

# Evolution of Sports Practice in Senegal in the Internet Age: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Impact of Digital Media on Sports Culture and Community Participation

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## Abstract

The rise of digital technologies has profoundly transformed sports practices in Senegal, influencing both sports culture and community participation. This study adopts a socio-historical approach to analyze the impact of digital media on these dynamics by exploring the social, cultural, and economic changes brought about by this transformation. Specifically, the study highlights the role of online platforms, social media, and mobile applications in promoting sports and creating new virtual communities. It also examines the interaction between Senegalese culture and new forms of sports communication, emphasizing both the challenges and opportunities for preserving local sports traditions. By analyzing the evolution of both traditional and emerging sports through a digital lens, this study sheds light on how the internet is reshaping sports practices and economic models in Senegal, contributing to a deeper understanding of the impact of digital technologies on the country's social and cultural dynamics in the sporting world.

## Keywords

Digital Media, Senegalese Sports Culture, Community Participation, Virtual Engagement

## 1. Introduction

The impact of digital technologies on society has continued to grow over the past few decades, significantly transforming various sectors, including sports. In Sen-

egal, a nation where sport is an integral part of cultural identity, this evolution takes on a special dimension. The country, which has long been marked by an essentially local practice of sport, is now at the crossroads of a new sporting era, favoured by technological advances. The growing influence of digital platforms, social media, mobile apps, and online media has redefined not only how Senegalese consume sport, but also how they actively engage with it [1].

The central question guiding this study is the impact of digital media on sports culture and community participation in Senegal. The rise of digital technologies has made it possible to redefine sports practices, giving them wider access and facilitating their dissemination to a global audience [2]. Digital has not only made sporting events more accessible, but has also introduced new ways of interaction and engagement [3]. These changes are leading to profound transformations, both in terms of individual participation and the organisation of sporting events. At the same time, new challenges are emerging, particularly with regard to the management of traditional local sports in the face of digital globalisation [4].

In Senegal, sports such as traditional wrestling (Lamb) [5], football, but also emerging sports such as e-sports, have become testing grounds for digital uses [6]. While these transformations offer undeniable opportunities, they also raise crucial questions about how they redefine social, cultural and economic relationships within Senegalese sports communities. Through a socio-historical analysis and specific case studies, this study aims to demonstrate how digital technology is shaping the future of sport in Senegal, and how it is influencing the structure of practices, identities and community relations.

## 2. Methodology

Several major trends provide a better understanding of the approaches and methods used in this study. The first aspect leads to the choice of a method to try to find out how the advent of digital media shaped sports or physical practices in the early 2000s. The second aspect concerns the description of data collection. The third side is dedicated to the delimitation of the study. Finally, we will conclude with the description and justification of the method. This study of the impact of digital media on sports culture and community participation in Senegal is based on journalistic publications produced on the websites of the three main general-interest dailies, *Le Soleil*, *Walfadjri* and *Sud Quotidien*. The choice of these three media outlets is based on their age, their continuity of publication and their importance in the production of media discourse on sport in Senegal. They therefore constitute a relevant sample to observe the changes in the treatment and perception of sport in the digital age. We also relied on independent Senegalese websites such as *Seneweb*, whose objective is not necessarily to process information based on journalists' collection techniques. The purpose of this research is therefore to examine the transformation of sports practices in Senegal with the advent of the internet. The data collected comes mainly from: 1) the online and paper archives of the daily newspapers mentioned, 2) digital content (articles, videos, comments)

published on Senegalese sports platforms between 1997 and 2022, and 3) semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 key actors (journalists, club managers, athletes and promoters). The interviews were conducted between January and March 2024, each lasting an average of 45 minutes. To this end, a longitudinal survey was carried out of the texts and illustrations relating to online sports treatment over a period of the Senegalese daily press organs selected: *Le Soleil* (1997-2012), *Sud Quotidien* (1998-2012), and *Walfadjri* (1984-2012) as well as the websites as independent. This period corresponds to the media transition phase preceding the generalization of the Internet and the appearance of the first local digital platforms such as Lutte TV (2008). Logically, for each newspaper, the study period began in the 1990s. Renamed *Le Soleil* in 1970 by the first president of the Republic of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, this very official daily was assimilated to an autonomous government press organ. Aware of the decisive role played by the written press in the education of the masses, the Senegalese state adopted media censorship in order to avoid any political excesses. For *Sud Quotidien*, this rather elitist opus created in 1986 is the first independent general news newspaper. Initially *Sud Magazine*, before changing its name to *Sud Hebdo*, it took on a daily rhythm in 1993. According to journalist Mbow, “this daily is the work of five journalists who were then journalists at the daily *Le Soleil*.” The date of creation of *Walfadjri* dates back to 1984. *Seneweb* was created in 1999 by Abdoulaye Salam Madior Fall. In 2000, Daouda Mbaye became the co-owner. Abdou Salam Madior Fall, CEO of *Seneweb*. The site is a resounding success, especially with the Senegalese diaspora. The number of Internet connections in Senegal did not exceed 40,000 in 2000.

While several studies in the social sciences have described the advent of digital media, such as the work of Moustapha Barry, Mbow, Guinchard, Dieng, no research, to our knowledge, has insisted on the way in which the advent of digital media is disrupting the Senegalese media landscape. The careful examination of the Senegalese general online print press and its competitors such as *Seneweb* should make it possible to carry out this project. The articles analyzed (n = 312) were coded according to three categories: 1) traditional sport, 2) modern sport, and 3) digital or mediatized sport. Thematic coding made it possible to identify lexical recurrences, changes in tone and forms of interaction between media and sports actors. This reading grid is inspired by Bardin’s approach [7] for content analysis. The central question of this analysis is: How have sports practices evolved over time, and what role has the advent of digital technologies played in these changes?

## 2.1. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis examines the eras before and after the internet era, providing a clear overview of how digital media has redefined the sports landscape. This approach compares sports culture and community participation before the widespread adoption of the internet with the current situation, where

online platforms, social networks and mobile applications dominate [8]. This comparison is based on cross-referenced data between journalistic archives (1990-2005) and digital productions (2006-2022). The interviews also enriched the understanding of the social and professional dynamics related to these periods. Based on statistical data, surveys and interviews with local sports stakeholders, this section highlights the significant changes that have taken place, highlighting the major changes in the way sport is consumed, discussed and practiced in Senegal [9].

## **2.2. Case Studies and Analysis**

A fundamental aspect of this methodology is the examination of specific cases of sports clubs, athletes and sporting events in Senegal that have used the Internet in innovative ways. Three case studies were selected: 1) the Senegalese Wrestling Federation for its use of online broadcasts; 2) the Génération Foot football club for its use of social networks in the training and visibility of young talents; 3) the Senegalese e-sports community for its emergence as a new space for socialization. These cases have been chosen in a targeted manner for their illustrative value and their ability to reflect different dynamics (institutional, community, emerging). These case studies will be analysed in depth to identify trends and lessons that illustrate how the digital age has influenced sports practices and community engagement [10]. The approach adopted is therefore qualitative, exploratory and comparative, seeking less to generalize than to understand the social and cultural logics underlying the transformations observed.

### **2.2.1. Socio-Historical Context of Sports Practice in Senegal**

Senegal has a rich sporting tradition marked by the coexistence of modern and traditional disciplines [11]. Football remains the most popular sport, with national fervour exacerbated by the success of the “Lions of Teranga” team on the international scene [12]. At the same time, Senegalese wrestling, known as “Lamb”, occupies a prominent place in the local culture, being both a sport and a cultural expression rooted in ancestral traditions [13].

### **2.2.2. Impact of Digital Media on Sport Participation and Community Participation**

We are mainly talking about the accessibility and democratization of sports information. One of the main impacts of the Internet is the ease of access to sports information [1]. Social networks, specialized blogs and streaming platforms allow Senegalese to follow national and international sports news in real time. This democratization of information has encouraged greater participation of young people in various disciplines, thus broadening the spectrum of sports practiced in the country [14]. For example, according to data compiled from the Social Blade tool on the YouTube platform (2023), channels (Sunu Lamb, FSF TV, etc.) broadcasting local sports content accumulate more than 500,000 monthly views on average, revealing a strong public demand for national sports productions and a growing interest in the digital promotion of Senegalese sport.

### **2.2.3. Promotion of Local Sports and Emergence of New Disciplines**

The Internet plays an essential role in the promotion of local sports [6]. Senegalese wrestling, for example, is enjoying increased visibility through live streaming of the fights on YouTube and Facebook Live, attracting a national and international audience. The largest Senegalese wrestling channels such as Lutte TV record an average of between 300,000 and 900,000 views per event with a peak of 20 million views in August 2025, generating advertising revenues estimated at several million CFA. Similarly, the rise of electronic sports (e-sports) testifies to a change in the sporting habits of the younger generations, attracted by new forms of digital competition [2]. This mutation illustrates the logic of convergence described by Jenkins, where participatory communities are redefining the production and consumption of sports content.

### **2.2.4. Engagement and Structuring of Online Sports Communities**

Digital platforms have fostered the formation of virtual sports communities [15]. Fan groups, discussion forums and dedicated apps like Discord allow sports fans to exchange, organize and promote events. These discussion spaces strengthen fan engagement and create new networking opportunities between athletes, coaches and event promoters. These dynamics are similar to what Maffesoli [16] describes as the formation of affective tributes, where the feeling of belonging often precedes institutional logics.

### **2.2.5. Evolution of Sports Business Models**

The digital age has profoundly changed the sources of income for sport in Senegal. Sponsors and advertisers are increasingly relying on social media to reach their target audiences, while online streaming of competitions is generating new monetization opportunities [8]. In addition, sports e-commerce allows clubs and athletes to sell their merchandise directly, reducing their dependence on traditional distribution channels [9]. Revenues from online advertising and sponsorship now account for up to 25% of the revenues of some local federations (Dakar Digital Report, 2024), confirming the growing importance of digital economic capital.

## **3. Case Studies: Digital Impact on Specific Disciplines and Actors**

### **3.1. Senegalese Wrestling and Digital Mediatization**

Senegalese wrestling (Lamb) is a pillar of Senegal's cultural and sporting heritage. Long broadcast by national channels such as RTS1 or 2STV, it has undergone a profound media change since the 2010s with the rise of the Internet and social networks. This shift to digital has not only changed the way sports are consumed, but has also redefined the relationship between wrestlers, promoters, fans and the media.

The shift from traditional media to digital platforms has made wrestling more accessible and interactive. The fights, previously reserved for national television broadcasting, are now broadcast live on YouTube, Facebook Live or Instagram

Live, via pages such as Lutte TV, Sunu Lamb, or Baye Ndiaye Production. According to statistics from Social Blade (2023), the Lutte TV channel has more than 600,000 monthly views and nearly 1,400,000 subscribers, testifying to the vitality of the digital consumption of this discipline. These figures reflect a globalization of the Lamb, followed today from France, Italy, The United States and Canada, where a significant part of the Senegalese diaspora resides.

Digital platforms also offer direct interaction between spectators and athletes, through real-time commentary, polls and shares. This active participation of the audience has transformed the unidirectional relationship of traditional media into horizontal communication, where the fan becomes an actor in the show.

Renowned wrestlers, such as Balla Gaye 2, Modou Lô, Ama Baldé or Eumeu Sène, now use their Facebook, Instagram and TikTok accounts to manage their public image, publish their training, or announce fights. These platforms allow them to build a symbolic capital and a media capital, in the sense of Bourdieu [17], which gives them a power of economic and social attraction beyond the simple sporting confrontation. Thus, digital notoriety becomes an instrument of distinction and hierarchy in the field of wrestling: the most followed obtain the most lucrative contracts and attract more sponsors. This logic is part of what Zane [10] describes as an “economy of visibility”, where sporting performance is coupled with a permanent media staging.

Digital technology has also changed the economic circuits of the struggle. Monetized YouTube channels generate revenue through advertising and partnerships, while independent digital promoters organize fights exclusively broadcast online, through virtual tickets or pay-per-view. Local companies, such as Orange Senegal, Free, and Wave, now sponsor some fights via their digital platforms. At the same time, young wrestlers are using crowdfunding on Facebook (kitty) or Kopar express to finance their training or equipment, a practice that was previously non-existent.

While the digitalization of wrestling has disrupted its economy, it has also helped preserve and reinvent the ritual and cultural aspects of the discipline. Arena ceremonies, griot songs, and pre-fight dances are now archived and broadcast online, constituting a digital memory of the Lamb. This digital preservation responds to what Maffesoli [16] calls “postmodern sociality”, *i.e.* the creation of new forms of community through networks of symbolic sharing.

Finally, the digital media coverage of the Lamb has fostered the emergence of a pan-African identity discourse: platforms such as Africa Combat TV or SunuSports promote wrestling as a symbol of a shared African heritage, going beyond national borders.

### **3.2. Amateur Football and the Emergence of Talent Thanks to Social Media**

Football remains the most popular and unifying sport in Senegal, occupying a central place in the construction of national identity. In the digital age, young Sen-

egalese footballers use social networks mainly TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube to promote their skills, share their performances and attract the attention of recruiters. This practice reflects a recomposition of the sports field in the Bourdieusian sense: sports capital (talent, performance) is now combined with digital capital (visibility, online interaction) to become a lever for social advancement. This practice is part of a context where professional opportunities in football are limited by the limited number of places in professional clubs, especially in a country like Senegal, where the majority of talent emerges from amateur leagues or regional clubs. The use of social networks has allowed a democratization of visibility for these young athletes. Through videos of their performances, matches, dribbles or spectacular goals, they manage to reach a global audience. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube have become showcases for local talent, allowing foreign scouts to spot players who would otherwise have remained in the shadows.

This has significantly changed the recruitment mechanisms. Before the digital age, scouts physically moved onto the pitch to scout talent, but now they can view videos uploaded by players, breaking down geographical barriers. Concrete examples include the case of Sadio Mané, who, although he emerged before the digital age, is an example of the possibilities that social media offers for young Senegalese footballers. Many young players follow his journey and use the same platforms to make themselves known. In addition, football clinics and online tournaments allow amateur players to virtually compete against talent from all walks of life, increasing their experience and exposure. This enthusiasm for the use of digital technology allows for the effective promotion of talent and strengthens the participation of young people in sports practices. This phenomenon is also leading to a change in the business models of sport, with partnerships between sports influencers and brands, allowing athletes to increase their visibility and monetise their activity through sponsorship contracts, advertising and commercial partnerships [6].

### **3.3. The Rise of Emerging Sports: The Case of E-Sport in Senegal**

E-sports, or electronic sports, is one of the emerging sports that is experiencing rapid development in Senegal, especially among the younger generations. The increasing accessibility of online video games, coupled with the rise of international competitions, has made esports a booming discipline. The rise of esports is largely due to the increase in internet access and the democratization of video games. Senegal now has several online gaming communities that participate in local and international competitions through platforms like Twitch and YouTube. Events such as the Senegal e-Sports Championship have emerged, where Senegalese players compete against other international competitors. The phenomenon is supported by a digital youth that is particularly passionate about video games and by the idea of professionalizing e-sports through online competitions that are attracting more and more sponsors, including technology brands, telecommunications, and gaming companies.

The impact of the Internet on e-sports is not limited to simple competition. It

provides a platform for local players to gain exposure on a global scale. For example, players like Moussa “Mousta” Diop and Cheikh “Akaya” Fall have become leading figures in Senegalese esports thanks to their participation in international competitions and their presence on platforms like Twitch, where they live stream their FIFA, League of Legends and Dota 2. Senegalese e-sports also benefits from an expanding infrastructure, with the construction of online gaming halls, cyber-cafes dedicated to video games, and online tournaments open to all. These developments have a positive impact on the local economy, creating jobs in the fields of IT, competition management and events, while contributing to Senegal’s increased visibility in the global e-sports ecosystem [1]. Digital technology has thus enabled e-sports to establish itself as a legitimate discipline in Senegal, with growing ambitions for the years to come, as evidenced by the first international competitions organized in the country and the rise of Senegalese players in this field.

#### 4. Conclusion

Ultimately, the digital age has profoundly changed the practice of sport in Senegal, but also the way people interact with sport on a daily basis. On the one hand, the Internet has allowed for greater visibility and democratization of sports, both traditional and modern, and has facilitated the formation of new virtual sports communities. Thanks to platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, the broadcasting of sporting events has exploded, which has allowed Senegalese sports to gain an international reach. Disciplines such as Senegalese wrestling or sports *sabar* now benefit from a digital staging that helps to strengthen their attractiveness to the diaspora and young audiences. However, this same exposure can also lead to a reconfiguration of practices, sometimes to the detriment of their original ritual or community dimension. For example, the media spectacle of wrestling transforms certain traditional codes—songs, outfits, gestures—into products of visual consumption, which questions the boundary between preservation and adaptation. These advances thus present major challenges, particularly with regard to protecting the authenticity of local sports practices in the face of a rapid and sometimes uniform globalization of sports consumption patterns. While the Internet has allowed many athletes to become known and new practices to become popular, it also reveals a tension between cultural valorization and media standardization, a tension that deserves continued empirical attention. The impact of digital technologies goes far beyond mere technical considerations: they affect the way sports identities are created, the role of local communities in supporting and promoting sports, as well as the place of sport in Senegalese society as a whole. Thus, digital technology appears both as a lever of protection—by ensuring the visibility and transmission of sports knowledge—and as a factor of cultural transformation, sometimes a source of symbolic erosion. The question of the regulation of these new practices is also becoming a key point to consider, in particular to avoid too much commercialisation or standardisation of sport to the detriment of local specificities. The future of sport in Senegal, in the digital age, seems to oscillate between new opportunities,

particularly in terms of visibility and economic development, and important cultural issues. It is becoming crucial for the actors of the Senegalese sports world, whether institutional or community, to take advantage of this transformation while ensuring that the Senegalese sports culture retains its richness and authenticity. The balance between technological innovation and heritage preservation is therefore a central issue for digital technology to be not a vector of standardisation, but a space for renegotiating and revaluing local sporting identities.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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