

Cultural differences in sports fan engagement on Facebook: a comparison of Australian and Indian cricket league

Introduction

With the advent of technology, social networking sites have become an avenue for marketers to engage with their audience at a large scale. Social media provides a goldmine of data that marketers may seek to gain insights as to why consumers feel and respond the way they do to different online brand engagement exercises. Engagement with followers on social media has been found to be more effective than conventional marketing communication content (Thackeray et al., 2008), as half of the social media users have the addiction of following brands on social media (Hutchinson, 2015). The possibility of increased engagement has encouraged many brands to develop and manage their brand fan pages for enhancing their social network salience and building strong relationships with their fans (Khan et al., 2016).

Sports teams are one of the most powerful brand communities because they provide compelling entertainment enthralling millions of fans (Heere et al., 2011). They are noted to be one of the strongest drivers of fan identity and loyalty and are capable of driving fan engagement beyond their on-field delivery (Stevens & Rosenberger, 2012; Katz & Heere, 2013). The strong emotional connect between fans and sports teams has made social media an ideal business context to develop an interactive and long-lasting engagement with fans (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). For instance, Real Madrid Club de Fútbol has over 110 million fans following the official Facebook page (SocialBakers, 2019). Recognizing the revenue benefits that accrue from fan engagement (Stevens & Rosenberger, 2012), top professional sports stakeholders like clubs, athletes and sponsors try to manage their online presence on social media via their fan pages (Naraine, 2019; Abeza et al., 2014; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016).

The notion of social media engagement is context-dependent (Bowden, 2009) and has been explored in different contexts like consumer goods (Luarn et al., 2015), fast food chains (Khan et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017), electronic brands (Kujur & Singh, 2017), and sports clubs (Parganas et al., 2015) across different platforms. This warrants the need to examine the experiences of sports fans. Sports fans desire to engage with their favourite team on social media, and actively follow their social media fan pages (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). The study of social media in the context of sports fan engagement is evolving, as researchers aim at better understanding of what drives their fan behavior in the online platform. Few studies (e.g. Swani & Milne, 2017; Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Yoshida et al., 2015) have focussed on the determinants of fan engagement depending on differing content and context. While the studies have explored fan engagement determinants, its effectiveness has been found to vary across countries (Khan et al., 2016) thus impacting consumers' decision-making process (Mangold & Smith, 2012). The need to explore the effect of cultural factors on fan engagement has been widely acknowledged (Khan et al., 2016; Yoshida et al., 2014) and is evident from the limited literature in this field (King et al., 2014).

The aim of this study, hence, is to explore the impact of cultural difference on social media engagement depending on the post content shared and the level of fans' identification with the team. We explore the differences between India and Australia, which are significantly different on the cultural front. And have selected Cricket as the sport since it is followed equally passionately in both the countries and has a huge fan following in both the geographies. This also enables the study to go beyond the dominant focus of extant literature centered on football and in American context (Yoshida & Heere, 2015). We consider Facebook platform to study the cultural differences. Among all other social media platforms, Facebook provides a strong connect between business and communities with 1.58 billion users logging in every day¹.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/346167/facebook-global-dau/>

Businesses have also taken advantage of the growing Facebook user base by sharing posts about product and services on their officially owned brand fan pages. In Facebook, fans respond to a post by liking, commenting, and sharing. While liking and commenting responses to a post are identified as affective and cognitive responses, respectively, sharing a post can be either affective or cognitive or both (Kim & Yang, 2017). Sports fans are essentially driven by the associated team identification realized by following the sports club Facebook page. Team identification, in turn, influences affective behavior (Madriral, 1995). Affect Infusion Theory states that the affectively loaded information influences the cognitive process of judgement (Forgas, 1995). On Facebook network, the affective dimension has more influence on user behavior than the cognitive dimension (Koroleva et al., 2011). Therefore, the study focusses on the affective response of fans to capture the psychological state of a Facebook fan.

The study results would provide sports marketers an opportunity to better understand their fans' behavior on social networking sites and accordingly fine-tune their messages to garner better fan engagement. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: First, the conceptual background and existing literature is discussed to derive the hypotheses. Subsequently, the method and data analysis are described, which is followed by the discussion of our findings and subsequent conclusions.

Conceptual Background

Sports fan engagement

Brand's social media communication can be enhanced by 'being active, humble, honest, interesting, and unprofessional' dissemination of content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The content shared by brands on social media is broadly categorized as informational, entertainment, remuneration, and social (Luarn et al., 2015). The penchant for different content types is primarily governed by the domain and context (Bowden, 2009). In the sports context, fans are highly motivated to engage when informational content is shared (Trail and James,

2001; Vale and Fernandes, 2018). The engagement of fans with the teams through sports club is widely studied as “fan engagement”, and it is observed to be a multi-dimensional behavioral construct, which comprises of management co-operation, prosocial behavior, and performance tolerance (Yoshida et al., 2014). Fan engagement is manifested as interactions in fan communities, positive word-of-mouth, and following team-related information (Ahearne et al., 2005). Thus, fan engagement aids the club and other fans participate in the above non-transactional behaviors (example: Ahearne et al., 2005; Dholakia et al., 2010). Though fans engage in both online and offline medium, fan engagement on social media has gained prominence (Ioakimidis, 2010) and it forms an integral part of everyday lives for most fans (Popp et al., 2016).

A fan is a consumer of organized sports and is an enthusiastic devotee of some sports consumptive object like a sport or a league or a team or a player (Hunt et al., 1999). A consumer becomes a fan by processing information to build a schema comprising of expectations, beliefs, and perceptions associated with the consumptive object that forms the schema target (Hunt and Bashaw, 1999b; Keaveney and Hunt, 1992). A crucial end-node of the schema is the fans’ identification with an individual player, which is developed through a halo effect (Hunt et al., 1999a). The fans subsequently engage with the consumptive object, say an individual player, which forms the end node (Hunt and Bashaw, 1999a; Hunt et al., 1999). For example, a child first gets to know about the sport of cricket and associated formats following which the child comes to know about a league (say Indian league), then about a club/team (say Rajasthan Royals), and finally about a player (say Steve Smith). The sequence is likely to be reversed with the widespread use of player endorsements; where individual players form the end node (Hunt et al., 1999). However, in the reversed case, the child is likely to engage only with player-related content, and the halo effect on team content depends on the strength of the developed schema, which can also be weak (Hunt et al., 1999). Fisher and Wakefield (1998) ascertained

that fans' identification with the individual players leads to fans' identification with the team, thereby determining individual players to form the crucial end-node to trigger engagement. Hence, we posit that:

H1: Player related posts are likely to drive higher fan engagement than team-related post.

Sports fans develop strong identification with teams based on the team's performance and consider the success and failure of the team as personal success and failure (Hirt et al., 1992; Sutton et al., 1997). Since sports fans exhibit a high degree of tolerance toward the performance of the supported team (de Ruyter and Wetzels, 2000), the team's failure in an event may not affect the support exhibited by the fan. Fans desire a winning result for the supported team (Funk et al., 2012) and react more positively with the winning of the supported team (Madrigal and Chen, 2008; Jang et al., 2018). The relationship with the team is observed to strengthen with the team's success but does not deteriorate with the team's failure (Wann and Branscombe, 1990; Bizman and Yinon, 2002). Rather fans tend to exhibit varying coping strategy with team's win and loss by basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) and cutting off reflected failure (CORFing; Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini and Richardson, 1980), or basking in spite of reflected failure (BIRFing; Campbell et al., 2004) and cutting off reflected success (CORSing; Campbell et al., 2004). The coping mechanism is manifested in the social media activities of the fans (Wallace et al., 2011) and is expected to influence the impact of content shared by sports club on fan engagement. Pronschinske et al. (2012) advocate the need to consider team performance while studying social media fan engagement. Hence, we posit that:

H2: Fan engagement will be higher for team experiencing success than for team experiencing failure.

Impact of culture on fan engagement

Culture has been long believed to influence the members of society, as it is a reflection of their collective identity. Hofstede (1980) defined culture as “interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group’s response to its environment” (pp. 24). Culture reflects shared ideas and values within the society and forms the base of how people conceptualize themselves and others as well as demonstrates their interdependence. This results in differing beliefs, values, and attitudes of people in different societies and the nature of their individual experiences including emotion, cognition, and motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

A country’s culture has been identified as a key determinant of differential cultural norms and beliefs resulting in differences in perception, disposition, and behavior of individuals (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). The categorization of countries by culture has been attempted by quite a few academicians. Hofstede (1980) identified four major dimensions of cultural differences, namely, individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity. This was later enhanced with long-term versus short-term orientation (Bond, 1988). Trompenaars (1993) offered a five-dimension classification by incorporating the elements of individualism versus collectivism, universalism versus particularism, specific versus diffuse, neutral versus emotional, and achievement versus anticipation. This work was also amended to add two additional dimensions of attitude towards time and environment. Schwartz (1994) critiqued the classification for non-comprehensive addressing of all cultural elements and offered a theory of values based on which culture can be compared.

While the three theories offered different conceptualizations, all of them are based on the perspective that countries share a set of core values and norms that guide the citizen’s behavior. Of the different conceptualizations, our study will treat the work of Hofstede as the

base for assessing the difference in culture of countries. Typology offered by Hofstede has been most widely cited (Bond, 2002) and has also been used in marketing literature for studying cross-cultural differences (e.g. Han et al., 2016; Petersen et al., 2013; Singh, 2002) and intra-cultural commonalities (e.g. Khan et al., 2016). The study results of Hofstede have also been repeatedly validated in marketing studies across many countries (e.g. Biswas et al., 2009; Choi and Rifon, 2007).

The study on the influence of culture on social media engagement has gained prominence with the increased dissipation of internet in everyday life. Social media engagement is defined as a ‘social act full of culture, meaning, language, and values’ (Kozinets et al., 2014). The individual’s social media engagement is observed to be significantly different across national cultures (e.g. Cho and Park, 2013; Kim et al., 2011; Park et al., 2015) and is dependent on the local communication preferences (Barnett and Sung, 2005). This is also evident from the prevalence of different country-specific social media sites (Choi et al., 2013). Thus, it is essential to observe the cultural differences in social media engagement from a country-specific perspective.

The role of culture as a moderating element of brand fan engagement has been established in the past studies (Khan et al., 2016). For instance, Kim et al. (2011) found that social media users in individualistic countries are likely to be more active once their needs related to entertainment, information, and team support are fulfilled. Khan et al. (2016) found that effectiveness of the post determinants varied across cultures and countries and emphasized on the cultural significance while drafting social media post strategy. Culture has also been identified to influence the content type preferences and behavior of fans following brand pages (Tsai and Men, 2012). Extending the arguments of these researchers, we believe that culture may also be playing a moderating role in determining the influence of social media content on sports fan engagement.

While Hofstede categorized countries on five dimensions, two of the dimensions that have been explored extensively for examining cultural variations of significance are individualism-collectivism and power distance (Adler, 1991; Schermerhorn and Harris Bond, 1997). These dimensions have been found to significantly impact information acquisition and decision making on social media platforms (Goodrich and Mooij, 2013). These dimensions have also found representation in alternative frameworks used for understanding cultural differences (Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1988). Following this, we explore the cultural moderation in relation to these two dimensions.

Power Distance

Hofstede (2001) described power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally". Countries with high power distances are characterised by inequalities of power and wealth; hence, citizens believe in authoritarian values along with a centralized system, while in countries with low power distance, citizens de-emphasize the differences in power and wealth (Hofstede, 2001). A culture high of power distance signifies inequality in society with the manifestation of inequalities.

Referent power has been noted to be one of the bases of social power (French et al., 1959). It is derived from personal charisma of the powerful and is believed that identification with him or her will prevail with the less powerful (Hofstede, 2001). In societies with high power distance, people belonging to the lower strata/class/power rank have deference toward people of higher strata/class/power rank (Sahay, 2013). The deference gets reflected in the status enjoyed by successful artists or sportsperson because of their unique physical or mental characteristics. People who look up to these successful individuals end up idolizing them and even imitating them and their lifestyles (Sahay, 2013). The reverence and idolizing are less

likely to happen in cultures that are characterized by lower power distance and greater sense of equality within the society.

The information-giving and seeking behaviors of consumers are observed to be influenced by the cultural characteristic of power distance (Dawar et al., 1996). Given the high level of referent power of individual stars, we propose that posts carrying content about individual players (stars) within the team are likelier to gather greater fan engagement in countries with high power distance than in countries with lower power distance.

H3: Player related posts will garner higher fan engagement than team-related posts for countries with high power distance.

Individualism-Collectivism

Hofstede (2001) used individualism to describe cultures wherein ties between individuals are weak, and everyone is expected to look after their own self. However, collectivism refers to cultures wherein ties between individuals are strong, and everyone takes responsibility for the fellow members in the group. Individualism-collectivism trait has been used for studying individual's behavior on the internet. For instance, Chau et al. (2002) found differential online behavior of consumers in the collectivistic and individualistic cultures, and Choi, Lee, and Kim (2005) observed differential treatment for celebrity endorsement in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. We extend this argument of online behavior and explore the differences of fan's identification with team and their resultant engagement on social media depending on the individualistic-collectivistic culture.

Studies show that team performance impact fan's intention to engage with the team (Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012; Biscaia et al., 2016). A positive game outcome results in fan's satisfaction, whereas poor performance and a negative game outcome leads to dissatisfaction and reduces fan's intention to engage with team. We anticipate that sports fans from a collectivistic culture will have stronger identification with their team, and hence, they are

likelier to exhibit an amplified engagement as the team goes through a successful phase. The highly engaged sports fans are often reported to engage in bragging behavior about their team's success (Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012). (Eg: BIRGing; Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann and Branscombe, 1990). We posit that the BIRGing phenomenon will be higher for the collectivistic cultures in cases of team success, and one can expect a significantly higher fan engagement for successful team in collectivistic culture than individualistic culture. However, if the team experiences failure, fans are likelier to experience incongruity between cognitive reasoning (team failure) and affective (positive view of team) view. In presence of this congruity, fans may avoid association with the team (Boen et al., 2002). Boen et al., (2002) documented this phenomenon with a reduced tendency of the fans to visit team's website less often after the loss. Considering the stronger association with the team in collectivist (vs individualistic) culture, we believe that the tendency of reduced interaction with unsuccessful teams will be higher in the collectivist culture. Thus, teams are likelier to see a reduced fan interaction in the collectivist culture while experiencing failure. However, sports fan engagement is expected to be relatively mute in an individualistic culture than in a collectivistic culture (Campbell et al., 2004). Hence,

H4: Difference between fan engagement for teams experiencing success and failure will be more pronounced in countries ranking higher on collectivism.

The conceptual relationships are illustrated in Figure 1.

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Method

Data Collection

We chose India and Australia for our study. The two countries reported significant difference regarding cultural dimensions; and have been used in various academic cross-cultural studies (e.g. Alam, 2010; Rose et al., 2003). Further, the two countries have a strong fan following for

Cricket, and each has a competitive cricket league featuring multiple teams with each time having their own set of fans. Hence, the Cricket leagues in Australia and India provides us a suitable comparison ground across the two differing cultures. The two countries showed significant difference for the dimensions of Power Distance (India: 77; Australia: 36) and Individualism (India: 48; Australia: 90).

The cricket clubs investigated were Mumbai Indians (MI) and Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) for Indian league and Hobart Hurricanes (HH) and Perth Scorchers (PS) for Australian league. The data was collected from the Facebook page owned by the clubs of both the leagues using Netvizz API (Rieder, 2013). The study consider data at the summary level without violating Facebook data policy. The posts shared by the club's page administrator were collected as a list with each post containing details of each posts such as media type of the post, the number of likes received by the post, the message content shared in the post, and the date and time of post creation. The posts shared only by the page administrators were considered for the study. While, all types of fans show engagement during the peak season of a sport, the engagement during off-season is restricted to only devoted and fanatical type of fans (Hunt et al., 1999). To encompass all kinds of fans, a total of 1509 posts were collected during the peak season (1st December 2018 to 28th February 2019 for Australian league and 1st March 2019 to 31st May 2019 for Indian league).

Data Coding

The study compares player-related posts with that of team-related posts. We used content analysis to systematically categorize the content. Content analysis has been the preferred method of examining the context of the message in various communication and media research (Roznowski, 2003; Yun et al., 2008). Club posts were coded manually as team-related or player-related by an independent coder without prior research knowledge and one of the researchers. About 10% (151) of the total posts were coded initially based on the shared outline.

The discrepancies were clarified by the second researcher, and all the posts were coded. The inter-coder reliability calculated using Perreault and Leigh (1989) formula, was in the permissible range of 0.8 – 1.0 (0.909), and the discrepancies were sorted out by the third researcher.

Operationalization of the independent variables

Variables were operationalized based on the discussion in the section on conceptual background.

- *Post content-type*: The content type of the posts shared by the clubs was classified as team-related and player-related.
- *Team performance*: Winning team (HH and MI) of the league was considered for team success and the teams that lost the league (PS and RCB) were considered for team failure.
- *Fan engagement*: The affective response of fan engagement was measured using the number of likes per post.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The average number of fans per club was around 7079614 (SD = 5838682.85) and the average number of posts shared by a club was around 409 (SD = 110.46). Over 12 million impressions of cricket fans spanning across 1513 Facebook posts across four cricket clubs from the cricket leagues of Australia and India were evaluated.

<Place for Table 1>

To understand the use of different content types by different clubs for stimulating engagement, we examined the distribution of different content types across clubs (Table 1). Majority of the clubs (3 out of 4 clubs) shared more team-related content than player-related content in their posts.

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Table 2 shows the degree of variation in terms of the number of likes for different content types, clubs, and leagues. Although the team-related content type was preferred by majority of the clubs, we observed that player-related content has garnered more number of likes. The average likes count was higher for clubs experiencing success and for leagues from the country ranking higher on collectivism (Indian league).

Hypothesis Tests

We used ANOVA to test the hypotheses. As the engagement metrics were heavily skewed (likes: mean = 8147.94; standard deviation = 19054.26; skewness = 5.52; kurtosis = 40.81), the like count was normalized by dividing the dependent variable with the fan base of the club and multiplying it by a factor of 10000 (Cvijikj et al., 2013; Figueira, 2018).

The analysis of H1 using ANOVA to test the influence of content type of the post on fan engagement reveals that providing information related to players had a positive impact on the number of likes. Though posts with team-related content (Mean = 59.54; SD = 115.57) also had a significant effect on the fan engagement, its effect was found to be relatively lower than that of the player-related content type (Mean = 107.94; SD = 161.76). Therefore, H1 was supported (Table 3).

According to H2, clubs experiencing success garner more fan engagement than those clubs experiencing failure. The analysis shows that there is a significant difference in fan engagement between the two clubs. As posited the effect of team performance was highly pronounced for teams experiencing success (Mean= 120.91; SD=182.08) garnering more number of likes than teams experiencing failure (Mean= 40.96; SD= 48.98), thereby supporting H2.

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The hypotheses H3 and H4 were analyzed using univariate general linear model, and the results are shown in Table 4. For hypothesis 3, we find that the difference in the number of

likes between player-related content and team-related content the leagues with respect to leagues is significant. Further, it can be observed that the clubs of Indian league ($\text{Mean}_{\text{player}} = 133$; SE and $\text{Mean}_{\text{team}} = 79.13$; $\text{SD}=152.15$) have higher magnitude of difference than the Australian league clubs ($\text{Mean}_{\text{player}} = 60.78$; $\text{SD}=79.15$ and $\text{Mean}_{\text{team}} = 38.18$; $\text{SD}=42.84$). Comparison of the means plot (Figure 2), shows the difference in the slopes between the content types for Indian and Australian leagues. We found the difference to be more pronounced with a steeper slope of larger magnitude for Indian league than Australian league, thus supporting H3.

<Place for Table 4>

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Testing the difference in fan engagement for teams experiencing success and failure between the collectivist and individualist culture, we found a significant difference between the leagues at different performance levels. Table 4 shows that the clubs of Indian league ($\text{Mean}_{\text{success}} = 149.01$; $\text{SD}=207.83$ and $\text{Mean}_{\text{failure}} = 42.53$; $\text{SD}=49.24$) have higher difference in the number of likes than clubs of Australian league ($\text{Mean}_{\text{success}} = 59.15$; $\text{SD}=74.84$ and $\text{Mean}_{\text{failure}} = 39.54$; $\text{SD}=48.76$) with respect to the team's performance. Comparison of the means plot (Figure 3) shows a steeper slope of larger magnitude for Indian league than Australian league, thus supporting H4.

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Discussion

The research examined the difference in sports fan engagement on club pages of leading sports team across different cultures. By analyzing 1513 posts across four cricket teams from the cricket leagues of Australia and India, we found that a country's culture does affect the level of fan engagement. The analysis revealed that power distance and the individualism-collectivism

components of culture have significant interaction effect with content type and performance level of the team, influencing fans' level of engagement with a sports club.

First, our study established that fan engagement varies across player-versus-team content types, independent of culture and showed that fans are likelier to have higher engagement with posts dealing with individual sports person than team. This is because the players associated with the team are noted to form crucial end-nodes that triggers a fan's engagement with the team (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). This is more evident in popular sports where star players are endorsed heavily, which results in fans forming a stronger associative node with the star player and through him or her develop a connected node with the team (Hunt et al., 1999). Thus, the findings establish that content type plays a vital role in posting strategies because it significantly influences the online engagement level, which is similar to the findings of previous studies (Luarn et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2016; Vale and Fernandez, 2018).

Extending the discussion on player-related content versus team-related content by showcasing the effect of culture, we found that culture accentuates the variation of fan engagement between a team and player-related post. This happens, since in cultures with high power distances, members of the community look up to and go to the extent of idolizing the star performers in the society. Owing to this reverence, the individuals not only follow their idols (star players) but also go to the extent of imitating them and their lifestyles (Sahay, 2013). Moreover, this reverence is more visible in cultures with high power distance than cultures with lower power distance, where the perceived manifestation of equality is much higher.

Second, our study established that fan engagement varies as a result of team performance, independent of culture and showed that fans are likelier to have higher engagement with better performing teams than poor performing teams. The behavioral difference in fan engagement arises because sports fans have been noted to consider team success or failure as their own, due to their attachment with the team (Sutton et al., 1997).

Given the reflection of team success on to themselves, sports fans tend to engage more with teams that are winning as a result of the bragging behavior- BIRGing. However, when the team is losing, the fans tend to cut themselves off from the team-CORFing (Campbell, 2004). BIRGing and CORFing is also exhibited in social media interaction of sports fan (Vale and Fernandes, 2018); and hence, we found that fans across cultures had higher engagement with teams that are performing well than teams not performing well.

We extended this discussion on team performance by showcasing that the effect of culture accentuates the variation of fan engagement in case of well performing team versus poor performing team. In cultures with higher collectivism, sports fans have higher identification with the team. Therefore, the coping mechanisms of BIRGing and CORFing are likelier to get accentuated given the strength of the member's identification with the team. Fans with higher identification, as in the case of collectivist cultures, will indulge in accentuated bragging with the winning of the team, and the team let down will be seen as symbolic of personal let down and will go in a shell.

Our study results have direct contributions for social media page managers of sports clubs. As opposed to the conventional post content classification, i.e., information, entertainment, social and remuneration, we considered classifying post content as player-related and team-related. To create deeper engagement, we propose that social media content strategy of teams, while continuing their focus on team building, can drive fan engagement by leveraging star players in the team. Cultural difference makes the post content even more significant given the accentuated connect and reverence in certain cultures. Moreover, when the team is on a winning spree, the opportunity needs to be leveraged to feed in lots of engagement opportunities with fans, who would be keen to share the same for manifesting team performance as their own.

Conclusion

Behaviors and motivations for social media engagement vary with different perspectives (Vale and Fernandes, 2018). Research on sports management has focused on fan engagement over social media, but the study is limited on the influence of culture perspective of fan engagement on social media. In this regard, our study contributions encompass the fields of sport management and social media engagement. Literature focuses on intra-cultural commonalities and has necessitated studying the cross-cultural differences. Answering to the call for further research, we studied the influence of different post content and its variation between cultures with different power-distance characteristic and the influence of team performance between the cultures with different levels of individualism-collectivism characteristic. Our research shows that culture impacts the scale of influence of the content type on affective fan engagement. Further, we explicated the differential influence of cultural factors on affective fan engagement. The study findings also show that the affective reaction of fans varies with culture thereby highlighting the need to calibrate the expectation of fan reaction with regard to the cultural context.

In managerial terms, our findings provide guidance for social media marketers regarding the cultural differences in Facebook fan engagement. For example, though team's loss will impact fan engagement across cultures, the impact will be less in an individualistic culture as against collectivistic culture. In general, sports fans engage more with player-related content than team-related content. But the difference is significantly higher for clubs in the higher power-distance culture. Hence, it is desirable for sports club marketers to share player-related content during peak season, especially in a higher power-distance culture. Thus, the findings should encourage sports club marketers to build culture-based content strategies for enhancing affective fan activities.

Although this study delivered desired results, it has certain limitations. The study is based on a single social media platform and is limited to two cricket leagues. Further research is needed to generalize the findings to other social media platforms and other leagues (say Caribbean Premier League) as well as team sports. Our research exclusively focused on the volume of the affective social media engagement behavior without considering the valence measure. Studying the valence of social media engagement behaviors, such as fan reactions or comment sentiment, could provide additional insights on social media fan engagement with cricket clubs. The two cricket leagues studied are relatively newly formed clubs, and the findings cannot be generalized for the established county clubs. Further, a comparative study is desirable to observe the commonalities and differences in fan engagement of the established and new clubs. The data is limited to fan engagement during the peak season of the considered clubs, which could reduce the generalizability of the findings to off-season period. Notwithstanding the limitations, we intended to study the cultural differences in affective fan engagement for which the work provides a definitive treatment.

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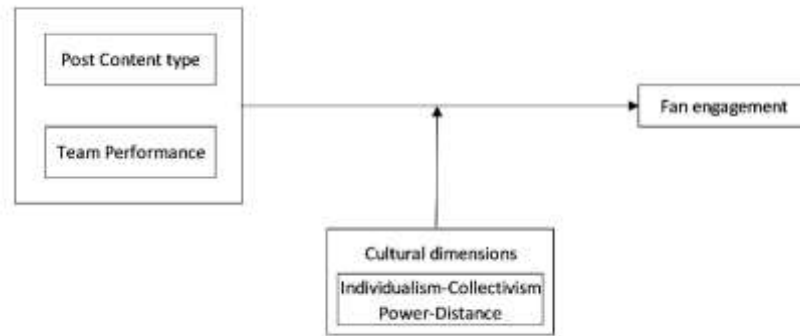


Figure 1: Conceptual model

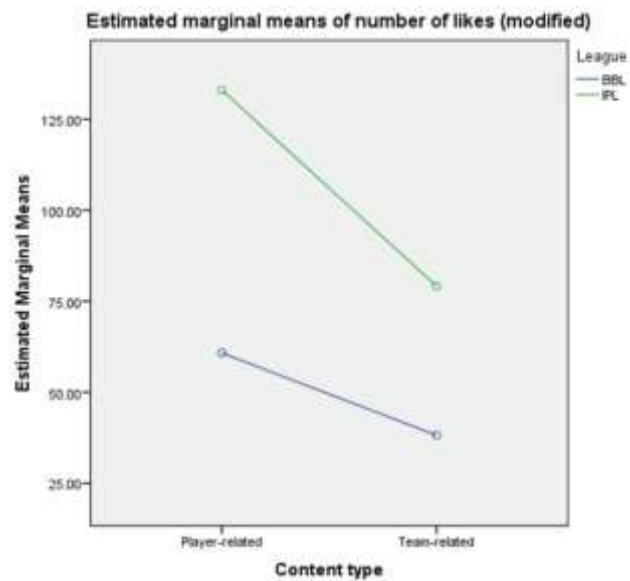


Figure 2: Comparison of means between different content types across leagues

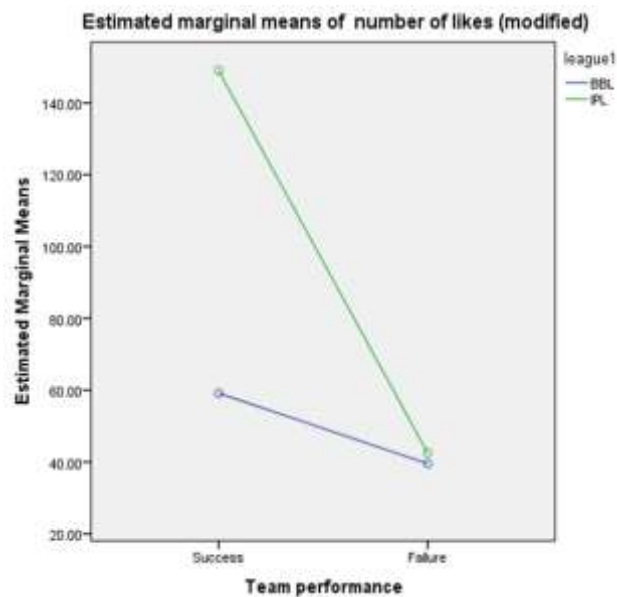


Figure 3: Comparison of means between team performances across leagues

Table 1: Summary statistics of the content type (Italics represent teams that lost in the league match)

		Content-type			
		Fan base	Total posts	Player- related	Team-related
Australian league	HH	369240	248	39.52%	60.48%
	<i>PS</i>	<i>388756</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>40.79%</i>	<i>59.21%</i>
Indian league	MI	13374160	545	65.69%	34.31%
	<i>RC</i>	<i>9362474</i>	<i>340</i>	<i>34.71%</i>	<i>65.29%</i>

Table 2: Summary of engagement metrics (Italics represent teams that lost in the league match)

Leagues	Indian league				Australian league			
Average number of likes (SD)	13802.54 (23320.16)				179.27 (229.81)			
Clubs	MI	<i>RCB</i>			HH	<i>PS</i>		
Average number of likes (SD)	19929.01 (27795.71)	<i>3982.18 (4610.16)</i>			218.41 (276.35)	<i>153.73 (189.59)</i>		
Content Type	Player-related	Team-related	<i>Player-related</i>	<i>Team-related</i>	Player-related	Team-related	<i>Player-related</i>	<i>Team-related</i>
Average number of likes (SD)	21482.13 (27409.32)	16955.65 (28357.81)	<i>4605.60 (6200.40)</i>	<i>3650.81 (3454.07)</i>	293.61 (362.08)	169.27 (187.35)	<i>190.26 (240.65)</i>	<i>128.57 (139.45)</i>

Table 3: ANOVA analysis for the effect of content type and team performance

Engagement metrics (Normalized by Fan base count)	Independent variables	Mean (SD)	F	Sig.
Number of Likes	Player-related	107.94 (161.76)	45.30	0.00
	Team-related	59.54 (115.57)		
	Team performance- Success	120.91 (182.08)	130.26	0
	Team performance- Failure	40.96 (48.98)		

Table 4: Univariate ANOVA analysis for the effect of content type and team performance across leagues

	Mean	Standard Error	F	Sig.
Content type			27.91	0.00
League			61.12	0.00
Content-type * League			4.67	0.03
Australian league * Player-related	60.78	8.61		
Indian league * Player-related	133.00	6.28		
Australian league * Team-related	38.18	7.07		
Indian league * Team-related	79.13	6.77		
League			42.74	0.00
Team performance			37.42	0.00
League * Team performance			78.82	0.00
Australian league * Team Success	59.15	4.75		
Indian league * Team Success	149.01	8.90		
Australian league * Team Failure	39.54	2.50		
Indian league * Team Failure	42.53	2.67		