clean sheet on a World Cup debut. That specific formulation was not located in any independent source and is reported here only as a claim made by the posting account. The independently verified record is narrower: he was the oldest player to appear in a nation's first World Cup match (EV11). The corpus captures the immediate framing of this performance rather than the performance itself (S01 to S04).

The intermediary caption at S04 also reports a shot location count and a modelled goals prevented figure, neither of which names a data provider and neither of which was independently verified. Both are treated as posting-account claims and neither is reported as a finding. Neither discrepancy affects the substantive finding that the performance was exceptional, but both illustrate a general pattern in the corpus: intermediary captions render performance data in rounded, emphatic form, and those renderings do not always survive comparison with primary match analysis.

The tournament sequence extended beyond the triggering fixture. Independent reporting establishes that Cape Verde drew all three group matches, reached the round of thirty two, and were eliminated on 3 July 2026 by the defending champions after extra time, with the goalkeeper making a further eight saves in that fixture and eighteen across the tournament. The corpus captures the intermediary framing of the elimination (S06, S07).

5.3. Influential Media Framing

The intermediary material in the corpus displays a consistent framing architecture built from five recurring elements. The first is numerical emphasis, with age, save count, national population and market valuation presented as bare figures (S01, S03, S04). The second is superlative construction, with claims of historical precedence and record status (S02, S04, S06). The third is emotional address, with tears, family and gratitude foregrounded (S03, S06, S07). The fourth is participatory invitation, including a poll that recorded 232,000 responses (S02) and direct questions to the audience (S09). The fifth is monumentalising language, exemplified by the exhortation to build statues and call them heroes (S07).

Two observations qualify this framing as amplification rather than mere reporting. The intermediary account did not simply describe the performance; it supplied the interpretive categories through which the athlete became legible as a figure rather than as a competitor. Age was not reported as a biographical fact but positioned as the source of the achievement's meaning. National population was not reported as demography but as evidence of improbability. Second, the intermediary reproduced platform metrics as content in their own right (S05), publishing screenshots of the athlete's own profile panels so that the growth of the audience became the subject of the post. This is a distinctive move: the metric ceased to be a measurement of the story and became the story.

Verification establishes an important boundary on this finding. Independent agency reporting attributes the decisive amplification not to the transfer journalist represented in the corpus but to a Brazilian broadcaster with exclusive national rights to the tournament, whose anchor explicitly instructed a live audience to follow the goalkeeper during the match and whose organisation publicly claimed credit for the resulting surge. The intermediary captured in this corpus therefore documents and extends an amplification process that it did not initiate. RQ2 can consequently be answered for the captured intermediary with confidence and for the amplification process as a whole only by combining the corpus with external verification.

5.4. The First Documented Follower Transformation

Three follower states are documented. Two appear as profile panels reproduced within an intermediary post (S05) and record 432 posts with 50,000 followers and 2,160 accounts followed, and subsequently 439 posts with 5,000,000 followers and 2,178 accounts followed. These are reproduced platform evidence rather than direct researcher observation of the live account and are classified accordingly. The third is a direct researcher capture of the live profile recording 461 posts, 29,500,000 followers and 2,189 accounts followed (S13), valid only at the moment of that capture. Table 1 sets out these states.

Table 1: Documented Follower Milestone States. These are Three Discrete Observations and Not a Continuous Series. No Intermediate Value has been Interpolated.

Milestone	Posts	Followers as displayed	Following	Evidence ID	Evidentiary status
M1	432	50k	2,160	S05	Reproduced profile panel within a verified intermediary post
M2	439	5 M	2,178	S05	Reproduced profile panel within a verified intermediary post
M3	461	29.5 M	2,189	S13	Direct researcher-captured platform observation

The differences between these states are large. The first documented state and the final captured observation differ by 29,450,000 followers, a difference of approximately 58,900 per cent relative to the first state. The first and second states differ by 4,950,000 followers and the second and third by 24,500,000. Across the same interval the account added twenty nine posts and followed twenty nine additional accounts, which indicates that the athlete's own publishing behaviour did not change in any proportionate way. The audience expanded by a factor of roughly five hundred and ninety while output remained approximately constant. This asymmetry is the clearest single indication in the corpus that the evidence is consistent with a follower surge driven predominantly by amplification external to the athlete's own posting activity.

The intermediary caption at S05 claims that the movement from 50,000 to more than 5,000,000 followers occurred within twenty four hours. This is recorded as a claim by the posting account. External verification neither confirms nor refutes it cleanly: agency reporting states that the account moved from about 50,000 followers to more than one million shortly after the final whistle and to nearly ten million less than twenty four hours after the match. The direction and approximate compression of the claim are therefore corroborated, while the specific pairing of five million with a twenty four hour window is not. Independent sources also give the pre tournament baseline variously as approximately 46,000, approximately 50,000 and approximately 56,000, and this conflict is unresolved. Subsequent independently reported waypoints, which are recorded for context rather than incorporated into the milestone reconstruction, indicate continued growth through mid and late June and into July. Figure 2 presents the three documented states with their evidentiary status marked.

RQ1 can therefore be answered as follows. The athlete's documented Instagram visibility developed through at least three discrete observed states of very large magnitude within a period of approximately seven weeks, with the transformation temporally following the triggering fixture. The evidence does not support, and this study does not offer, a continuous growth curve, a daily series or an hourly rate.

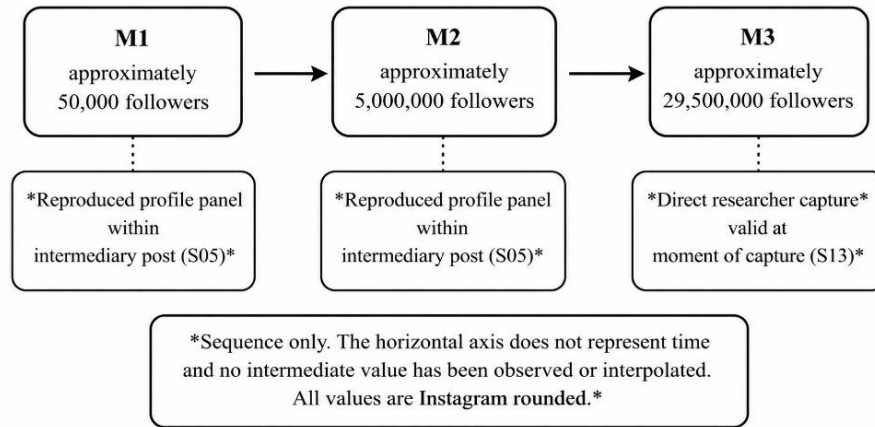


Fig. 2 Documented Follower Milestone States. The Horizontal Arrangement Indicates Sequence Only and Does Not Represent A Continuous Or Evenly Spaced Time Axis. Each State Carries Its Evidentiary Status and Rounding Uncertainty

5.5. Emotional, Underdog, Age and Identity Narratives

Coding of captions, on screen text and visual content identified four narrative clusters that recur across accounts and across the whole documented period. The age and longevity cluster is applied to three of the seven intermediary tournament posts (S01, S03, S04), where it frames the athlete's years as the condition of the achievement rather than as an incidental fact and connects explicitly to delayed recognition. It is not present in the remaining four, and no claim of universal presence is made. The underdog cluster operates through repeated invocation of national population, market valuation and the standing of the opposing team. The emotional cluster is dense and visually specific: tearful close ups at both the triggering fixture and the elimination, an embrace, references to family and to a mother, and the recurrent motif of tears of joy (S03, S06, S07). The identity cluster combines the national flag, the federation crest, personalised gloves bearing the athlete's name alongside the national flag, and Portuguese language self description.

The athlete's own profile supplies the most analytically interesting identity evidence, because it is the only substantial element of the corpus authored by him. The biography is written in Portuguese, identifies him as a professional footballer and as a member of the Cape Verde national team, and carries an injunction never to forget who you are and where you came from (S13). The profile grid displays community footage from Cape Verde alongside a tournament dream team graphic and content from an international film campaign. The self presentation is thus continuous with the intermediary framing rather than in tension with it: origin, nation and humility are asserted by the athlete in the same register in which others assert them about him.

African representation appears in the corpus principally through audience rather than institutional or intermediary framing. A visible comment on one intermediary post articulates continental rather than national identification, and video material records a supporter in Chile displaying a Cape Verdean national flag customised with a hand drawn illustration of the goalkeeper (V06). The material evidence of transnational identification is thus produced by ordinary participants, which is consistent with the networked celebrity account of distributed production and is reported here without identifying any individual.

RQ3 can be answered on this basis. The narratives that contributed to the athlete's construction as a globally recognisable figure were age and delayed recognition, small nation underdog status, emotional authenticity centred on visible tears and family, and national and continental identity, with sporting excellence functioning as the evidentiary anchor for all four.

5.6. Peak Engagement and Mass Audience Participation

Table 2 reports the transcribed engagement metrics for all posts in the corpus that display them. Phase is assigned by the subject matter of the post rather than by calendar date alone. Tournament-phase items concern the tournament performance and its immediate aftermath, which includes the elimination tributes published on 4 July 2026, while transfer-phase items concern the transfer process. On this rule the transfer-speculation post of 5 July 2026 reporting Brazilian club interest (S09) is a transfer-phase item and is grouped with S08, S10, S11 and S22. The distribution is highly skewed. On the intermediary account, likes range from 335,000 to 4,700,000 and combined likes and comments range from 335,749 to 4,741,300. The single highest interaction total in the entire corpus attaches not to the triggering performance but to the elimination tribute (S06), which recorded 4,700,000 likes, 41,300 comments, 185,000 reposts and 224,000 shares. The second highest attaches to the family and tears post following the triggering fixture (S03). Both peaks are emotional rather than technical in their framing, which is consistent with the coded narrative pattern.

Table 2: Transcribed Post Level Engagement

Evidence ID	Account	Phase	Likes	Comments	Reposts	Shares	Likes plus comments	Normalised interaction
S01	Intermediary	Tournament	411K	1,800	3,883	29.7K	412,800	0.85 per cent (proxy)
S02	Intermediary	Tournament	729K	11.1K	8,168	115K	740,100	1.52 per cent (proxy)
S03	Intermediary	Tournament	3.8M	11.1K	38.5K	86.8K	3,811,100	7.84 per cent (proxy)
S04	Intermediary	Tournament	1.8M	5,523	20.6K	50.3K	1,805,523	3.72 per cent (proxy)
S05	Intermediary	Tournament	1.8M	6,705	13.8K	164K	1,806,705	3.72 per cent (proxy)
S06	Intermediary	Tournament	4.7M	41.3K	185K	224K	4,741,300	9.76 per cent (proxy)
S07	Intermediary	Tournament	1.9M	9,713	52.3K	48.6K	1,909,713	3.93 per cent (proxy)
S08	Intermediary	Transfer	1M	4,082	14.7K	221K	1,004,082	2.07 per cent (proxy)
S09	Intermediary	Transfer	1.2M	4,316	6,848	57.1K	1,204,316	2.48 per cent (proxy)
S10	Intermediary	Transfer	584K	1,004	4,040	7,050	585,004	1.20 per cent (proxy)
S11	Intermediary	Transfer	467K	3,126	4,093	19.9K	470,126	0.97 per cent (proxy)
S22	Intermediary	Transfer	335K	749	2,463	7,126	335,749	0.69 per cent (proxy)
S12	Institutional	Transfer	107K	1,833	3,526	10.5K	108,833	4.03 per cent (same-batch)
S14	Institutional	Transfer	249K	2,457	13.1K	52.1K	251,457	9.31 per cent (same-batch)
S15	Institutional	Transfer	38.5K	413	1,134	3,122	38,913	1.44 per cent (same-batch)
S16	Institutional	Transfer	365K	2,492	12.1K	30.3K	367,492	13.61 per cent (same-batch)

S21	Institutional	Transfer	159K	793	3,228	6,624	159,793	5.92 per cent (same-batch)
S23	Institutional	Transfer	198K	5,166	5,713	12.6K	203,166	7.52 per cent (same-batch)
Median	Intermediary	Tournament					1,806,705	3.72 per cent (proxy)
Median	Intermediary	Transfer					585,004	1.20 per cent (proxy)
Median	Institutional	Transfer					181,480	6.72 per cent (same-batch)

Note: Likes Plus Comments is Used as the Interaction Numerator; Reposts and Shares are Reported Separately because their Platform Meanings Differ. Institutional Percentages Use the Club's 2.7 Million Follower Count Captured in the Applicable Collection Batch. Intermediary Percentages Use the Intermediary Account's 48.6 Million Follower Count from Supplementary Profile Capture D02, Associated with the 6 August 2026 Collection Session. Because D02 Postdates the Engagement Observations and the Account's Follower Count at the Earlier Observation Moments is Unknown, Intermediary Percentages are Proxy Normalised Values rather than Contemporaneous Historical Engagement Rates. Applying One Constant Denominator to Both Intermediary Phases cannot Change their Raw Median Ratio. All Displayed Platform Counts are Rounded.

Reposts and shares are reported separately from likes and comments because their semantics differ: they register redistribution rather than reception. Their distribution is instructive. The elimination tribute recorded 185,000 reposts, approximately 3.5 times the next highest repost count in the corpus (52,300, S07), and 224,000 shares. The post announcing club interest recorded 221,000 shares against only 1,000,000 likes, an unusually high share to like relationship. One exploratory interpretation is that circulation of this item was driven more by informational than by affective value, but no measure of audience motivation is available and this reading is not treated as a finding. These are descriptive observations about a small set of posts and are not tested.

5.7. Transfer Speculation and Cross-National Circulation

Two captures document the transfer speculation phase. One reports approaches from two Brazilian clubs, attributed in the caption to Brazilian press rather than to the intermediary's own sourcing (S09). The other reports the opening of official talks with the Chilean club, describing contact with the athlete's representatives and a counter bid, and noting that the athlete was available on a free transfer (S08). External verification confirms that the athlete had left his Portuguese second division club before the summer and was a free agent, and confirms the eventual agreement with the Chilean club. The specific Brazilian approaches are not independently corroborated in the sources consulted and remain unresolved.

The S08 capture displays a relative timestamp of six days ago with no absolute date. Applying the interval censoring rule, the publication date is recorded as not independently established. If the capture occurred on the earliest document level collection date, the display would correspond to approximately 19 July 2026, but since the capture cannot be attributed to that date, this correspondence is reported as conditional and is not used as a finding.

This phase demonstrates cross national circulation in a specific sense. Within roughly three weeks of elimination, the corpus and independent reporting document transfer interest involving clubs in Brazil (S09), Chile (S08, EV14) and Morocco (EV25a, EV25b), alongside the athlete's prior contract with a Portuguese club (EV13). The intermediary account addressed an audience assumed to be interested in all of them. The athlete's transfer prospects were therefore reported in connection with markets on three continents within the same period. Simultaneity of publication across those markets was not established and is not claimed.

5.8. Arrival in Chile and Fan Mobilisation

Independent reporting establishes that the athlete arrived at Santiago's international airport on the evening of Sunday 2 August 2026, having travelled from Madrid, following repeated delays attributed to documentation and

personal matters, and that he was received by several hundred supporters. The corpus documents this reception across four captures and two video files.

The video evidence is the richest material in the corpus for audience mobilisation. The extended arrival documentary (V06, 138.77 seconds) records a night time reception at a terminal exterior, supporters behind steel barriers, uniformed police, supporter vox pops, young supporters visibly weeping, and an in vehicle night interview. Speech and crowd sound are audible throughout. The shorter arrival film (V02, 49.00 seconds) opens on a macro shot of a vehicle badge and closes on a branded card, and carries audible crowd vocalisation and speech.

Two fan produced artefacts are legible in the video material and are analytically important. The first is a banner combining the club name, the athlete's name, an illustration of him in national team kit, both national flags, and a Spanish language legend describing him as making history at a great club. The second is a Cape Verdean national flag onto which a supporter has hand drawn an illustration of the goalkeeper, which the athlete is subsequently shown handling. These artefacts are material, non digital, locally produced objects that combine the symbols of two nations and one club. They demonstrate that the audience was not merely registering engagement on a platform but manufacturing physical symbols of transnational identification, which is the strongest evidence in the corpus bearing on RQ3 and RQ5, since collective celebrity production concerns the narrative and symbolic construction of the athlete and the networked character of the resulting celebrity, not the institutional communication addressed by RQ4.

5.9. Institutional Legitimation

The receiving club's communication constitutes a coordinated legitimisation sequence. Six institutional captures and three institutional video files document, in the order in which they are treated below rather than in an established publication order, the announcement that the athlete had become a club player with signing documents visible on a meeting table (S23, V03), the images of the arrival (S16), transport through the city with a commercial partner tagged (S15), the first meeting with the club president (S12, V05), and confirmation of presence in the country (S14). Independent reporting establishes a two stage announcement rather than a single dated event: the club issued a public welcome through its own social channels on Friday 24 July 2026 (EV14), and the club president confirmed the agreement to media on Saturday 25 July 2026 (EV15). The contract was signed and the player formally presented on Monday 3 August 2026 (EV17). What earlier drafts recorded as a conflict between two announcement dates is therefore a sequence of two distinct communications.

Four features of this communication are analytically significant. First, it is predominantly trilingual. Five of the six captured institutional post captions (S12, S14, S15, S16, S23) appear in Spanish, English and Portuguese, in that order, separated by consistent dividers. The sixth (S21) carries a short Spanish only caption, so the practice is regular but not universal across the captured set. The inclusion of Portuguese is consistent with an effort to address Lusophone and Cape Verdean audiences beyond the club's domestic Spanish-speaking base. Second, the institution tagged the athlete's personal account directly in its announcement caption (S23), formally linking institutional identity to the personal account and routing its own announcement through the larger audience. Third, the intermediary journalist commented publicly beneath an institutional post (S14) and published a collaborative post concerning the signing (S22), so that intermediary and institution were operating in visible mutual reference rather than in parallel. Fourth, the signing was documented as a social and relational event rather than a contractual one: the video record (V03) devotes its duration to a boardroom conversation, laughter, a change into club kit, a group portrait and an embrace, while the documents on the table remain present but illegible. No contractual terms are visible anywhere in the corpus and none are claimed.

The relationship film (V05, 87.40 seconds) extends this pattern. It records an extended informal conversation between the athlete and the club president at a laid dining table, in which conversational speech is audible throughout. Its communicative function is not to announce but to humanise, positioning the institutional relationship as personal warmth rather than transaction. RQ4 can therefore be answered as follows: the club's institutional communication contributed to post viral legitimisation by framing the transfer through a sequence of arrival, interpersonal warmth,

institutional access and formal affiliation, addressing the athlete's inherited global audience in its own language, and formally linking its institutional account to his personal one.

5.10. Commercial and Celebrity Aestheticisation

Two distinct aestheticisation registers appear in the corpus. The first is institutional and monochrome. A promotional film produced by the club (V01, 29.30 seconds) presents the athlete in a black and white studio treatment with low key single source lighting, a slow reveal beginning on hair texture, a seated pose on a stool, and letter spaced serif typography reading a single word denoting aura. A scored music bed is audible and no dialogue is detectable. The associated post visible in the corpus (S17, S21) confirms that this material was pinned to the top of the club's profile grid. This is portraiture in the idiom of luxury advertising rather than sports communication, and it constructs the athlete as an aesthetic object with an ineffable quality rather than as a functional signing.

The second register is commercial and playful. A club post presents a toy brick stylised render of the athlete in club goalkeeper kit against a stadium backdrop, carrying four commercial marks on the depicted shirt (S21), while a further post documents his transport by a tagged automotive partner (S15). Within days of arrival, the athlete's image had been rendered into a promotional graphic bearing sponsor identification and integrated into an existing commercial partnership.

The clearest commercial evidence lies outside the club relationship entirely. A third party campaign film (V04, 63.37 seconds) presents the athlete on the pitch at Campo do Bitim on the island of Sao Vicente, identified by the campaign registry as his home town and as the ground where he began playing (EV21), wearing a goalkeeper jersey rendered in superhero livery, delivering a reflection on the meaning of heroism that resolves into a theatrical release announcement. Its burned in English subtitles trace a complete narrative arc from the location card identifying the pitch where he began, through a redefinition of heroism as protection of something greater than oneself, an expression of gratitude to those who have called him a hero, a joke about being unable to prevent spoilers, and a closing identification of the athlete with the franchise character. External verification through a professional advertising campaign registry confirms the campaign, identifies the client as Sony Pictures and the agency as DOJO Comunicacao (EV20), and confirms the filming location as Campo do Bitim on the island of Sao Vicente (EV21). Independent reporting further records that the athlete promoted the film to his own followers in late July 2026.

This artefact is the strongest single evidence of conversion in the corpus. A film studio and its named agency produced a location shoot in Cape Verde (EV20, EV21), built a campaign narrative around the athlete's own biography and origin, and published a campaign featuring the athlete during the same period in which his platform visibility was unusually high, for a theatrical release in a market where he does not play. The campaign provides evidence of commercial engagement occurring within the broader visibility cycle, without establishing why the athlete was selected, and without institutional mediation by any football body. No financial terms are disclosed anywhere in the available evidence and none are claimed here.

5.11. The Captured Milestone and Athlete-Club Audience Asymmetry

Two profile captures made within the same session permit a contemporaneous account scale comparison. The athlete's account displayed 29,500,000 followers across 461 posts (S13). The club's account displayed 2,700,000 followers across 18,300 posts (S17). The descriptive ratio of athlete followers to institutional followers is approximately 10.9 to 1. The club has published approximately forty times as many posts and holds approximately one tenth of the audience.

This asymmetry is reported as an account scale comparison at the time of capture and nothing further. It is not evidence that the athlete possesses greater institutional power, commercial value, fan loyalty or influence than a club with more than a century of history, a stadium, a squad, a domestic league position and an established supporter base. Follower counts measure platform registration of a following action, not any of those properties. [32] What the comparison does establish is a structural inversion of the ordinary relationship between an arriving player and a receiving institution. In the customary arrangement the club confers visibility on the player. Here the player brought an audience an order of magnitude larger than the institution's own, which supplies a concrete explanation for two

otherwise puzzling observations in the corpus: the institution's decision to publish in the athlete's national language, and its decision to tag his account in its own announcement. Both are rational responses to an inherited audience that the institution does not control.

5.12. From Viral Visibility towards Potential Platform-Mediated Celebrity Capital

The final analytical question concerns whether the documented visibility was converted into anything durable. The evidence supports a differentiated answer across five resource types.

Symbolic recognition is documented at Tier A and Tier D. The athlete received the player of the match award, was selected for a fan voted tournament dream team as displayed on his own profile grid and corroborated by independent reporting, and was framed through monumentalising language by an intermediary with a very large audience. Institutional access is documented at Tier A and Tier B: a documented meeting with the president of a major club, presentation at its facilities, and formal announcement through its official channels. Career opportunity is documented and externally corroborated: a contract with a club reported as top of its national league at the end of July 2026 (EV19), following documented interest from clubs in at least three countries, secured while the athlete was a free agent at the age of forty after leaving a Portuguese second division club (EV13). Independent reporting of the contract term is in conflict, giving both eighteen months and six months with a one year option, so no duration is stated here (EV18a, EV18b). Commercial value is documented through the third party film campaign and the tagged automotive partnership, though no terms are disclosed. Social connections are documented in weaker form through visible institutional relationships and cross account interaction.

Evidence bearing on attention decline is also present and must be reported alongside the conversion evidence. Median combined likes and comments on the intermediary account's tournament period posts was 1,806,705 across seven items. On the same account's transfer period posts the median was 585,004 across five items, a ratio of approximately 3.09 to 1. On the institutional account, follower normalised interaction across six posts ranged from 1.44 per cent to 13.61 per cent with a median of 6.72 per cent and an inclusive method interquartile range of 4.36 percentage points, and the lowest value attached to the most overtly commercial item. Applying the intermediary account's 48.6 million follower denominator produced proxy normalised medians of 3.72 per cent across the seven tournament phase posts and 1.20 per cent across the five transfer phase posts. The tournament phase raw interaction median was approximately 3.09 times the transfer phase median. Applying the same 6 August 2026 follower denominator to both phases produced the same ratio by arithmetic construction. The proxy normalised comparison therefore improves scale interpretability but supplies no independent confirmation of temporal decline. The institutional and intermediary percentages are not fully equivalent, because their denominator provenance differs in temporal status. Captured engagement on the sampled intermediary posts was lower during the transfer phase than during the tournament phase. This statement is bounded in several respects and must not be read as a measure of attention decay. The post groups are small and unequal, seven items against five. Their content subjects differ. Their post ages at the moment of capture differ, and Instagram interaction counts are cumulative and continue to accrue, so items captured at different ages are not directly comparable. Follower retention was not measured. Audience sentiment was not measured. No decay function was estimated and no inferential test was performed. Attention decline is retained in this article as a theoretical trajectory within the proposed model, not as an estimated empirical quantity.

RQ5 can therefore be answered with the following formulation. The evidence supports a process in which event driven visibility was associated with subsequent symbolic recognition, institutional access, career opportunity and commercial engagement, which is consistent with the proposed mechanism of platform-mediated celebrity capital conversion. It simultaneously shows that captured engagement was lower in the sampled transfer-phase posts on the principal amplifying account during the same period. Institutional and commercial outcomes and lower captured transfer-phase engagement were documented during the same period, and the case is therefore located at the point where the two trajectories diverge rather than being settled on either.

6. Discussion

The findings extend media event theory in a specific direction. The tradition theorises the event as producing a temporary interruption of routine and a shared ceremonial focus, [13] and later work has questioned whether that centre survives fragmentation. [14] This case suggests a refinement: the event retained its capacity to concentrate attention, but the attention did not disperse at the final whistle because an addressable, verified and permanently available destination existed. The consequence is that a media event now generates not only a moment of shared focus but a persistent platform registration of audience following at the time of capture on a private account. The pre existing verified infrastructure documented in Section 5.1 is relevant here: the established and verified account appears to have provided a readily identifiable destination for audience migration. Media event theory should therefore be extended to account for the platform destinations that convert ceremonial attention into persistent affiliation.

The role of intermediaries in this case supports and qualifies two step flow accounts. The mechanism observed is not interpretation relayed through interpersonal networks [5] nor direct message transmission bypassing intermediaries, [18] but something the classical models did not anticipate: an intermediary issuing an explicit, executable instruction naming a destination, to an audience measured in millions, in real time. This differs from opinion leadership in kind rather than degree, because the intermediary supplies not only an interpretation but the action. The finding that the decisive instruction came from a broadcaster absent from the captured corpus, while the corpus intermediary documented and extended the resulting surge, suggests that platform amplification operates through a division of labour among intermediaries: one initiates migration, others narrativise and sustain it. Network media logic anticipates this hybridity in general terms, [19] and the present case supplies a concrete instance of its operation.

The observed sequence is strongly consistent with a networked-celebrity interpretation in which multiple actors participated in framing and circulating the athlete's public persona. The athlete published twenty nine posts across the entire documented period while his audience expanded by more than twenty nine million. His persona was assembled by a broadcaster that directed the audience, an intermediary that supplied narrative categories, an audience that executed the following action and manufactured physical symbols, an institution that staged belonging, and a film studio that scripted his biography into a commercial narrative. This distribution is more extreme than the athlete branding literature typically accommodates, since that literature presumes the athlete as the agent of brand construction. [30, 31] The case indicates that a distinct category is required for athletes whose brands are constructed for them, and that the analytical question in such cases concerns not self presentation strategy but the terms on which an athlete accepts, inherits or contests a persona authored elsewhere.

The narrative findings speak to the underdog and identity literature. Age, small nation status, emotional authenticity and national identity did not merely accompany the visibility surge; they supplied publicly circulating symbolic meanings through which following and sharing could be expressed. Following this athlete was a low cost expressive act with a legible meaning, which is a different expressive structure from following an established star. The African representation dimension is notable for having emerged principally from audience rather than institutional framing, which suggests that continental identification was projected onto the case by publics rather than asserted by its promoters. This finding qualifies scholarship on African football visibility [9, 10, 42] by indicating that platform environments allow audiences to perform continental identification independently of the institutional channels that historically mediated it.

On institutional legitimation, the case demonstrates a mechanism that Bourdieusian media capital anticipates but does not fully specify. The institution did not simply acquire a player; it consecrated him, and it did so in a manner adapted to the fact that his audience exceeded its own. Trilingual publication, direct account tagging, monochrome portraiture and the documentation of relational warmth rather than contractual fact are consistent with an attempt to address audiences beyond the club's domestic base. The consecration therefore ran in both directions: the club legitimated the athlete's status as a first tier professional, and the relationship may also have increased the club's visibility among audiences beyond its established domestic base. Media meta capital [37] operates here as an exchange rather than a unilateral conferral.

The central caution concerns the relationship between follower volume and enduring influence. The account scale comparison in Section 5.11 makes the point concretely: an account with roughly eleven times another's followers and one fortieth of its published output is not thereby eleven times more influential, and the metric measures registration rather than attachment. [32] The lower captured cumulative likes and comments on the sampled transfer phase posts of the intermediary account are consistent with the point, subject to the unequal ages, differing content and small sample sizes of the captured items. No decline, decay or trend is claimed. Attention that arrives in a compressed burst through a broadcast instruction has no established relationship with the account holder and no demonstrated durability. Whether the audience documented here becomes a public with sustained interest or a residual number attached to an account is not determinable from the present evidence and would require observation over a considerably longer period.

This is why the study describes possible platform-mediated celebrity capital conversion rather than proven economic capital. The film campaign is the strongest evidence available, and it is genuine evidence of commercial conversion, but its terms are undisclosed and its durability unknown. The contract is real and externally verified, but no financial detail is available, and the causal contribution of the follower count to the club's decision cannot be established: the club acquired a goalkeeper who had just performed exceptionally at a World Cup, which is a sufficient sporting rationale on its own. What the evidence supports is that the transfer occurred within the same visibility cycle, that the institution's communication was demonstrably organised around the athlete's platform audience, and that at least one commercial actor engaged him during the post-tournament visibility period. The relative influence of sporting performance and follower volume cannot be determined. This is a bounded account of outcomes documented within a single visibility cycle and it stops short of causal attribution deliberately.

Finally, the case differs from conventional celebrity self branding in a way that has implications beyond sport. The microcelebrity and self branding literatures describe visibility as the product of sustained labour, calibrated authenticity and strategic audience management. [22, 23, 24] Here visibility arrived without any of that labour having been performed for its acquisition, though two decades of professional preparation preceded the performance that triggered it. The relevant labour was athletic, not communicative. This suggests that the visibility labour thesis requires a boundary condition: in fields where performance is publicly adjudicated at scale, the labour that produces visibility may occur entirely outside the communicative domain, and the communicative task becomes one of reception and management rather than construction.

7. Theoretical Contributions

This article proposes an Event-Driven Platform-Mediated Celebrity Capital Model comprising eight stages. Performance salience denotes the generation of an attention opportunity by an exceptional and publicly adjudicated performance within a media event. Narrative resonance denotes the availability of interpretive categories, such as age, underdog status, national identity and emotional authenticity, that render the performance meaningful beyond its technical merit. Intermediary amplification denotes the work of quantified media actors in framing the performance and, decisively, in supplying an addressable destination for audience action. Audience mobilisation denotes the execution of that action by participatory publics. Platform quantification denotes the registration and public display of that action as a cumulative metric, which renders the transformation visible and thereby itself newsworthy. Celebrity reconstruction denotes the assembly of a persona by intermediaries, audiences and institutions. Institutional legitimation denotes the consecration of that persona by organisations with recognised authority in the relevant field. Capital conversion or attention decline denotes the terminal divergence at which visibility either exchanges into durable resources or dissipates.

Three features distinguish the model from existing accounts. First, it treats the destination of attention as a theoretical variable rather than an implementation detail. The pre existing verified account documented in Section 5.1 is not incidental to the case; without a discoverable and credible destination, the same intermediary instruction would have produced dispersed attention rather than a transferable audience. Second, it separates quantification from mobilisation as distinct stages, because the public display of accumulated followers becomes an independent driver of further

attention, as demonstrated by the intermediary post that made the metric itself its subject. Third, and most importantly, it makes attention decline a modelled outcome rather than a residual.

The model specifies two terminal trajectories. Trajectory A consists of temporary virality followed by attention decline, in which quantified visibility is neither exchanged nor sustained, the audience remains a number, engagement regresses, and the athlete returns to approximately the prior structural position with an inflated follower count as the only residue. Trajectory B consists of virality followed by institutional recognition, sustained engagement, opportunity and platform-mediated celebrity capital, in which visibility is exchanged into contractual, symbolic, relational and commercial resources that persist independently of the metric.

The present case is positioned deliberately between these trajectories rather than assigned to either. Evidence consistent with Trajectory B is substantial: an externally verified contract at a leading club, documented institutional access at presidential level, symbolic recognition through a match award and a fan voted tournament selection, and a commercial engagement with a global entertainment corporation built around the athlete's own biography. Evidence consistent with Trajectory A is also present: median interaction on the principal amplifying account was approximately 3.09 times lower during the transfer phase than during the tournament, and the lowest institutional engagement attached to the most commercial content. The case is therefore located at the divergence point itself, which is the most analytically useful position it could occupy, since it permits both mechanisms to be observed in operation simultaneously. Determining which trajectory prevails would require systematic observation over a period considerably longer than the seven weeks documented here.

8. Practical Implications

For athletes from smaller or less globally visible nations, the most consequential implication concerns readiness rather than activity. The decisive infrastructural condition in this case was a verified, correctly named, actively populated account that existed before the event and could absorb an audience arriving within minutes. Establishing verification, coherent naming and a populated profile is a low cost preparation whose value is realised only if an opportunity occurs, and which cannot be assembled once it does. The corresponding implication is that profile readiness before major events may matter more than posting frequency during ordinary periods, a proposition that requires testing in comparative research.

For athlete managers and representatives, the case indicates the possible value of rapid response capability rather than campaign planning, and suggests that the window of maximum leverage may be short, although its duration is not measured here. A representative unable to respond to commercial, media and institutional approaches within days of a surge may lose part of the period of maximum leverage. It also indicates that narrative control becomes contested precisely when visibility peaks, since the persona in this case was constructed principally by third parties, and that the practical task is to establish a coherent first person account of origin and identity early enough to shape how others narrate it.

For football federations, particularly those of smaller nations, the case demonstrates that a single tournament fixture can generate audience assets whose scale exceeds the federation's own institutional reach. Federations should consider whether their communication capacity, rights arrangements and player support structures are prepared for the possibility that an individual player becomes, temporarily, a larger media entity than the federation. This is a governance question as much as a communication one, since it concerns who speaks for a national sporting identity when a player's audience is an order of magnitude larger than the institution's.

For clubs, the case illustrates a signing whose audience exceeded the institution's own and the communicative adaptations that followed: publication in the player's national language, direct tagging of his personal account, and staging of the relationship as belonging rather than transaction. Clubs recruiting players with disproportionate platform audiences should anticipate that the customary direction of visibility transfer may be inverted, and that the institutional task shifts from conferring profile to binding an inherited audience without appearing to appropriate it.

For sports broadcasters, the case is instructive in a manner that reaches beyond this instance. Independent reporting attributes the decisive amplification to a broadcaster whose anchor issued a direct instruction to a live audience. This is consistent with broadcast intermediaries retaining a capacity to redirect attention at considerable scale and speed, although the attribution is a reported one and this study estimated no causal effect. If that capacity is real, it carries responsibilities. Where a broadcast instruction is followed by an audience movement of this magnitude, whatever the causal relationship between them, the consequences fall on a person who in this case had no opportunity to prepare for or consent to the transformation. That asymmetry is the ethical point, and it does not depend on establishing causation.

For media strategists and sponsors, the case indicates that identity coherence and multilingual communication are operationally significant rather than cosmetic. Five of the six captured institutional post captions appeared in three languages, and the athlete's own profile addressed his national audience in Portuguese. It further indicates that engagement is unevenly distributed across content types, with the most overtly commercial institutional item recording the lowest follower normalised interaction in the captured set. The pace of commercial activity warrants consideration where an audience has formed through emotional identification. Audience response to commercial saturation was not measured in this study, and no inference is drawn about whether any particular level of commercialisation is commercially advantageous.

For African sports institutions more broadly, the case suggests that digital visibility now constitutes a channel of international recognition that operates partly outside the scouting and broadcasting structures that have historically mediated African football exposure. Institutional attention to content ownership, archival rights over match and behind the scenes material, and long term engagement retention would allow the value generated by such moments to be retained regionally rather than accruing entirely to external platforms, intermediaries and receiving clubs.

9. Limitations and Future Research

The intermediary follower denominator was obtained from a supplementary profile capture associated with the 6 August 2026 collection session and postdates the engagement observations. The intermediary percentages are therefore proxy normalised values using the nearest available verified account scale. They should not be interpreted as contemporaneous post level engagement rates. Because the same denominator is applied to both intermediary phases, their normalised median ratio is mathematically identical to the raw median ratio and does not constitute independent corroboration.

Twelve limitations constrain this study and are stated without mitigation. First, the design is a single case and supports analytical rather than statistical generalisation. Second, the follower record consists of three discrete documented states rather than a historical time series, so no growth curve, rate or trajectory shape can be established. Third, the analysis depends entirely on publicly visible platform metrics, which register platform recorded actions rather than attention, sentiment or influence. [32] Fourth, all displayed metrics are Instagram rounded, and the analysis inherits that imprecision throughout. Fifth, metrics are cumulative and revisable, and every value reported here may have changed since capture. Sixth, Instagram's ranking and recommendation processes are not observable, so algorithmic amplification is retained as a theoretically inferred mechanism and is never asserted as an observed one.

Seventh, the study cannot establish causation. The sequence documented here is temporal and associational, and no claim is made that the follower surge caused the transfer, that any single intermediary caused the surge, or that platform visibility produced any specific financial outcome. Eighth, posts may have been deleted, edited or restricted between publication and capture, and the corpus is a sample of what was visible rather than a complete record. Ninth, public comments are not representative of audience opinion, and comments were used sparingly, in paraphrase, and without identification. Tenth, private commercial and contractual information was unavailable, so no term, value or duration of any agreement is known. Eleventh, the corpus is geographically and linguistically bounded: it is dominated by English and Spanish language material, contains no Cape Verdean domestic media, and, most significantly, does not include the Brazilian broadcast intervention that independent reporting identifies as the decisive amplification event.

Twelfth, the study is platform specific to Instagram, while the phenomenon manifestly extended across broadcast, streaming and other social platforms.

Two further constraints arising from the analytical environment require disclosure. Automatic speech recognition was unavailable, so spoken audio in the six video files was not transcribed, and only burned in on screen text is quoted from video sources. Relative timestamps on five captures could not be resolved to exact publication times, and interval censoring was applied rather than reconstruction from device clocks.

Four research directions follow. Longitudinal observation of the same account over twelve to twenty four months would establish which terminal trajectory the case follows and would allow the decay function to be characterised empirically. Comparative study of multiple event driven surges, including cases that decayed without conversion, would permit the model's conditions to be tested rather than illustrated. Interview based research with athletes, representatives, broadcasters and club communication staff would access the decision processes that platform traces cannot reveal, particularly regarding the weight given to audience size in recruitment. Finally, research attentive to the welfare dimension is warranted: the case involves a person whose public identity was reconstructed at extraordinary speed by parties he did not select, and the experience of athletes subject to such transformations remains almost entirely unexamined.

10. Conclusion

This article examined how an exceptional sporting performance by a forty year old goalkeeper from a small African island nation became platform visibility, and how that visibility was subsequently associated with networked celebrity, institutional legitimisation and commercial engagement. Three findings are central. The transformation operated through an account whose platform-generated About this account panel records a date joined of December 2013 and verification in October 2020, approximately twelve and a half years before the tournament (S19). This is a platform disclosure rather than an independently verified historical record. It indicates that pre existing platform infrastructure appears to have facilitated rapid visibility accumulation rather than resulting from it. The captured amplification content was predominantly external to the athlete's account, whose own output increased by twenty nine posts while his following increased by more than twenty nine million, which places the case closer to networked celebrity than to athlete self branding. And contractual, symbolic and promotional outcomes were observed within the same visibility cycle in which captured engagement on the sampled intermediary posts was lower during the transfer phase than during the tournament phase.

The Event-Driven Platform-Mediated Celebrity Capital Model proposed here specifies eight stages from performance salience to the divergence between capital conversion and attention decline, and treats the addressable destination of attention, the public quantification of accumulation, and attention decline itself as theoretical elements rather than incidental features. The model's contribution lies in the junctions it specifies between frameworks that each explain adjacent segments of the process: media event theory, two step flow, networked celebrity and a cautiously platform adapted reading of Bourdieusian capital.

The wider significance of the case is that it is consistent with a pathway by which an athlete outside the established football economies achieved global recognition without prior club mediated international exposure, through the interaction of performance, broadcast intermediation, participatory audiences and platform infrastructure. That pathway is consistent with the documented evidence, and it is also fragile, externally controlled and, on the present evidence, of undetermined durability. Whether the visibility documented here becomes durable platform-mediated celebrity capital or resolves into a residual number attached to an account is a question this study can pose precisely but cannot answer, and answering it will require the sustained longitudinal observation that the phenomenon has so far outrun.

Data Availability

The coded analytical corpus comprised twenty-three platform captures and six video files, yielding twenty-nine analytical items. Three further profile-header captures, D01-D03, were retained solely as denominator and account-scale

provenance records; they were not coded and were not added to the 29 x 51 coding matrix. The complete retained collection therefore comprised thirty-two evidence objects, of which twenty-nine formed the coded analytical corpus. Four supplementary files accompany this article and are listed under Supplementary Materials: the de-identified evidence register, the anonymised coding framework, the external verification register and the coding matrix. Together they contain the evidence identifiers, coding decisions, derived quantities and external sources on which the analysis rests. Original platform captures and videos contain third-party material and may be made available for verification only where ethically, legally and contractually permissible. All platform metrics reported in this article are valid only at their stated observation context and may have changed subsequently.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization, M.M.; methodology, M.M.; validation, M.M.; formal analysis, M.M.; investigation, M.M.; resources, M.M.; data curation, M.M.; writing, original draft preparation, M.M.; writing, review and editing, M.M.; visualization, M.M.; project administration, M.M.

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