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Unemployment, hustling, and waithood: exploring Zimbabwean urban male youth's utilisation of ICT in soccer betting

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This article explores how urban male youth in Zimbabwe have created economies of hustle and waithood through soccer betting to ensure alternative means of survival in a country facing rapid urban growth and endless economic challenges. Data were collected using a combination of ethnographic methods, including participant and non-participant observations, betting experimentation, and informal conversations. The findings show that urban male youth in Zimbabwean cities use a variety of skills in soccer betting to increase their chances of winning and earning a living through informal economic activities while waiting for employment opportunities. The findings also demonstrate the intellectual genius and streetwise resourcefulness of young people, as they incorporate research, digital, and networking competencies to decide and place their bets. The article concludes that soccer betting is not only part of Zimbabwe's economies of hustle, leisure, and waithood but also central in influencing the adoption of ICT products and digital skills among male youths in Zimbabwe.

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Introduction and background

It is a hot April Sunday evening in central Harare. We are among many young people who are crammed into a Moors World of Sports (MWOS) betting shop along Mbuya Nehanda Street, watching soccer, and hoping their bets will win so they can smile at the teller and collect their cash. Major world soccer leagues, including the English Premier League (EPL), Spanish La Liga, and German Bundesliga, are approaching their end. Games are coming thick and fast, sometimes starting from noon to midnight. At this stage of the season, matches are becoming even more competitive as some clubs fight for top honours, while others battle to avoid relegation. It is a real treat for soccer fans, but more importantly for hustling young people who have ventured into soccer betting to try and earn some income to survive in a city experiencing a seemingly endless economic crisis in which formal employment opportunities are hardly available.

The brief recount above summarises the many days of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the authors on emerging urban livelihoods in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out between 2016 and 2019 in a small town called Norton, complemented by data from Harare, the country's capital city. The research was conducted against the backdrop of a relentless economic meltdown that, since the mid-1990s, saw the collapse of the formal sector economy (Bond and Manyanya, 2002; Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004; Raftopoulos, 2006; Pasara and Garidzirai, 2020) and left Zimbabwe's once thriving manufacturing sector severely incapacitated. These crises forced Zimbabwean manufacturing sector firms to downsize operations or collapse completely because of viability problems (Ndakaripa, 2020). In turn, the downsizing and closure of manufacturing and mining firms resulted in substantial job losses, leading to high unemployment (Chirau, 2014; Magidi and Hlungwani, 2023). For example, in 2010, formal unemployment in Zimbabwe was estimated to be more than 80% (Murisa, 2010; Zimbabwe Human Rights Association [ZimRights], 2014), and young people who continuously graduate from high schools and higher training institutions find it difficult to enter the formal job market and are the most affected (Hlungwani et al., 2021).

Sustaining life in a city with few opportunities made life difficult for them, pushing them towards urgency and agency to earn a living "through other means" (Magidi, 2019:139) in the context of enduring economic crises and rapid urban growth. Zimbabwean cities are among the fastest-growing cities in southern Africa (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency [Zimstat], 2013; World Bank, 2014). However, rapid urbanisation in the country has not been accompanied by the corresponding economic and industrial growth required to support the needs of the growing population (Murisa, 2010; Nhodo, 2014). Consequently, many urban dwellers, including young people, endure extremely constrained lives, and some innovate and carve out alternative livelihoods from the informal economy (Magidi, 2019).

The informal economy of Zimbabwe has received good coverage from researchers in many fields. Magidi (2023) explored how some residents of a secondary town called Norton pieced together livelihoods in the informal economy after the town's once-growing manufacturing sector completely collapsed. The sector is also the largest contributor to the town's economy after the collapse of the formal economy (Magidi, 2024). Other researchers (Ngundu, 2012; Mbiriri, 2010; Chirau, 2014) have emphasised the crucial role of the sector and have highlighted that it has been supporting the Southern African country during the peak years of its economic crises by creating jobs and supporting the livelihoods of most of the urban population

throughout the country. Tamukamoyo (2009) emphasised that Zimbabwe's informal sector has grown to become an economy on its own and has been regarded as the unofficial backbone of the national economy. Ndiweni and Verhoeven (2013) estimated that this sector was responsible for 60% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2000 while Mahiya and Magidi (2022) noted how the sector took advantage of the 'fluidity' of the different currencies of the country to continue to survive and grow. Additionally, Coltart (2008) argued that the sector employed more than 3 million Zimbabweans in 2005.

This article explores how urban male youth in Zimbabwe have created economies of hustle and waithood in the form of soccer betting to navigate unemployment and earn income in the context of an enduring economic crisis. It explores how young soccer lovers in Norton and Harare have created what Magidi and Jimu (2023) call an 'informal entertainment economy' by turning soccer watching into 'more than just a hobby', but also a hustle opportunity from which they can earn some income through betting. The article discusses how young men have incorporated information and communication technology (ICT) or digital technologies and research into soccer betting, making it more informed by science as opposed to random subjective guesses. It argues that soccer betting has been a platform that young men are using to self-teach and acquire digital, ICT, and Internet skills that they may not have had the opportunity to learn at school. This resonates with the observation by Magidi and Mahiya (2021) that the informal sector plays a role in the acquisition and development of a range of skills that can be used to transform lives. It further relates to arguments by Honwana (2012) that the waithood period is not wasted time but can be utilised productively.

Gambling and soccer betting

Gambling, the umbrella category under which soccer betting falls, has emerged as one of the most important spaces for the survival of many people across the world (Binde, 2005). Church-Sanders (2011) argues that since the advent of competitive sports, sports betting has been a natural part of sports in many societies across the world for centuries. People have always bet on the results, not only for leisure and entertainment purposes but also to earn a profit. In Zimbabwe, gambling has historically been dominated by elderly men living in low-income residential areas in major urban centres. This type of betting focused mainly on horse and dog racing (Muzari, 2016). There are no records indicating any evidence of gambling or betting during pre-colonial Zimbabwe. As a result, gambling and betting are therefore considered colonial constructs that emerged after the introduction of a money economy (Chiweshe, 2020). The colonial government in Southern Rhodesia, Zimbabwe's name under colonialism, had reservations about gambling, leading to the introduction of laws that banned natives from participating in it, starting with the first such betting law in 1914, followed by another in 1938 that further limited gambling. In 1950, a new legislation that banned dog racing and betting was introduced. However, despite these restrictions, illegal and underground forms of gambling continued, particularly among unemployed urban males.

Furthermore, a law prohibited black people from participating in the state lottery (Robert, 2007). Even after colonialism ended, the post-colonial state maintained the same approach, viewing gambling as a social vice that could lead to violence and criminal activity. However, more opportunities have emerged for various forms of gambling over time, including casinos, lotteries, and sports betting (Chiweshe, 2020). In Zimbabwe, gambling and betting have been legal since 2000 and are governed by the

Lotteries and Gambling Act. This act allows all forms of gambling activities, including sports betting, horse racing, lotteries, and casinos. The Lotteries and Gambling Board is responsible for regulating and overseeing all gambling operations and issuing licences to both individuals and gaming companies operating in the country. (The Zimbabwean, 2021).

Although gambling, in general, has a long history in the Zimbabwean context, soccer betting is relatively new and has not received much academic attention and therefore remains under research. Chiweshe (2020) noted that before Zimbabwe's economic crisis, lottery, horse racing, and dog racing were the dominant forms of betting in the country, with soccer betting only becoming popular in recent years. Magidi (2019) and Chiweshe (2020), who, according to the available literature, appear to be among the few pioneers of such research, suggest that sports betting was a fast-growing informal survival strategy in the wake of a failing economy. Magidi and Jimu (2023) found that there is an increasing number of young people in Norton creating an informal night-time leisure economy through soccer watching and betting. They concluded that due to soccer lovers and bettors following late-night soccer matches, among other nocturnal social and economic activities, Norton was becoming a nocturnal town.

This study builds on these previous studies to explore the details of soccer betting. It goes beyond portraying soccer betting merely as a livelihood strategy, as was done by earlier studies cited above, by further exploring the increasing use and role of the Internet, ICT products, digital skills, and research skills in soccer betting among urban youth in Zimbabwe. It further demonstrates the interplay between Internet use and social networking skills as young men seek to maximise their chances of placing 'winning bets'. The article also argues that, in addition to being a hobby and an income-generating activity, soccer betting encourages the use of the Internet and digital devices and the acquisition of digital and Internet skills among some urban male youth. The following section places young people in soccer betting in the context of the concepts of hustling, agency, and waitthood, which constitute the conceptual framework of this paper.

Young people, hustling and waitthood

The study is grounded in the concepts of '*hustling*' and '*waitthood*', which are becoming increasingly common phenomena among African urban youth. This article acknowledges the complexity of defining youth since the term has different meanings in different contexts. For this study, young people refer to those individuals who are 'trapped' between the childhood and adulthood phases (Mhazo and Thebe, 2021) without being restricted by the actual age groups. It considers Honwana's (2012) argument of 'delayed adulthood' among African youth who struggle to transition from childhood to adulthood. Honwana (2012) further argues that young people in Africa are denied and largely excluded from participating in major socioeconomic and political processes. As a result, the youth category in Africa is so bloated that it also includes individuals whose ages qualify them as adults but are still considered youth because they have not yet assumed responsibilities and acquired assets and properties that adults typically have. Therefore, the article uses a more liberal definition of young people (youth) to include 'adults' who continue to be trapped in youth and cannot assume proper adult roles, although they are old enough to be independent adults.

'*Hustling*' is a way of earning income from temporary informal economic activities. It may include a range of activities such as the use of deceit, part-time or once-off casual piece jobs, or even taking up jobs that one does not have expertise in and finding a way to have it done (Magidi, 2019). As a form of livelihood, hustling has not gone unnoticed. This study notes how, in Kenya,

President William Ruto acknowledged the high prevalence of 'hustling' in his country in his 2022 election manifesto, a strategy that is believed to have worked well to attract youth votes and resulted in his victory. Mwaura (2017) confirmed that many educated young people in Kenya are involved in some side work as an alternative livelihood strategy in the face of increasing uncertainty in formal employment. In Liberia, ex-combatant youth invented and developed the motorcycling sector in their attempt to build livelihoods in post-war Liberia to circumvent job shortages (McMullin, 2022). Jinnah (2022) highlights how *zama zamas* (informal artisanal miners) in South Africa earn income through informal mining in Johannesburg's abandoned and disused gold mines. Mhazo and Thebe (2021) demonstrated how youth in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, are 'hustling out of unemployment' after failing to secure jobs in the formal sector. Magidi (2019) also highlighted how hustling is an economic activity that dominates the informal economy in Zimbabwean cities.

This study highlights the close relationship between *hustling* and *waitthood*. Hustling is therefore framed as a survival strategy in which young people engage during their waitthood phases. Honwana (2012: 4) defines waitthood as the "period of suspension between childhood and adulthood." During this phase, most young people in Africa do not get jobs. This delay in progressing to the crucial stages of their lives, such as marriage, starting a family, and acquiring assets to sustain them, has a significant effect. Honwana (2012) notes that waitthood is a common experience for African youth due to the poorly performing economies in their respective countries. Political instability, poor governance, and failed neoliberal social and economic policies in many African countries have reduced the chances of young people acquiring secure jobs, limiting their ability to transition to adulthood. As a result, most young people do not achieve the fundamentals necessary to exit the youth phase, delay their transition into full adulthood, and occupy their place as fully-fledged adult members of their societies. Youth transitions to adulthood have become very indeterminate, and young people are improvising jobs and livelihoods, devising creative solutions to address their circumstances, and supporting themselves and their families (Honwana, 2012). This is a significant concern, as Africa is experiencing rapid growth in its youth population at a time when African economies cannot offer them economic opportunities, prompting Paice (2021) to call it a 'youthquake', which the world should be concerned about.

To situate the concepts of hustling and waitthood in the context of this study, it is the case in this article that young people in Zimbabwean cities are struggling to find jobs and secure livelihoods. Consequently, some are resorting to 'hustling', presumably on a momentary basis as they 'wait' for 'proper' job and livelihood opportunities. Creating an informal leisure economy out of soccer betting is an improvisational and creative solution during waitthood, as Honwana (2012) suggests. Although some participants were of the view that getting a proper job would signify the end of both hustle and waiting, it is important to note that proper jobs do not always come with adequate remuneration and financial security. Many employed people continue to hustle even after getting the so-called proper jobs to supplement their low income (Hart, 1973; Masquelier, 2019). Mwaura (2017) noted that employed young people are involved in 'side hustles' to increase their income, while Magidi (2019) highlighted how employed people participated in the informal economy to supplement their poor earnings.

In Zimbabwe, young people engage in various informal entrepreneurial activities to make a living while waiting for more stable employment opportunities. These activities include forex trading, vending, farming, and music (Magidi and Jimu, 2023; Mhazo and Thebe, 2021; Gukurume, 2022). This article

specifically focuses on the male youth who have developed an “informal leisure economy” through soccer betting while they await traditional job opportunities and transition into full adulthood.

Research methodology

The study was conducted in Norton and Harare. It employed autoethnographic methods of participant and non-participant observations, interviews and informal conversations to collect the data. As participant observers, the researchers experimented with placing bets to gain first-hand experience of what soccer betting processes entail. The primary motive here was not to become competent gamblers and earn money. Instead, the idea was to learn about the processes involved in deciding on the teams to bet in favour or against, and any other considerations made when placing bets. This gave the researchers some practical understanding of the betting processes as opposed to trying to understand it in abstract terms. As non-participant observers, the researchers observed others as they worked out and placed their bets, and listened to conversations that soccer punters engaged in as they shared tips and ideas on how to place a ‘winning’ bet. The researchers also engaged in many informal conversations with new and experienced punters seeking information that provided answers to questions that improved their understanding of the trade. The questions included the following:

- Why and how did they begin soccer betting?
- How long have they been involved in soccer betting?
- How did they decide which soccer leagues, clubs, and players to place their bets on?
- What betting methods did they use?

The researchers took field notes and pictures that later developed into meaningful narratives. Part of the data collection process also involved the use of WhatsApp. The researchers also joined two WhatsApp betting groups and one soccer update group, each of which was composed of 40 to 80 members, over approximately six months. Here, the researchers were introduced to the rest of the group and their intentions were made known to the members of the group. In these groups, punters and non-betting fans discussed and shared football knowledge, betting tips, and ideas on which matches, clubs, and players bet for or against, and the reasons why. They also recommended to each other the number of matches to be placed on one bet, considering the risk of losing or the chances of winning. Some matches, especially between big and strong sides and small/weak clubs, are considered easy predictions and less risky, while others, normally pitting opponents of almost the same strength, perennial rivals, or derbies, are difficult to predict and thus risky, and bettors emphasised the need to place them on different betting tickets.

Punters also shared the results of their bets, information on the money won or lost, what they got right or wrong about their past bets, and how to improve in the future. The researchers accrued invaluable insights from these group discussions, information that may not have been possible to obtain through one-on-one conversations and observations. Although there were punters from other age groups, the researchers collected most of the data used in this study from young men, mostly unemployed, whose ages ranged from 18 to 38 years, most of whom were reached by convenience sampling and snowball techniques.

Findings

Sports betting is a popular activity in Zimbabwe, with many forms of sports available for betting, such as soccer, cricket, rugby, boxing, and horse and dog racing. However, soccer is the most popular sport among punters. According to the participants, they

were more involved in soccer betting than any other sport due to its popularity. Most of the punters who bet on soccer were already soccer fans before they started betting. Other sports such as rugby and cricket receive little attention but only during major tournaments, such as World Cups that involve national teams. Horse and dog racing mostly attracts elderly bettors and very few young punters participate in it. The study also noted that gambling is primarily a male domain. Some participants in the study believed that the absence of women was because not many of them are interested in sports. Others suggested that betting in Zimbabwe has traditionally been mainly horse racing dominated by men and that nothing has changed even after the advent of soccer betting.

The study found that the decision to bet on soccer leagues and clubs is mainly influenced by their popularity and the availability of information about them. Consequently, the most popular soccer leagues such as the English Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga, French, and Italian leagues, whose matches can be watched on SuperSport TV, are the most betted. However, some punters experimented with some lesser-known leagues, such as Chinese, Indian, Israeli, Croatian, and American leagues. In national team football, the most sought-after countries included Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and the best European national teams such as Spain, France, England, and Belgium and others. In Africa, strong national teams such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana, Cameroon, and Nigeria, were the most popular choices among punters during international tournaments such as the World Cup.

The betting stores in Norton and Harare are operated by companies such as MWOS, Africabet, and Soccer Shop. These shops do not charge any percentages and offer manual and online betting services. In manual betting, cashiers were employed to receive wagers in cash and issue printed betting tickets to punters. These cashiers were also responsible for paying out cash to the winners. Betting shops provided large television screens for customers to watch soccer and often showed multiple matches simultaneously. Some betting stores also offered desktop computers with Internet access, which customers could use to prepare their bets at no charge. The study also noted that betting shops offered printed copies of soccer fixtures from various leagues around the world, mainly for those who prefer manual betting. However, these stores did not sell food or alcohol, except bottled water, energy, and soft drinks. Furthermore, food and alcohol stores were usually located near several betting stores, but food and alcohol were not allowed inside.

In online betting, punters created online accounts linked to their Ecocash wallets. Ecocash is a mobile money transfer system operated by Econet Telecommunications. They deposited money from their Ecocash wallets into online wallets in their online accounts and withdrew from their online accounts to mobile wallets when they won. Mobile money was used mainly for betting purposes because it is easy to open and maintain an account. None of the participants used bank accounts to wager. According to the study, soccer betting enthusiasts have been gambling for periods ranging from 1 to 7 years. Most of them stated that their love for soccer prompted them to start betting, while others were inspired by fellow soccer fans who were already into it. They started betting for fun, but with time, their interest increased as some of their bets won or after seeing other football fans-turned-punters winning some significant amounts.

It was challenging to determine the actual amounts of money that punters were making enough money to survive on as they had varying reasons to bet. For instance, some who were still college students were betting to earn transport money and buy lunch and internet data, as their parents' income was not enough to cover their needs. For this group, winning around \$25 a week was considered a good win and motivated them to continue

betting. Others were betting to pay rent or buy food for their families at home and aimed to win more significant amounts. Although the punters were unwilling to reveal their actual earnings, it was apparent that many of them were earning something, which motivated them to keep betting. For example, some disclosed that they managed to buy smartphones, tablets, and laptops using money earned from betting. Although the punters generally did not earn large amounts, we believe they were making enough to keep them motivated. The losses incurred were significantly lower since most of them placed bets with between \$1 and \$5, amounts they could easily afford to raise.

The following sections detail the actual processes involved in placing a 'winning bet'. Punters coined the phrase 'winning bet' to describe a high-quality bet that has a high probability of winning. However, the definition of a 'winning bet' differed among punters, as they aim to meet various needs from betting. To some, any bet that has a chance of winning is considered a 'winning bet', while others define it as a bet with a high potential for generating significant profits. The study established that the bets were not decided on based on random guesses, but were informed by extensive research, understanding, and knowledge of soccer leagues, clubs, and players, and this involved the use of the Internet and ICT skills and gadgets as demonstrated below.

Pre-betting research. The study revealed that sports bettors require up-to-date information on teams and players to make informed bets with a high likelihood of success. Pre-betting research was conducted in various ways, such as consulting online soccer news websites for valuable updates, including squad and injury information. It is crucial to understand the current performance of selected clubs and soccer players and their previous performance against specific opponents. Punters used data from recent matches to identify trends and patterns of performance. They also sought updated news on player injuries and absenteeism. For example, some punters highlighted how Chelsea FC struggled in the absence of Eden Hazard:

Chelsea FC always struggle to create chances and score when Eden Hazard is out of the squad due to injury... His presence or absence determines how much we bet for or against his club.

The study found that punters were interested in reading tabloids covering player scandals both on and off the field. Examples include players who fight or have disagreements during training, which might affect their performance in real matches. Furthermore, disagreements with managers or harsh criticism from coaches can reduce confidence and lead to poor performance. Tabloids are known for accurate reporting of such news. One example given was Diego Costa's frequent disagreements with his manager, Jose Mourinho, while playing for Chelsea FC, which often led to punishment in the form of benching or poor play.

It is important to know the player/manager relationships before placing a bet. See what happens when Costa fights Mourinho... He is normally benched for punishment or underperformance if he is selected, reducing Chelsea's chances of winning.

Punters also required information about players' likelihood of being cautioned or dismissed, and they were often sceptical of players like Sergio Ramos and Pepe (Real Madrid), Fernandinho (Manchester City), Ander Herrera (Manchester United), and others who frequently played physical and aggressive soccer when they faced quick creative players, which usually resulted in yellow or red cards. These cautions impact their performance and reduce

their club's chances of winning, and punters want to be aware of these risks before placing bets. As one bettor in Norton stated, this requires extensive pre-betting research:

We research before placing our bets. This includes reviewing the booking history of the players involved. For example, players like Fernandinho and Herrera are usually cautioned, sent off, or conceded penalties when they face quick and creative opponents. Therefore, one must be cautious when betting on such matches.

Soccer bettors revealed that they analyse the number of matches a club has played over a given period. They understood that clubs that participate in multiple competitions typically play more games, which leave their players fatigued and more prone to injuries and mistakes. This results in clubs losing some matches, regardless of their overall strength. A bettor in Harare explained:

Big clubs that reach advanced stages of both domestic and international competitions record most of their losses from around March to May because of player fatigue and injuries. These factors are crucial in how we include them in our bets around the time of the season.

The study also found that punters value pre-match analyses and score-line predictions by soccer pundits. They considered prediction analyses by pundits and commentators such as Roy Keane, Gary Neville, Peter Drury, and Jamie Redknapp associated with the English Premier League important. Punters also consider match officials, believing that certain referees may display favouritism, as captured by the following quotes from Norton punters:

Manchester United have a bad experience with Michael Oliver, and whenever he is set to officiate their match, punters tend to bet against them...

Chelsea seems to be unfairly treated when Antony Taylor officiates their matches. They often struggle to win, and if he is appointed as the referee, bettors typically avoid placing bets that favour them.

Punters also expressed similar viewpoints regarding North African referees, who they assert sometimes exhibit partiality towards North African teams during Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) and Africa Champions League competitions when playing against teams from sub-Saharan Africa. To illustrate this, if a game between Egypt and Zimbabwe, or ES Tunis (Tunisia) and Mamelodi Sundowns FC (South Africa) for example, is officiated by a North African referee, punters tend to wager against Zimbabwe or Mamelodi Sundowns. As a result, the punters wanted to know the nationalities of the match officials before placing a bet in support of a team from sub-Saharan Africa.

The findings further show that before placing bets, punters often watch soccer highlights from previous matches that they may not have watched. Social media platforms, such as YouTube, clubs' Facebook pages, and soccer websites such as Time Soccer and Highlights Soccer were used by punters to access these highlight videos. Furthermore, the study found that some punters have limited Internet access due to the high cost of the data. To compensate for this, some used what they regarded to be low-data-consuming Internet browsers, such as Opera Mini and UC Browser, to avoid high-data-consuming browsers, such as Google Chrome and Safari. One punter who frequented the MWOS betting shop in Harare explained this practice.

Punters avoid Internet browsers like Google and Safari because they require a lot of data. We have learnt that there

are cheaper browsers like UC Browser and Opera Mini, and that is what most of us use.

The results also showed that punters with high or unlimited Internet access did more work. They extracted soccer data from the Internet (statistics, soccer news, pictographs, and videos) and shared them in WhatsApp groups, which saved Internet data. A betting WhatsApp group administrator from Norton emphasised this:

About five members of our group have Wi-Fi. They download the latest soccer news, statistics, and highlights from the Internet and social media and share them with the rest of us in the group.

Once these data are posted on WhatsApp groups, punters then work together to make sense of them and decide on their 'winning' bets. However, for punters to carry out this research and extract valuable betting data, internet access is key as discussed in the following section.

The role of the internet and social networking. To demonstrate the critical role of the Internet in betting, the article should emphasise that while soccer bettors tended to concentrate on well-known big European leagues and competitions, they were also interested in less-known leagues. These include Chinese, Indian, Croatian, Brazilian, Israeli, and others that are not popular in Zimbabwe. Since most Norton and Harare punters do not have other reliable sources of information on players, clubs, matches, and competitions in these leagues, the Internet becomes their only option available. A cashier at the betting shop recognised that he had processed betting tickets with soccer teams from all over the world:

I have seen tickets with teams from countries where I didn't think there was soccer playing there and for the players I didn't even know.

The Internet thus becomes an asset with which to access information about such clubs and players. Since they cannot watch all matches at once, they can also get real-time updates of other matches of interest through mobile soccer update applications such as AiScore, Football TV, and subscription-free online soccer live streaming websites such as Hesgoal and Score808. This way, one can track all their bets at once, no matter how many they are or where the matches are being played. Access to the internet also allows punters to get updated information about club and player ratings, squad strengths, injuries, and recoveries, match fixtures, line-ups and kick-off times which informs them which match is played when.

Furthermore, the study discovered that the Internet also facilitates social networks for betting among young punters. For easy and quick sharing of ideas and crucial information, as well as coordination of activities, young punters come together via virtual platforms such as WhatsApp group chats. Here, they assign each other tasks to research soccer clubs and players of interest. This research is mostly done on the Internet and is used to find information such as current and recent performance and the form of clubs and players under the spotlight. In a WhatsApp group, the first author of this article was assigned to a group that was tasked with researching how English clubs (Chelsea, Manchester City, Tottenham Spurs, Manchester United, and Arsenal) usually perform against German and Spanish clubs in European competitions. Once the research was done, all groups would share their findings with the larger group, and the punters would use it to decide their bets. In addition to WhatsApp, other social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, which also

use the Internet, play a role in providing live soccer news and updates.

It is important to note that although punters worked in groups to conduct pre-betting research, they placed bets as individuals and did not share the proceeds of betting unless they wanted to appreciate any good advice or betting tips given to them by someone. The role of groups was to help each other find information and brainstorm ideas and betting options. However, making the actual bet was an individual decision. Whether to use ideas and tips shared in WhatsApp groups was at the discretion of individual punters. Moreover, whether to make conservative or risky bets again was up to individual punters. Here, we learnt that punters normally placed more than one betting tickets, sometimes as many as five, with some bets being very conservative while others were risky. Individual circumstances also played a role in whether or when to make risky bets. For example, when one was in dire need of money, they would avoid risky bets because, although they carry higher returns, their chances of winning were lower than conservative ones.

Similarly, the way profits were used depended on the betting motives of different individual punters. We learnt that some had invested money in buying better smartphones, tablets, laptops, and Internet devices, while others subscribed to satellite TV, supplemented their college needs, paid rentals, and bought food, among other needs. However, it should be highlighted that the ability to research and access the internet is enough for successful betting without access to/ownership of digital devices and we discuss this in the next section.

Owning a digital device. Ownership of digital devices is also a key resource that facilitates fast betting without experiencing any delays. The study revealed that young punters were investing a lot in buying devices such as laptops, cell phones, tablets, and associated accessories such as power banks, chargers, portable Wi-Fi devices, and mobile data bundles. To boost their operations, punters were also reinvesting their betting profits in buying better digital devices and the Internet. They noted that obsolete devices usually have functional problems, and hence the need to upgrade. Old phones are normally slow and can face Internet connectivity challenges. Some had little storage space, while others became incompatible with updated versions of the mobile applications they used. Presented below is a range of interview responses made by some soccer punters:

If you want to succeed as a soccer bettor, you must have a well-functioning smartphone, tablet, or laptop.

My cell phone was old and slow, and I realised that it was letting me down, so I upgraded by buying a better one...

I have both a smartphone and a laptop. A phone is good and portable, but you cannot open many Internet pages, so for that reason, I use a laptop. A laptop is also ideal for streaming live matches online...

The study also noted that betting stores and sports bars where punters gather are fertile marketing points for hawkers that sell mobile phones and accessories. A hawker who sold some of these accessories confirmed that

Business is normally high in soccer betting shops and sports clubs, especially on weekends, when many matches attract many bettors.

Although some punters confirmed that they already owned at least one digital device before betting, some revealed that they were motivated to acquire smartphones and related devices from soccer betting. A 19-year-old punter highlighted:

I had no smartphone before, but after starting soccer betting, I realised that it was imperative to own one, so I made some savings and bought one for myself.

Most of the young punters the researchers encountered hinted at having at least one digital device and significant digital and internet skills, in part due to their participation in soccer betting. We also realised that most betting shops have desktop computers connected to the Internet that are set to be used by their clients for free. These are meant to serve those who do not own smartphones or have little or no access to the Internet, but also to attract more punters. However, access to the Internet and ownership of a digital device are again not enough if one does not have the required skills to operate these devices. In the next section, we discuss the importance of digital and Internet skills in soccer betting.

The role of digital and Internet skills. The participants highlighted that owning a digital device and having access to the Internet is not enough for soccer punters. Instead, these must be complemented by the know-how and competencies necessary to operate digital devices. The study discovered that some punters utilised some of their already existing digital knowledge and skills, mostly acquired from school, to operate their devices and support their betting activities. Useful digital skills necessary here include the general ability to operate a digital device, type, use the internet, find information from the internet, download documents, pictures, video, and audio files, and conveniently organise them in storage format for future use. Digital skills also include the ability to use email services and different social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. As one punter who frequents Katanga betting shop commented:

To be a successful punter, you must have some digital and internet skills. You should know how and where to get information quickly. You should also know how to operate your phone, tablet or laptop; otherwise, without such skills, the devices will not serve you.

The study found that some of the young people in 'waithood' were college/university graduates who had the opportunity to learn these ICT skills at school. These punters indicated that they had advanced digital skills, including troubleshooting the internet connection or malfunctioning devices and minimising data consumption. A university graduate who was also into soccer betting noted:

I took ICT classes during my university studies and have significant internet skills that I use to my advantage in soccer betting.

Other punters confirmed that they did not have enough of this knowledge and skills before becoming soccer bettors and had to learn through a combination of self-training and consulting with fellow knowledgeable punters. Due to the motivation to participate in soccer betting, most of the punters engaged in the research could operate at least one digital device without difficulty, of course, at varying levels of competence. Several of them credited soccer betting with their digital and internet skills.

I did not know how to use a computer, but after learning through soccer betting, now I can.

Before joining soccer betting, I was unable to use the Internet. However, I realised that to successfully bet, I should have up-to-date information, and this forced me to learn how to use the Internet. Now I am a pro and I also use the Internet for other purposes in addition to betting.

My older brother, who is not even into soccer betting, was tired of looking for information on the Internet. Therefore, he lent me his smartphone and taught me how to access the information I wanted on the Internet. Now I can do it perfectly.

Online betting. The study also alerted us to the fact that the ownership of digital devices among young punters is also driven by the increasing adoption of the online betting method. We learnt that online betting had some advantages over the manual method, which according to some punters has a fair share of challenges. We noted that manual betting is always accompanied by long queues, especially during weekends, when there are many concurrent matches. Long queues lead to delays, as some matches may start before one can submit bets. Once a match kicks off, it becomes impossible to place some types of bets. Manual betting is also affected by different time zones. Some punters were interested in soccer leagues from Brazil to Australia and Canada to China, yet betting shops are open to the public between 09:00 and 20:00 hrs local time. This makes it difficult to place bets on American or Far East leagues, leaving the online option as the best, and hence its increasing uptake among young punters. Manual betting is also affected by weather conditions: extremely cold winters and rainy summers discourage punters from going out, yet with online betting, they can bet from home.

Additionally, manual betting is also affected by the shortage of hard cash in Zimbabwe. Online betting allows for the use of mobile money, thus bypassing the cash shortage problem. However, manual betting presented an advantage in that punters were paid in cash and thus evaded the challenge of hard cash shortage that online bettors sometimes faced.

Discussion and conclusions

The research revealed to what extent a portion of unemployed male youth in Norton and Harare have turned to soccer betting as a means of coping with their situation. It revealed that these individuals use a variety of research, networking, and digital skills to generate income through soccer betting. The study underscores the significant influence that soccer betting has had on the adoption of digital technology and the Internet among urban male youth in Norton and Harare. Furthermore, the research suggests that soccer betting is driving young people not only into acquiring smartphones and other digital devices but also into learning new digital skills or improve those they already possess.

We argue that as young male youth engage in 'waithood hustling', they are creating an informal leisure economy by transforming soccer watching into a lucrative activity. Using a variety of resources, including research, digital and networking skills, coupled with their soccer knowledge and access to the internet and ownership of digital devices, they are enhancing their chances of earning an income from soccer betting. This demonstrates that soccer betting has evolved from relying on random guesswork and luck to becoming more scientific, showcasing the innovative qualities and agency of young people to confront the challenges they face in life.

Although soccer betting among young people in Norton and Harare primarily serves survival purposes, we contend that it has also stimulated the adoption of ICT products and facilitated the acquisition of skills that can be used in other contexts, possibly beyond their waithood phase when they may transition from hustling to more conventional employment opportunities. Our findings and arguments align with Honwana's (2012) perspective, who opined that time spent in waithood is not wasted and can be put to productive use. By transforming soccer betting into an informal leisure economy, young people in Norton and Harare

have created a resourceful and innovative solution during their waitness, as Honwana (2012) suggests. Furthermore, the acquisition of digital skills through soccer betting connects to Magidi and Mahiya's (2021) argument that participation in informal economic activities contributes to the development of other skills that can be applied in various aspects of life. In conclusion, soccer betting has evolved beyond leisure for young male youths in Norton and Harare, functioning as an income-generating activity. Considering the dedication and expertise invested in betting, we argue that soccer betting represents an innovation by young men in the two urban centres in response to adversity.

Data availability

The data generated during the current study are not publicly available primarily for privacy and confidentiality reasons, as requested by research subjects. However, they could be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Additionally, this paper is based on just one theme of a broader study, and making data publicly available would mean sharing a large amount of data from other themes of the bigger study that is not relevant to this specific study.

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Author contributions

Martin Magidi—conceptualisation; writing - original draught; writing - review & editing. Tavengwa Gwekwerere – writing - review & editing; validation.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethics approval

The Ethics Approval of the University of KwaZulu-Natal approved the research for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Date: 11 Jan 2017 / Protocol Reference No. HSS/003/017D).

Informed consent

The authors declare the following: The researchers ensured informed consent: all participants freely chose to participate without getting any rewards in return. All participants quoted in this article were anonymised – no names of individuals or organisations that participated in the study are mentioned.

Additional information

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