Introduction

In 2010, Gibbons and Dixon issued a call to take football ‘fan interactions on the Internet more seriously’ (608). On an initial reading, this seemed like a call that should have been made at least ten years earlier: although the Internet has a rhizomatic history (Castells, 2001) the launch of Microsoft’s Windows 95 operating system in December 1994 was crucial in its production as, for the first time, easy access to Internet Explorer through a desktop icon was made available. By 2010, the Internet had reached a state of some maturity – initial single-route communications of new media websites had been added to by the dialogically friendly communication affordances of social media through the multitude of message-board forums, Myspace (launched in 2003), Facebook (launched in 2004; see Miller, 2011), YouTube (launched in 2005; see Burgess and Green, 2014), Bebo (launched in 2005) and Twitter (launched in 2006; see Murthy, 2013). However, their statement held some merit: Fuchs (2013) suggests that social science was not quick to accurately understand the significance of these developments and this argument might be applied to the specific field of the sociology of football alongside the wider disciplines at large. Indeed, the magnitude of what a desktop icon unlocked to multiple areas of life – even those traditionally associated to physical activity, such as football – was not immediately clear. The rise of GeoCities in developing this world beyond the desktop icon was pivotal in this as its pioneers, David Bohnet and John Rezner established the Beverly Hills Internet organisation which broke from the established ‘old’ media model in that consumers could develop their own web pages, rather than only reading the content laid out by journalists (Castells, 2001). Therefore the presentation of the Internet to the general public allowed new media spaces to develop (Gane and Beer, 2008). The distinction between new and social media is fuzzy, but largely coalescences around communicative capacities. So, ‘new’ media arguably democratised the reportage of events but social media deepened the communicative potential as it allowed Internet users greater capacities to co-construct the story through online dialogue. This opened up computer program possibilities and social networking sites began to appear.

Even half a decade after Gibbons and Dixon’s belated call to arms relatively little is understood about the impact of the Internet and new/social media on sport and its cultures. This statement particularly stands up when compared to the media attention that is given to the issues. This can
be manifest in at least five ways. First, both BBC Sport and Sky Sports News give daily coverage to what football players have discussed on social media platforms relating to major incidents in sport and the wider society. Second, in one of the first pieces to explain the growing phenomena of ‘football hooliganism’, Taylor (1971) argued that a ‘sub-cultural’ rump of fans were feeling senses of loss and alienation from the sport, in part caused by the perceived detachment of professional players from their communities. Now, with the wave of social media platforms, fans and elite sports players can dialogically reconnect (Sanderson, 2014) or at least lead supporters to the perception that star players are happy to engage with them. Some football players have arguably become as well renowned for this engagement as they have for their sporting achievements. Queens Park Rangers midfield player, Joey Barton, who has 2.76 million Twitter followers (figures correct in November 2014) might exemplify this point, given that he has been capped only once at international level but a Google search of ‘Joey Barton Twitter’ yields over one million web-page matches, and that he has been invited on to BBC One’s key political debating programme, Question Time as a result of his opinions voiced on social media forms. Third, in October 2014, his Queens Park Rangers teammate, Rio Ferdinand, was ‘severely warned as to his future conduct’, told to attend an education programme arranged by the Football Association, fined £25,000 and banned from playing in three football matches over offensive ‘slang’ language he used to describe some women on Twitter (BBC Sport, 2014a). Given that tweeting constitutes a form of micro-publishing, interesting questions about the public nature of comments made by high-profile individuals are raised. Questions of this form prompted Arsenal manager, Arsène Wenger to state: ‘We are concerned about Twitter and things going out of the club that should not go out. It is important to keep that under control. In the modern world that is very difficult but we try’ (BBC Sport, 2014b), while Hynter (2014) reported that the Football Association had collected a total of £350,000 in fines that players had paid in 121 disciplinary cases between 2011 and 2014. Fourth, these communication channels open up the possibility of players and former players being victimised by football supporters, for instance, Manchester City’s Yaya Touré described the racist abuse he was subjected to on Twitter as a ‘disgrace’ and reported it to Greater Manchester Police, just hours after reactivating his Twitter account in November 2014 (Jackson, 2014). Fifth, online communications have facilitated the rise of free ‘live streams’ and, most recently, ‘Vine’ clips in which either whole football matches or short bursts of those matches can be made available in ways that – although the evidence on such is inconclusive – may challenge the pervasiveness of pay-to-view broadcasting arrangements that ‘old’ media channels like Sky Sports depend upon (David and Millward, 2012). In this chapter, I address a further important issue within the theme of social media and football by exploring how they embed into fan cultures, illuminating this argument with examples of how such channels have been utilised by supporters in recent protest movements against conditions emanating from the broad ‘commercialisation’ of football. I begin these discussions by looking at the rise of Internet forums in their connection to the football fanzine fan scene.

Social media and football fanzines

Duke (1991) and Jary et al. (1991) have pointed out that fanzines are quite literally independent ‘fan magazines’ which are made by fans and reflect the current sporting and other issues in a humorous way. Their history and genesis can be traced elsewhere and most – but not all – are club specific (see Haynes, 1995; Millward, 2008). Back et al. (2001) point out that fanzines have a liberal voice and were partially created as a form of cultural resistance against the 1980s widespread conflation of football with the racist–hooligan couplet, seeming to have left-wing/liberal positions. They were arguably more popular and appear to have originated in British
football, but spread across other parts of Europe – often becoming a key publication in ultra-fan scenes in Germany, Austria and Italy, among other countries. However, caution must be taken when attempting to characterise fanzine producers in the UK and elsewhere: Giulianotti (2002) points out that the only absolutely consistent factor when considering such individuals are that they are ‘football supporters’, that is, in his opinion, among the most committed type of fan. Indeed, fanzines are produced by ‘amateurs’ – that is, the people who write the fanzines and who are not (usually) professional journalists. It is for these reasons that – in many respects – fanzines encompassed some aspects of the ‘new’ media, even in a pre-Internet age. Supporters could air their views on the print pages of an unofficial fanzine, although this way time delayed in comparison to ‘new media’ Internet produced pieces.

By the early years of the twenty-first century sales of many print football fanzines had reduced.1 There are a number of potential reasons why this happened. First, as Needham (2006: 33) suggests, the popularity of fanzines may have spread beyond their original ‘cult’ level into the mass media. So, for instance, in the early 1990s, the BBC commissioned Fantasy Football – a football fanzine-styled television show – which became hugely popular and relaunched the careers of co-hosts Frank Skinner and David Baddiel. Also, Needham points out that the British tabloid newspapers launched their fanzine (or ‘fan zone’) football columns, which mimicked the original movement. In essence, fanzines were seen to be stripped of their ‘underground cool’ and as a result many producers/consumers refocused their attentions elsewhere.

The loss of interest in the fanzine movement also coincided with the increasing availability of the Internet. The (usually) young, well-educated men who were so instrumental in the development of the fanzine movement were likely candidates to develop information and communication technology skills and the movement – along with many other leisure activities – therefore slowly migrated onto the Internet. This had two immediate impacts – first, online Internet message boards – sometimes referred to as e-zines – were born, and second, a series of blogs – sometimes through websites like GeoCities began to emerge. These developments heightened the discursive dimension of fanzines: blogs provided a space to immediately discuss issues related to football and message boards allowed fans to talk about – and debate – with his/her fellow supporters. Boyle and Haynes (2004) suggested that e-zines are a product of well-educated football fans and technological advances. This is entirely consistent with the production of fanzines given that Haynes (1995: 53) previously argued that they were seen as a rejoinder to the desktop publishing and office photocopying revolution in the 1980s. This returns the argument to assume that e-zines – including blogs – have replaced fanzines. Yet, the relationship between fanzines and e-zines is perhaps not as linear as has so far been implied. Indeed in many cases e-zines may be better viewed as the online continuation/sister project of fanzines rather than their direct replacement. So e-zines may enhance the marketability of paper fanzines, through free online promotion. However, a common argument among fanzine editors is that e-zines have led to a decline in sales. This is highlighted by Steve Kelly, editor of Liverpool FC’s long-running fanzine Through the Wind and Rain:

Before the Internet, fanzines were the only outlet for fans to ‘mouth off’ in any way they chose. The web gave people the chance to do it at that very moment and not have to wait for months for a new issue [of the paper fanzine].

(interview with the author, 7 January 2004)

However, the relationship between the rise of communicative online spaces – such as those offered by e-zines – and fans’ print media of fanzines may not be entirely linear. In 2012, Stand Against Modern Football (hereon Stand AMF) was launched. This was both a network of disgruntled football fans that formally began engaging with each other in communicative
Internet spaces – particularly on football casual message boards, where issues to do with young people’s fashion and music are debated with equal frequency to football but also on Twitter. This network galvanised around the production of a new print fanzine at the beginning of the 2012/13 season, bucking the trend and social process outlined by Steve Kelly. Indeed, on the relationship between new/social media forms and print editions, Stand AMF’s then co-editor Daniel Sanderson stated on Seven Streets blog that:

A lot of what we’ve done would have been absolutely impossible without online content and social media, but our readership are the people who still buy fanzines and like to have something to hold onto. Fanzine culture is about rolling it up and sticking it in your back pocket before the match, lending it to your mates and spilling your pint all over it. We’ve not got the ability to sell them outside every ground in the country, but keeping it as a physical product maintains a bit of that idea.

(quoted in Lloyd, 2012)

Castells (2012) argues that social movements become more ‘real’ in what he refers to as the ‘space of autonomy’, which represents the blend of online and offline spaces. Within one year this movement had grown into a series of meetings in urban spaces around the UK, in which emotions around collective anger at the experienced ‘cultural loss’ of football among those in the meetings, communicating through the fanzine and talking online emerged. From this collective anger grew a sense that the network could ‘reclaim’ some elements of ‘modern football’, most notably through exerting pressure that might result in a reduction in match attendance costs and a cross-club protest was born. This campaign continues, with events being regularly held that are mediated through new/social media channels, communicated through a print fanzine and ‘held’ in cities around the UK. These events drew on new ‘activists’ but also members from other protests groups connected to football clubs and one important example to discuss was that which was related to largely club-specific fan protests at Liverpool FC that emerged several years before but which used the new and social media web forms to connect fans. It is to that movement that this chapter now turns.

**Social media and football fan protests: a case example from Liverpool FC**

In early 2008, groups of Liverpool FC fans began to mobilise against the conditions they believed were being imposed upon the club by the North American businessmen Tom Hicks and George Gillett, who co-owned its economic rights. One year beforehand, Hicks and Gillett bought the football club for £175m., taking on previous chairman David Moores’s 51.6 per cent stake for £88m. alongside the club’s estimated £80m. debt and the cost of building a new stadium (Hunter and Burt, 2007: 52). On the day they bought the club and brought to an end its well-documented search for investment, Gillett said: ‘we have purchased the club with no debt attached to the club, so it is very different from the Glazers [who had bought Manchester United and loaded the acquisition debt back on to the club]’ (quoted in Rich, 2007: 1) and also promised that there would be rapid development on the new stadium. By purchasing the club, Gillett and Hicks followed locally based major shareholders, including David Moores – of the Littlewoods Football Pools empire – as owners. Liverpool fans initially welcomed Gillett and Hicks’s ownership of the club. However, their disharmony grew from the summer of 2007, when it became apparent that work had stalled on the new stadium and it was perceived that the transfer funds available to then football team manager Rafael Benitez were too small. By March, Conn (2007: 3) had argued that Gillett and Hicks borrowed ‘close to £500m’ to buy the club, which
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included a £298m. loan from the Royal Bank of Scotland, and leveraged this back onto the football club through the establishment of the Kop Holdings parent company. He stated that this figure comprised £185m. to buy the club itself – including fees for Rothschild, their merchant bank in London, and for lawyers, accountants and financial PR advisors, with other associated costs – and £113m. borrowed to absorb its £44.8m. net debts, fund preliminary work on the stadium and provide working capital for the club. Later that year it was reported that personal disagreements between the two owners were halting their investments in the club. As a result, two direct forms of protest were launched in February 2008: Spirit of Shankly (hereon SOS) and ShareLiverpoolFC, with a third, the semi-professional football club AFC Liverpool formed in the light of the general commercial practices in elite level football that meant that many young and working-class supporters could no longer afford to attend games. The protest movement would eventually be supported by Kop Faithful and SaveLFC in the summer of 2010, which were splinters of SOS. To be sure, SOS regarded themselves as a supporters’ union with short-, middle- and long-term aims but intending to give fans a greater say in the running of the club, while ShareLiverpoolFC was launched with the explicit aim of raising £500m. through fans’ pledges and buying the club from Hicks and Gillett, thus providing the club’s global fan base with ownership of the club. In October 2010, and after fans had protested, the club’s ownership rights were sold to fellow North American businessman John W. Henry’s Fenway Sports Group for around £300m. but with two-thirds of that fee going to pay off Hicks and Gillett’s acquisition debt which had risen from £175m. in February 2007 (Conn, 2010).

A fuller story of the protests can be found in Millward (2011, 2012) but like with Stand AMF which came after it, a noteworthy feature of the SOS and ShareLiverpool protests was that they readily embraced the Internet. It is difficult to objectively ascertain the bearing these protests had on the sale but it seems likely they played a partial role and in doing so, drew upon new and social media forms. Castells (2013 [2009]: xx) argued that a ‘few technologically savvy youngsters with some ideas and a small amount of money can create companies that would challenge the restriction of free communication imposed by oligopolistic business’ and so it proved in these protests. Indeed, ShareLiverpool appeared to mostly exist in the virtual space, having given its greatest investment in the development of a website which includes news updates on its campaign and an online space where fans can sign up to pledge to buy a share in the club. Offline public meetings – held locally at the club’s Anfield home – were relayed to fans across the world through narrowcast coverage channels such as YouTube. SOS also utilised narrowcast channels as a way of capturing protests and edited many of these into short YouTube documentaries. As Castells suggested, the use of new and social technologies has been useful to the movements because the cost of production is nominal and, unlike television and newspaper coverage of events, they can control the content of the screenings.

One such example occurred in April 2008 when SOS rallied to communicate with fans through the Red and White Kop message board that they would be leading a symbolic protest against the owners’ broken promises that evening, and specifically against their unfulfilled promise to build a new stadium; and that the fans and the media were told upon Hicks and Gillett’s purchase of the club that there would be a ‘spade in the ground [signifying the commencement of construction work] within 60 days’ with the following invitation:

A Spade in the Ground in 60 days? 440 Days later …

After last week’s interview, after the roaring fire and the lovely mug, after the sweet words and all those promises that Uncle Tom would never make in bad faith, well, Spirit Of Shankly are convinced. Convinced enough by Tom Hicks to do him and his estranged partner a favour.
When they got to Liverpool they told us they’d have a spade in the ground within sixty days. There must be some perfectly reasonable explanation as to why they haven’t.

Just as there must be a perfectly reasonable explanation why Hicks told us he wasn’t negotiating with DIC when he was, a splendid explanation for the football club servicing hundreds of millions of debt when Gillett said they wouldn’t do a Glazer, a magnificent explanation for when Hicks said he hadn’t spoken to any other managers when he had spoken to Klinsmann, a stupefying explanation for them consistently insisting they hadn’t fallen out when they had and an explanation way beyond human comprehension of them consistently insisting they’d spent millions and millions last summer when it turns out Torres and Babel were bought on credit notes.

There must now be some terrific explanation for a man who said: ‘You don’t even have to win a championship every year to draw the fans. You just have to show you’re really trying. This business has to do with fan affinity and brand devotion. It doesn’t necessarily have to do with winning.’ To now say he wants this club top of the pile.

Or for a man who said: ‘When I was in the leverage buy-out business we bought Weetabix and we leveraged it up to make our return. You could say that anyone who was eating Weetabix was paying for our purchase of Weetabix. It was just business. It is the same for Liverpool.’ To now say if he takes 100% of the club he’ll do so without debt being on the club.

It’s time for the benefit of the doubt to be given.

Yep, they’ve tried their best to do what’s right for Liverpool Football Club and if we could only get behind them then we’d soon find ourselves back top of the pile. Well we can do more than just silently support them. We’ll put the spade in the ground for them, tonight, in Stanley Park. 6pm, Spirit Of Shankly will be there, doing their bit to help the Hicks effort, digging for victory.

Hicks and Gillett told us it’ll be 60 days.

Who do you believe?
Stanley Park. Tonight. 6pm. We’ll be the ones with the spades.

This communication prompted a large number of replies from fellow fans that showed universal support for the idea. As a result, a group of supporters gathered together and were filmed on *ITV Sport* making their ironic digging gesture. Thus, actors in traditional, new and social media forms can collaborate as they did in this action but as Liverpool fan Neil Atkinson argued on the Internet-distributed podcast, Internet forums are a key way of connecting with supporters:

Someone on one of the forums suggested it and not many people picked up on it. But one of our guys read it and is on the committee, I think his name is Fran, Fran Stanton, and Fran just read the idea and said ‘this is brilliant, this is brilliant’ so what we did was, it was on Monday, we and we put the word out on the forums and that it was going on Monday lunchtime – the timing was a bit, you know a lot of people think we should give people more notice with these things and with this we did sort of want to, but there was a couple of factors in there [why we couldn’t] … and it was great – the turnout was fantastic, there were about fifty lads. Someone brought a wheelbarrow, someone brought a pickaxe, about 10–15 spades, high visibility jackets, banners and it was great and it came out and just illustrated the point that yet again,
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about this gulf in reality about what Hicks and Gillett say and what ends up being there and it was good to see a few of the lads and we had a bit of a laugh doing it … The lads all around us who’ve been so supportive and come out with the jackets on, who make the flags, who can make that difference and that’s what we’ve been trying to put across on the forums this week, is that you’re making that difference.

This is Anfield (podcast 7, 1 May 2008)

It is clear that a message that is posted on the e-zine forum can rapidly mobilise support and provide a rapid way of organising collective action. It is also true that the protest’s impact is likely to increase if the story being reported by mainstream media forms – in this case ITV Sport – which have higher public resonance level than Internet message boards and narrowcast formats. Yet, this is not to deny the communicative importance of the Web 2.0 technologies in enhancing the impact of collective action. Very quickly, however, new social media platforms rose to the fore as Jay McKenna, chair of SOS (and formerly its Media and Communications Officer) stated:

Spirit of Shankly wouldn’t be where it is today without the Internet. There’s no two ways about that. We were a new organisation … and we were using internet forums originally, but what we realised was that … not everyone was using internet forums, but everyone used Facebook and latterly everyone used Twitter … a Facebook status update meant that you could get somebody interested in a protest.

(quoted in Monaghan, 2014: 228)

Jay McKenna’s words closely accord with those offered by Castells (2013 [2009]: xx) – a ‘few technologically savvy youngsters with some ideas and a small amount of money can create companies that would challenge the restriction of free communication’ but these communications did not end with message boards, as Jay McKenna also records, other platforms such as Twitter and Facebook did rise to the fore in the protests. Two examples from the summer of 2010 highlight their use when, in the light of the financial crisis, altering dynamics of the club’s board of directors and – possibly – Liverpool FC’s underperformance in the league that season launched splinter protest movements, such as SaveLFC and Kop Faithful.

First, SaveLFC was launched by Dundee-based Liverpool fan Roy ‘Hendo’ Henderson, through the website Facebook on 26 May 2010. It described itself as ‘a consumer-facing, communications-focussed group aimed at promoting education and unity in favour of fit and proper ownership’ (quoted in Roan, 2010), and according to its Facebook page, promoted action in four ways:

1. Firstly, invite every single Liverpool fan you know to this group, and urge them to do the same. Many fans are still unaware of, or choose to ignore, our current plight, and they may only get the picture if they woke up one day and our club no longer existed. We can change that. Get people to join this group, so they can be educated on the problems within the club, and join the cause to cure those problems.

2. Have a look at the photos section. Spread these images however you can – set them as your profile picture if you wish, click ‘Share’ to post them to your wall, post them on Twitter, link them in emails, anything. Spread the word, get the message out there.
3. If you are not already a member, join the Spirit of Shankly, the Liverpool FC Supporters Union. SOS is one of the only organisations which is taking our club’s future into consideration and attempting to change it for the better, by trying to force Hicks and Gillett out of our club. Join them, it is £10 to save the future of Liverpool FC.

4. If you ever hear any Liverpool fans saying that the owners are not a problem, or that ‘everything will be fine’, or something similar, tell them the truth – without action being taken, everything will be far from ‘fine’.

(www.facebook.com/#!/helpsaveliverpoolfc?v=info)

These pointers illustrate how political actions mobilise on social media. SOS’s original direct action was supplemented through SaveLFC’s gradually politicising fans by asking them to join the social network group and spread their images across the world via social media. This brought two potential impacts: first, by taking the protest to a transnational level its Internet-served viral form, utilising Liverpool’s global fan base; while, second, in the hope that by getting fans to make a small commitment such as showing Facebook support, many will move on to make stronger associations with the protest and join more direct pressure groups like SOS. SaveLFC coordinated its members displaying flags containing its logos at the 2010 World Cup, therefore raising the profile of the Liverpool fan protests.

Second, Kop Faithful is rooted within SOS, having been set up by Liverpool-based Alan Kayll who was originally part of the organisation. Kop Faithful used RAWK and other Internet mediums to encourage supporters to write emails to senior bankers at JP Morgan and Deutsche in the USA and RBS in the UK after a Manhattan-based fan had used his mobile telephone to photograph Tom Hicks outside his local JP Morgan and Deutsche branch and sent this to his Twitter account on 21 September. Alan Kayll saw the photograph and immediately wrote a letter urging banks not to provide Hicks with any extra finance and posted this, with contact emails, on RAWK as the campaign went viral and was even featured in the Wall Street Journal:

At Kop Faithful, our focus is the banks, preventing refinancing to the existing owners and explaining to them why they should not help keep these owners in power. If we hear that Hicks is due for a meeting with a bank, within minutes we can mobilise via our forums and networks on Twitter and Facebook. Soon the bank’s e-mail system will be inundated. We have the intelligence needed to keep ahead of the game. Liverpool fans are everywhere and, once we have the information, we can act quickly … We plan to exert as much pressure as possible on RBS between now and their decision in October. They are receiving 10,000 e-mails a week from Liverpool fans. Alan Kayll (quoted in Roan, 2010).

This is particularly important as Castells (2013 [2009]: xxxix) argues:

Though these movements usually begin on the Internet social networks, they are not identified as movements until they occupy urban space, often through the standing occupation of public squares or the persistence of street demonstrations. The space of the movement consists of an interaction between the space of flows on the Internet and in wireless communication networks, and the space of places of the occupied sites and of symbolic buildings targeted by protest actions.
Indeed, this online pressure surfaces in ‘urban spaces’ many times but one noteworthy example of this was on 4 July 2010, when SOS held its ‘Our Independence Day’ event on the steps of the ‘symbolic building’ of St George’s Hall in Liverpool city centre, when SOS members spoke about plans to regain control over the club. The ‘Our Independence Day’ event interspersed the political speeches with entertainment provided by Liverpool-fan comedians and singers, and the event went viral through YouTube, being communicated through social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. The networks of, as Castells describes, outrage and anger had – through the social media spaces and urban space gatherings – turned into networks of outrage, anger and hope in the way that they did two years later through Stand AMF, highlighting the importance of social media in protests emerging from football’s fan scenes but also that this cannot be fully realised without the lived urban spaces provided by ‘symbolic buildings’.

Conclusions

The chapter ends in almost the same place it began: with the proposition that ‘new’ and ‘social’ media should be taken ‘seriously’ in socio-cultural analyses of sport. The outlined examples show how the Internet facilitated a move of the alternative discursive spaces previously afforded by amateur print media outlets, like fanzines, on to the Internet, speeding up and – potentially – clearing channels of communication between supporters. Under circumstances where fans feel they are ‘losing’ some cultural dimension of football, these channels may give rise to communicative possibilities for supporters to mobilise, both in the form of single-club collective action or – as offered by Stand AMF – through cross-club protests. However, such mobilisations often depend upon the presence of established media, as offered in the case of ITV Sport’s coverage of SOS’s protest, or lived urban space gatherings that make such actions seem ‘real’ to those who meet up. In short, the new ‘virtual’ – or, more precisely, online – connections and practices are not necessarily replacing those offline or even in the established media, and may even supplement these forms of communication. Beyond this, the uses of social media – for connecting football supporter communities with players, arranging events and/or (widely held but still) subjectively negative use by players or fans requires much deeper interrogation. Therefore, Gibbons and Dixon (2012) are correct to make the call for football fan interactions on the Internet to be taken seriously by social scientists.

This, however, assumes that they are not really taken seriously in the current context. This may not be a fair assumption. Why would researchers in the social scientific analysis of football not take Internet-supported relationships seriously? Rather, I suspect that many social scientists do not know how to gather and/or take most seriously the use of social media data in the analysis of football. On this issue, I offer only vague advice. First, the social networks of social media technologies – in the form of, for instance, Twitter ‘follows–follower’ relationships – can be gathered through freely available public domain programs such as Gephi (available at http://gephi.github.io; and see Cherven, 2013) or NodeXL (available at http://nodexl.codeplex.com; and see Hansen et al., 2010) and these can be shaped into diagrams on such programs, or others including UCINet (available at https://sites.google.com/site/ucinetsoftware/home; see Borgatti et al., 2013). Second, in terms of grasping the texts in those communications, programs such as Webometric Analyst and/or Mozdeh (freely available at http://lexiurl.wlv.ac.uk and http://mozdeh.wlv.ac.uk, respectively) might help. Thus, a more pertinent challenge might not be to take new and social media communications between fans seriously but to find the most appropriate ways to capture and analyse it and the relationships it helps to strengthen.
Notes

1 For instance, I was told that in the 1990s Liverpool FC’s *Through the Wind and Rain* and Oldham Athletic F.C.’s *Beyond the Boundary* (Oldham Athletic) were at the peak of their sales by their editors selling 5,000 and 6,500 copies of each edition, respectively (see Millward, 2008). However, by 2004 these numbers had reduced to 1,600 and 450. By the end of 2009, neither of these fanzines were in production.

2 Seven Streets is a blog that is connected to music, fashion and culture in Liverpool. That Daniel Sanderson is talking about the print fanzine on such an outlet underpins the relationship between the fanzine and online communicative spaces.

References


