

# Professor examines vuvuzela craze as World Cup approaches

11 June 2014, by Matt Crum

For the 2014 World Cup soccer matches, Brazilian government officials have banned the percussion instrument known as the caxilora from stadiums where matches will be held. So the world will not experience the same type of culture-specific sound as during the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, where the vuvuzela spurred a wide range of reactions.

Arizona State University communication professor Jeffrey Kassing has written a book chapter about the world's reaction to the vuvuzela, a plastic horn blown by thousands of spectators. The chapter, "Noisemaker or Cultural Symbol: The Vuvuzela Controversy and Expressions of Football Fandom," is included in the forthcoming "African Football, Identity Politics and Global Media Narratives: The Legacy of the FIFA 2010 World Cup." The book will be published July 9 by Palgrave Macmillan.

Kassing specifically looked at reactions to the vuvuzela in the form of postings by fans on the website of the British newspaper The Guardian, which ran a story shortly after the 2010 World Cup began that indicated tournament organizers were considering a ban on the instrument. Fan reactions flooded the website for three days until the comment board was closed.

Negative comments fell into several categories of themes. Some questioned the idea that the vuvuzela is actually a cultural symbol in South Africa. Others said users of the instrument weren't "real" fans, that the sound would be acceptable if it weren't used all the time, that the vuvuzela affected communication among players and coaches, and that the sound overpowered the ebb and flow of the game.

Together these themes led Kassing to a specific conclusion: "People felt very strongly that the vuvuzela disrupted the experience of fans and viewers because it conflicted with their expectations of how fandom should be performed,"

he said. "In particular, fans felt the vuvuzela interrupted a prescribed soundscape for matches – one characterized by singing, applauding and cheering at very specific moments.

"It was very clear that people felt the vuvuzela was a fundamental threat to a specific Eurocentric version of football," Kassing added. "And therefore it was not seen, at least by most people commenting, as a legitimate or alternative fan tradition."

Those posting in defense of the vuvuzela used humor and irony to make their points. Comments included, "Who let all the locals in, honking their strange instruments, dancing around and having a good time. Football should be watched in silence," along with, "The incessant droning noise completely destroys the pleasure of watching the sport on TV. Please ban Formula 1 immediately."

"This use of humor drew attention to shared conceptions of the shortcomings in the English production and presentation of the World Cup and the English game, while also revealing the illogical and excessive nature of complaints against the vuvuzela," Kassing said.

Other supportive comments pointed to the rights of the host country to follow its own traditions, while others challenged English soccer traditions. One concluded, "Complain about the vuvuzelas if you want but please don't pretend they drown out anything more imaginative."

"This comment and similar ones punched holes in the uniformity of English football fandom, highlighting how the experience had grown dreary and repetitive for some fans," Kassing said.

Ultimately the unique sound of the vuvuzela branded the World Cup of 2010 as distinctively South African. According to Kassing, [vuvuzela](#) supporters "reminded readers and participants on

the message board that there is no one universal version of football fandom and that banning a symbol associated with African football would undermine this truth."

Kassing is director of ASU's School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The school is a component of the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, the core college on ASU's West campus. He teaches classes for New College's B.A. and B.S. degrees in communication, as well as the master of arts in communication studies (MACS) degree.

Provided by Arizona State University

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