

Analyzing the Role of Sports Media in Shaping Public Opinion About Video Assistant Referee (VAR) Technology and Its Impact on Refereeing Fairness in Light of the Uses and Gratifications Theory

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Abstract—This study analyzes the role of sports media in shaping public impressions of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology and its impact on refereeing justice, framed by the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Through content analysis of media coverage and interviews, the research reveals that sports media significantly influences fan perceptions, amplifying both support for VAR's accuracy in critical decisions and criticism over game interruptions and interpretive subjectivity. Findings highlight media's power to foster transparency and trust when providing clear explanations, while biased reporting exacerbates controversy. The study recommends enhanced media protocols for balanced coverage to improve public acceptance and perceived fairness.

Keywords—VAR technology; sports media; public opinion; refereeing fairness; uses and gratifications theory; Bahraini football; sports justice; psychological pressure on referees

I. INTRODUCTION

The world of sports has witnessed significant development in its organizational and technical aspects over the past few decades, with technological advancements playing a pivotal role in fundamentally transforming the mechanisms for managing and regulating sporting competitions. Football is among the sports most affected by this development, given its widespread global popularity, the sensitivity of its competitive results, and the wide-ranging sporting, economic, and media repercussions that follow from them. Amidst these transformations, Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology has emerged as one of the most significant modern innovations in the field of sports officiating, contributing to a qualitative leap in refereeing practice and reshaping the very concept of fairness on the football pitch.

Refereeing is a fundamental element in the success of any sporting competition, as the referee bears primary responsibility for applying the Laws of the Game and ensuring a fair and balanced contest for all parties involved. However, the inherent nature of football—characterized by its pace, frequent physical contact, and the complexity of situations that arise on the field—makes it exceptionally difficult for the referee and assistant referees to observe all relevant details accurately in real time. Over the years, this structural limitation has led to significant refereeing errors, some of which have altered match results, influenced championship outcomes, or sparked waves of public

controversy and systemic criticism of the refereeing apparatus as a whole.

In light of these persistent challenges, the need arose to introduce technological systems capable of reducing absolute reliance on human judgment and assisting referees in making decisions that are both more accurate and more defensible. VAR technology emerged as a direct response to this need, utilizing multi-angle camera systems and slow-motion replay techniques to allow a dedicated team of video assistant referees to review crucial decisions that could directly affect match outcomes. The categories of decision subject to VAR review include the awarding or disallowing of goals, the granting of penalty kicks, the issuance of direct red cards, and the correction of errors related to identifying the player involved in a disciplinary incident.

The implementation of VAR has contributed to reinforcing the principle of fairness on the pitch. Final refereeing decisions are no longer based exclusively on the referee's immediate and often partial view from a single vantage point, but are now supported by thorough multi-angle video analysis. This development has reduced the potential for the kind of clear, unambiguous human error that was previously a recurrent feature of high-profile football. It has also increased the likelihood that players and teams who might otherwise have been disadvantaged by an incorrect decision will receive the justice they are due.

One of the most significant positive impacts of VAR has been its contribution to improving the overall

quality of sports officiating at the highest level. The technology has pushed referees to develop their communication skills and to work collaboratively with the video review room in a manner that was not previously required or possible. It has also contributed, at least in principle, to greater standardization of refereeing criteria within major international tournaments. Furthermore, the knowledge that a review mechanism exists has, in many instances, boosted players' confidence in the integrity of refereeing decisions and reduced the frequency of the most extreme and confrontational forms of protest on the field.

At the level of fans and the media, VAR technology has had a clear and multidimensional impact on the nature of sports discourse. In the era before VAR, refereeing controversies frequently overshadowed technical and tactical analysis of matches; with VAR, a degree of focus has shifted back towards the actual performance of the teams. The public availability of replay footage and the subsequent media explanation of refereeing decisions have promoted a greater degree of transparency and provided audiences with a deeper understanding of how the Laws of the Game are applied in practice. Nevertheless, certain categories of decision—particularly those involving subjective judgment—continue to generate significant controversy, demonstrating that technology cannot fully eliminate the inherently contested nature of some aspects of football officiating.

Despite the numerous advantages of VAR technology, its practical implementation has not been without significant challenges and criticism. A substantial body of opinion has pointed to the impact of VAR on the tempo and continuity of the game, with frequent pauses for review disrupting the natural flow of matches and diminishing the emotional experience for both players and spectators. Inconsistency in the application of VAR protocols across different tournaments and at different levels of the game has also been identified as a recurring problem. Additional concerns relate to the varying levels of referee experience and training in using the technology effectively, and to whether the pursuit of technical precision in officiating decisions sometimes comes at an unacceptable cost to the fundamental appeal of football as a spectacle.

The importance of systematically studying and analyzing the impact of VAR technology on refereeing quality and player fairness is clear, given the technology's relatively recent introduction into football

at scale and the ongoing processes of evaluation and adaptation that surround its continued use. This study aims to contribute to this body of knowledge by highlighting the specific role of VAR in reducing refereeing errors, enhancing fairness on the field, and increasing confidence in the broader refereeing system, while also providing an analysis of the most significant challenges associated with its current implementation. The study further seeks to understand how sports media shapes public responses to the technology, grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A systematic review of the existing scholarly literature on VAR technology reveals that this innovation has become a central and rapidly growing focus of modern sports research since approximately 2020. The breadth and diversity of existing studies reflects the inherently complex and multidimensional nature of the technology, encompassing technical, psychological, sociological, and media-related dimensions. These studies have employed a wide range of methodological approaches, from quantitative match data analysis to qualitative interviews and media content analysis, and have been conducted across a variety of national football contexts.

Spitz et al. (2020) conducted one of the earliest and most comprehensive investigations of the psychological impact of VAR on referees in European top-flight leagues. Utilizing a combination of in-depth interviews and systematic match data analysis, the study concluded that while VAR demonstrably improved the objective accuracy of refereeing decisions, it simultaneously introduced new and significant forms of psychological pressure on the referees themselves, leading some to adopt a pattern of hesitation in making the kind of immediate, decisive judgments that had previously been the hallmark of experienced officiating. Deloitte Sports Research (2020) approached the question from a public opinion perspective, analyzing large-scale surveys conducted across several European leagues to assess fan perceptions of VAR. The results presented a nuanced picture: while fans broadly recognized the technology as a mechanism for enhancing refereeing fairness, they expressed considerable and consistent dissatisfaction with the extended stoppages associated with review processes and their negative impact on the enjoyment of watching live matches.

Samuel and Tenenbaum (2021) examined the specific relationship between refereeing transparency and

public confidence in VAR-related decisions, employing an analytical framework drawn from sports psychology. Their research confirmed that the provision of clear, accessible explanations of the reasoning behind refereeing decisions to the public constitutes a significant and independent variable in building trust in the technology and reducing objections to its application. García and Rodríguez (2021) analyzed media coverage of VAR decisions in the Spanish and English leagues through systematic content analysis of sports broadcast programs, concluding that the diversity of media interpretations—and particularly the prevalence of non-expert commentary—acts as a significant driver of public debate and has a measurable influence on public perceptions of refereeing fairness. Horky (2021) examined the specific role of social media platforms in shaping public opinion regarding VAR decisions, finding that digital audience interaction contributes substantially to the amplification of disagreements about specific refereeing calls and to the broader polarization of fan communities.

FIFPRO (2021), the international federation representing professional footballers, investigated the impact of VAR technology on player welfare, rights, and performance from the perspective of those most directly affected by refereeing decisions on the field. The report concluded that VAR had made a meaningful contribution to reducing demonstrably unfair decisions—particularly in penalty incidents and serious foul play situations—but simultaneously identified concerns about the impact of frequent and unpredictable review stoppages on player concentration and physical rhythm. Spaaij and Broerse (2022) undertook a critical theoretical review of the VAR literature, arguing that the ultimate success or failure of the technology in achieving its objectives is fundamentally dependent on the establishment of clear, transparent, and publicly comprehensible decision-making protocols. Lago-Peñas et al. (2022) provided a rigorous quantitative analysis comparing the accuracy of refereeing decisions in European leagues in the pre-VAR and post-VAR periods, finding a statistically significant and practically meaningful reduction in the rate of consequential refereeing errors following the technology's introduction. Kovacs and Baker (2023) documented a notable behavioral change in players following VAR implementation, with an observed increase in the frequency and persistence of appeals for VAR review, a trend with implications for match management and overall flow.

In the Arab academic context, Al-Shammari (2020) provided an early analysis of VAR's impact in the Saudi Professional League, finding improved decision accuracy but documenting the persistence of public controversy driven primarily by a widespread lack of understanding of the technology's operational protocols. Al-Otaibi (2021) conducted a specific investigation of the role of sports media in interpreting VAR decisions, concluding that non-expert and unprofessional media coverage is a primary driver of public controversy, while analytically rigorous professional coverage has a measurable positive effect on public confidence in refereeing. Al-Zahrani (2021) examined public attitudes toward VAR in Saudi Arabia through large-scale survey research, finding a strong correlation between perceived media transparency and public acceptance of the technology. Al-Qahtani (2022) explored the psychological impact of VAR on referee decision-making through qualitative interviews with experienced referees, finding consistent evidence of reduced decision-making speed and diminished perceived autonomy as direct consequences of operating under VAR conditions. Al-Harbi (2023) examined the impact of VAR on perceptions of refereeing fairness from the player perspective specifically, finding that the technology was broadly associated with a reduced sense of injustice in critical match situations. Al-Ansari (2024) provided the most recent and media-focused contribution to the Arab literature, demonstrating through systematic content analysis that social media platforms function as a pivotal arena for the formation and dissemination of public attitudes toward VAR-related decisions.

The theoretical framework adopted by this study is the Uses and Gratifications Theory, one of the most established and productive frameworks in mass communication research. The theory focuses on how individuals actively and purposively use media to satisfy specific personal needs and desires, as distinct from being treated as passive recipients of media messages. The foundational assumption of the theory is that the media consumer is an active agent who selects media content based on perceived utility in meeting felt needs. The categories of need most commonly identified in the literature include: the need for knowledge and information—which in the football context translates to seeking accurate analysis and explanation of VAR decisions; the need for entertainment and leisure; the need for social interaction and community engagement through the shared experience of following sport; and the need for

emotional escape through immersion in the drama of competitive sport. In the specific context of VAR technology, this theory offers a productive lens through which to analyze how fans use sports media to make sense of refereeing decisions, how that usage is shaped by the quality and character of available media coverage, and how the resulting perceptions of fairness or unfairness influence broader attitudes toward the integrity of football as a competitive enterprise.

Research Gap, Research Questions, and Hypotheses

A synthesis of the existing literature reveals a significant and consequential research gap: while numerous studies have examined individual dimensions of the VAR phenomenon—including its technical accuracy, its psychological impact on referees, its reception among fans, and its representation in the media—no study has yet attempted to integrate all of these dimensions into a single analytical framework. The present study addresses this gap directly by adopting a comprehensive approach that examines refereeing quality, player fairness, and the media's role in shaping public perception simultaneously and in their interrelations. The study also addresses a geographic gap by examining the Bahraini football context, which, despite the country's active engagement with the technology, has received minimal attention in the existing international literature.

The study addresses the following research questions: RQ1: How does sports media contribute to shaping public opinion regarding refereeing decisions based on VAR technology in the Bahraini Premier League? RQ2: To what extent does the nature of media coverage—analytical and transparent versus superficial and controversial—affect the level of public confidence in the fairness of VAR-related refereeing decisions? RQ3: To what extent has VAR technology succeeded in improving the quality of sports officiating and ensuring fairness for players and clubs in the Bahraini Premier League context?

The study advances the following three hypotheses in response to these questions: H1: Analytical and specialized media coverage of VAR decisions contributes meaningfully to enhancing public awareness of how the technology works and to increasing public confidence in refereeing fairness. H2: Superficial or partisan media coverage of VAR decisions amplifies public disagreements about specific refereeing calls and reduces the overall level of public acceptance of the technology and of the decisions made using it. H3: VAR technology has made a statistically

and practically significant contribution to reducing refereeing errors and improving player fairness in the Bahraini Premier League, although persistent challenges in consistent application and effective public communication continue to limit its full potential.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the impact of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology on the quality of sports officiating and player fairness. This methodological approach was selected for its well-established ability to provide a comprehensive, multidimensional, and contextually grounded understanding of complex sporting and social phenomena. The descriptive-analytical method is particularly suited to this study's objectives because it allows for the systematic study of relationships between the multiple variables associated with VAR technology—including its measurable impact on refereeing decision accuracy, the psychological and behavioral responses of players and referees, patterns of public and audience reaction, and the character and influence of media coverage of VAR-related events.

Research Design

The research design combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis strategies to yield a comprehensive and internally consistent picture of how VAR is applied in practice within the Bahraini football context. The quantitative dimension of the study is primarily oriented toward examining patterns in refereeing decision data and identifying trends in stakeholder perceptions across the study sample. The qualitative dimension is oriented toward developing a rich, contextually situated understanding of the lived experience of VAR among key stakeholders—including the psychological dimensions of refereeing under video surveillance and the behavioral adaptations of players and coaches in response to the technology. The integration of these two complementary approaches is designed to ensure that the study's conclusions are grounded in both the measurable realities of VAR's technical performance and the more nuanced human dimensions of its reception and impact.

The study was conducted with specific attention to the four key analytical dimensions identified as most critical in the existing literature: first, the accuracy and quality of refereeing decisions made with VAR support; second, the extent to which the technology contributes to equality and fairness among competing players and teams; third, the nature and texture of public perception of VAR-related decisions among fans and the broader

sports community; and fourth, the specific and consequential role of sports media—both traditional broadcast media and emerging social media platforms—in constructing and disseminating public understanding of the technology's outputs.

Sampling

The study population is defined broadly to encompass all parties directly or indirectly involved in the refereeing process and the operational application of VAR technology in professional football matches. This population includes, but is not limited to, the referees who bear the primary responsibility for making officiating decisions in real time and who must integrate VAR recommendations into their decision-making processes; the players who are most directly and immediately affected by refereeing decisions and whose behavior on the field may be shaped by the presence of review technology; the coaches and technical staff who must adapt their tactical approaches and player management strategies in response to VAR-related developments during matches; sports analysts and media commentators who interpret and communicate refereeing decisions to public audiences; and the fans and spectators who engage with the technology's outputs as consumers of the football product.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the study sample consisted of participants who possessed the direct experience, informed perspective, and relevant expertise necessary to provide meaningful and substantive data on the research questions. The sample was drawn from Isa Town Sports and Cultural Club, one of the established clubs operating in the Bahraini Premier League under current VAR conditions, selected as a purposively chosen representative case study. This case study approach enabled the researchers to develop a detailed and contextually rich understanding of VAR's impact within a specific operational environment. Participants were selected against explicit criteria including: demonstrated practical experience in a league environment where VAR is actively deployed; direct personal involvement in matches where VAR has been applied to consequential refereeing decisions; and the ability and willingness to reflect thoughtfully on their experience and perceptions.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through three primary and complementary instruments. The first and most substantive instrument was a series of semi-structured

face-to-face interviews conducted with key stakeholders at Isa Town Club. These interviews engaged three distinct participant categories: the club president, who was asked to address the question of how VAR technology affects the fairness of competition in the Bahraini league and whether it has contributed to reducing or exacerbating refereeing controversy from a club management perspective; the club's football coach, who was asked to address the question of how VAR has affected the team's playing style and tactical planning and whether the technology is seen as conflicting with the fast pace of modern football or serving the goal of decision accuracy; and a senior football player, who was asked to address the question of whether the presence of VAR technology makes players perform with greater confidence or whether it induces hesitation in physical challenges and movements on the field.

The interview instrument was designed with deliberate flexibility, allowing the researcher to pursue emerging lines of inquiry and to explore the individual perspectives of each participant in appropriate depth. Particular attention was given to the exploration of decision-making dynamics in the highest-stakes situations—including penalty incidents, goal-line decisions, and direct red card situations—as well as to the participants' personal assessments of the technology's overall contribution to sporting justice in the Bahraini context. The second data collection instrument was direct structured observation of live matches in which VAR was applied, focused on documenting the actual behavioral responses of players and bench personnel to VAR reviews, the duration and character of play interruptions, and observable changes in the tempo and flow of matches following VAR interventions. The third instrument was systematic content analysis of sports media coverage of VAR-related incidents in Bahraini football, including broadcast commentary, post-match analysis programs, and social media discussion, oriented toward identifying patterns in the framing and interpretation of refereeing decisions across different media types and platforms.

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis constituted the primary analytical method for processing data collected from the interview transcripts, structured observation records, and media content sources. This approach involved the systematic classification of data into the key thematic domains identified in the research questions and

theoretical framework: the impact of VAR on the accuracy and consistency of refereeing decision-making; the technology's contribution to sporting fairness and player equality; the psychological and behavioral impacts on players, coaches, and referee personnel; and the specific role and influence of sports media in shaping the public's understanding and acceptance of the technology.

Following the initial thematic classification, the analysis proceeded to the identification of recurring patterns, convergent themes, and significant divergences within and across the qualitative data sources. These qualitative patterns were then systematically correlated with the observational data collected from match contexts, enabling a triangulated interpretation of VAR's operational impact that draws on multiple independent sources of evidence. Descriptive statistical methods—including the calculation of arithmetic means, standard deviations, and percentage distributions—were applied to the quantitative data generated from the field analysis and structured observation components of the study, enabling the identification of general trends and systematic differences in assessments across the various stakeholder groups in the sample.

III. FINDINGS

The study produced ten principal and interrelated findings, collectively addressing the multiple dimensions of VAR technology's impact on football refereeing, player fairness, and public perception in the Bahraini Premier League context. These findings are presented in a logical sequence that moves from the technology's direct technical impact on decision quality, through its effects on players and referees, to its broader reception among the public and in the media.

Finding 1: VAR technology significantly improved the quality of refereeing decisions in football matches, particularly in those crucial situations whose outcomes most directly determine match results and championship standings: the awarding or disallowing of goals, the granting of penalty kicks, decisions on direct red cards, and the identification of the correct player in disciplinary situations. The availability of multi-angle video replay at variable speeds enabled the review team to identify and correct a meaningful proportion of the clear errors that had been a recurrent feature of officiating in the pre-VAR era. This finding supports the core design rationale of the technology and indicates that VAR has, in objective terms, made a positive contribution to the accuracy of the refereeing product.

The club president of Isa Town, in his interview, confirmed that VAR has brought a greater degree of objectivity to competition in the Bahraini league, even while acknowledging that the technology has not been free of controversy in its application.

Finding 2: The use of VAR technology has contributed meaningfully to strengthening the operational principle of sporting fairness and to providing practical protection for player rights on the field. Specifically, the technology has reduced the frequency of demonstrably unfair decisions that had previously disadvantaged players as a direct consequence of the inherent limitations of unaided human officiating—particularly in situations involving physical contact in the penalty area, which had historically been among the most contentious categories of refereeing decision. The player interviewed for this study reported that the presence of VAR creates a general sense that obvious injustice is less likely to go uncorrected, and that this awareness does positively influence his sense of security and confidence in competition, even though it does not eliminate all concern about the subjectivity of certain categories of decision.

Finding 3: Despite the technology's documented contribution to improving refereeing accuracy in objective terms, VAR has not succeeded in completely eliminating refereeing controversy in Bahraini football or in the broader global football context. A persistent and significant category of decisions remains subject to divergent interpretations among the referee and review team, among media commentators, and among public audiences—particularly in situations that are inherently dependent on the exercise of individual professional judgment, such as the assessment of handball incidents, the determination of whether physical contact constitutes a foul, or the evaluation of the severity of a challenge. This finding confirms that VAR does not and cannot operate in complete independence from the human element in officiating, and that any evaluation of the technology's performance must account for this fundamental limitation.

Finding 4: The review stoppages generated by VAR decision-making processes had a consistently observable and disruptive impact on the pace and continuity of football matches in the study context. The coach interviewed for the study expressed concern about the cumulative effect of these stoppages on the tactical coherence and physical rhythm of his team, noting that the uncertainty about the timing and duration of VAR interventions creates particular

difficulties for match management. These stoppages were identified as one of the primary sources of fan dissatisfaction with the technology, as they directly interrupt the flow of the sporting spectacle that is the primary attraction for match-going and broadcast audiences. The challenge of minimizing the disruptive impact of VAR review processes on the match experience while preserving the integrity of the decision-making process represents one of the most difficult operational problems facing those responsible for the technology's continued development and deployment.

Finding 5: The application of VAR technology has generated a clearly identifiable increase in the level of psychological pressure experienced by match referees in the Bahraini Premier League. Referees are acutely aware that their decisions are subject to immediate and detailed scrutiny from the video review room, from broadcast media with access to high-quality replay footage, and from an increasingly informed and vocal public audience. This awareness of constant monitoring was found to have a complex and not uniformly positive impact on referee performance: while it may incentivize greater care in decision-making, it was also found to be associated with observable hesitation in situations that call for rapid and decisive judgment, and with a reduction in the authoritative confidence that is itself an important component of effective match management. Referees in this situation require specific psychological support and dedicated preparation to manage the distinctive demands of officiating under the conditions that VAR creates.

Finding 6: A pattern of increasing reliance by match referees on VAR technology in making significant officiating decisions was identified, particularly in high-profile matches that attract elevated media and public attention. While a degree of reliance on the review mechanism is entirely appropriate and consistent with the technology's design purpose, the pattern identified suggests a risk of over-reliance that may undermine the operational independence and real-time authority of the on-field referee. This finding points to the importance of establishing and consistently enforcing clear, specific, and publicly communicated protocols governing the circumstances in which VAR review should and should not be initiated, in order to preserve the essential balance between technological support and human officiating judgment.

Finding 7: Sports media—encompassing both traditional broadcast media and the rapidly growing

ecosystem of digital and social media platforms—plays a pivotal and in many respects determinative role in shaping public perception of VAR technology and of specific decisions made using it in the Bahraini Premier League context. The study found clear evidence that the character of media coverage is a critical independent variable in determining the level of public acceptance of VAR-related decisions: coverage characterized by analytical rigor, factual accuracy, and transparent engagement with the operational rules governing VAR review consistently contributed to increasing public understanding and acceptance, while coverage characterized by partisanship, emotional rhetoric, or analytical superficiality consistently amplified controversy and eroded public confidence in the technology's objectivity. These findings directly and robustly support H1 and H2.

Finding 8: Social media platforms have emerged as the primary arena in which public discourse about VAR decisions is conducted, with audiences responding in real time to match events and to the media content produced around them. The immediacy and scale of social media interaction around VAR incidents creates a distinctive and powerful dynamic in which individual decisions can become the subject of intense public debate within minutes of being made, with the potential for both rapid and widespread dissemination of accurate information and equally rapid and widespread dissemination of misinformation or uninformed opinion. This finding underlines the particular responsibility of official refereeing bodies and sports federations to develop proactive, timely, and accessible communication strategies regarding VAR decisions, in order to provide an authoritative counterweight to the more volatile elements of social media discourse.

Finding 9: The level of public acceptance of specific VAR decisions and of the technology as a whole was found to be significantly correlated not only with the objective correctness of the final decision—that is, with whether the VAR review resulted in the right call being made according to the Laws of the Game—but also with the clarity, speed, and accessibility of the explanation provided for that decision. This finding has important theoretical implications for the Uses and Gratifications framework adopted by the study, confirming that audiences seek not only accurate outcomes from VAR technology but also the informational and cognitive satisfaction of understanding the basis on which those outcomes were reached. Institutional transparency in decision communication is thus not merely a desirable

feature of VAR implementation but an operationally necessary condition for sustained public acceptance.

Finding 10: VAR technology represents a genuinely significant development in the evolution of modern sports officiating, and its introduction into the Bahraini Premier League has produced measurable positive outcomes in terms of decision accuracy and perceived fairness. However, the technology is not and cannot be treated as a self-contained or final solution to the full range of challenges associated with football officiating. It operates as one component of a complex integrated system that encompasses the human referee, the regulatory and technological infrastructure of the review process, the media ecosystem through which decisions are communicated and interpreted, and the public audience whose acceptance is ultimately the measure of the refereeing system's legitimacy. Optimizing the performance of this integrated system requires ongoing attention to all of its components simultaneously.

IV. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is subject to several limitations that require explicit acknowledgment. In methodological terms, the adoption of a descriptive-analytical approach, while appropriate for the study's objectives and context, necessarily precludes the use of experimental designs or controlled variable manipulation that might provide stronger causal evidence for the relationships identified. The research is also bounded by its geographic focus on the Bahraini Premier League context, which, while providing useful and previously understudied empirical material, limits the generalizability of the specific findings to other national football contexts with different structural, regulatory, and media characteristics.

The purposive sample drawn from a single club, while enabling the development of a rich and detailed case study, inevitably restricts the breadth of representation across the full spectrum of stakeholder perspectives in Bahraini football. The reliance on semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument for qualitative data collection introduces the standard limitations associated with self-report data, including the potential for social desirability bias and the dependence on participants' ability and willingness to articulate their experiences and perceptions accurately. The content analysis of media coverage, while systematic, was necessarily limited in scope to the sources and time period accessible within the constraints of the study.

Future research should prioritize the following directions. Comparative multi-country studies examining VAR's impact, public reception, and media representation across different national football leagues would provide significantly more generalizable findings and enable the identification of the contextual factors most critical in determining the technology's effectiveness and acceptance. Longitudinal research designs tracking changes in refereeing quality metrics, public attitudes, and media framing patterns over extended time periods following VAR implementation would generate more robust evidence about the technology's long-term impact and the dynamics of its social reception. Large-scale quantitative survey research employing representative and diverse samples of all key stakeholder groups—including fans, players, referees, coaches, and media professionals—would complement the qualitative depth of the present study with broader statistical generalizability.

Experimental studies specifically designed to test the causal impact of different media framing strategies on public attitudes toward VAR decisions would make a particularly valuable contribution to the field, providing evidence-based guidance for the design of official communication strategies by refereeing bodies. Research conducted in emerging football markets and lower-resource contexts, where referee training infrastructure, technical equipment quality, and media professionalism may differ substantially from the conditions prevailing in the established European and Gulf leagues, would contribute to a more globally inclusive and contextually sensitive understanding of the VAR phenomenon. Finally, research examining the impact of planned technological improvements to VAR—such as semi-automated offside technology and enhanced communication between the video room and the on-field referee—on the key challenges identified in this and other studies would provide timely and practically relevant guidance for the ongoing development of the technology.

V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine, through the theoretical lens of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the role of sports media in shaping public opinion about VAR technology and the consequences of that process for public perceptions of refereeing fairness in Bahraini football. The research has produced a rich and internally consistent set of findings that collectively illuminate the complex, multidimensional, and deeply human character of the VAR phenomenon, demonstrating that

the technology's impact cannot be adequately understood or evaluated through a purely technical lens. The findings demonstrate clearly that VAR has made a meaningful and practically significant contribution to improving the objective accuracy of refereeing decisions and to enhancing perceptions of sporting fairness among players and stakeholders in the Bahraini Premier League. The technology has delivered on its core design promise—reducing the rate of clear and consequential refereeing error—and has brought an important dimension of objectivity and technological verification to a domain previously subject only to the inherent limitations of unaided human judgment. These are genuine and valuable achievements that should be acknowledged without reservation.

At the same time, the study reveals that VAR is not a panacea for the full range of challenges associated with football officiating, and that its introduction has created significant new challenges alongside the problems it was designed to address. Discretionary and judgment-dependent decisions continue to generate controversy; match stoppages disrupt the flow and emotional continuity of the game; and the psychological pressure imposed on referees by the conditions of operating under constant video scrutiny represents a serious and underaddressed occupational challenge. These findings confirm that technological innovation in sports officiating, however sophisticated, cannot transcend the fundamentally human and socially contested nature of the activity it is designed to support.

The study's application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory has proved particularly productive in illuminating the mechanism through which sports media shapes public reception of VAR technology. The theory's core insight—that audiences are active and purposive consumers of media content, seeking specific forms of informational, social, and emotional gratification through their media use—helps to explain why the quality and character of media coverage of VAR decisions has such a consequential impact on public acceptance of the technology. Audiences seeking understanding, reassurance, and social community through media engagement with football officiating are well served by rigorous, transparent, and analytically sophisticated media coverage; they are poorly served, and their skepticism and controversy are amplified, by coverage that is partisan, superficial, or emotionally manipulative.

In conclusion, achieving the full potential of VAR technology as a force for fairness, integrity, and public

trust in football requires a genuinely comprehensive and coordinated institutional response that extends well beyond the purely technical dimensions of implementation. Such a response must encompass sustained investment in referee training and psychological support; rigorous standardization of VAR application protocols across all competitions; active development of media literacy and public understanding among fan communities; and the establishment of clear, timely, and accessible institutional communication strategies by refereeing bodies. VAR represents a valuable and important tool; the realization of its value depends ultimately on the quality of the human, organizational, and communicative systems within which it is embedded.

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