

Social Media Content Strategy for Sport Clubs to drive Fan Engagement

Abstract:

The widespread adoption of the Facebook (FB) platform by sport fans has necessitated sport clubs to increase the content shared on FB with an aim to enhance fan engagement, and thereby drive sport clubs' revenues. However, merely increasing the quantum of content shared has turned out to be ineffective in increasing fan engagement. Instead, sport clubs need to design and execute platform-specific content strategies to enhance fan engagement. This study focuses on understanding the impact of the kind of content shared by sport clubs on fans' engagement in, and contribution to, FB fan pages. A netnography study was conducted on the FB platform among six cricket clubs of a major league – Indian Premier League, covering approximately 4000 club generated posts and recording over 76 million impressions on the six sport clubs' official fan pages across three years (2015-2017). We used the volume of likes, comments, shares, and the valence of comments, to measure fan engagement contribution activities on FB fan pages. We found that social content garnered maximum contribution, while remuneration related content resulted in the least contribution. Photos, representing medium vividness content, garnered maximum likes and comments, while high vividness content (i.e. videos) were most often shared. Further, the findings for the conditions arising from the interaction of team performance and seasonality are explicated. This study contributes to the emerging research on social media in the sport marketing literature, and provides practical prescriptions for sport clubs to improve their ability to engage their fan base online.

Keywords: Content strategy, Cricket, Facebook, Fan engagement, Social media, Sport

1. Introduction

Sport clubs strive hard to enhance and deepen their engagement with fans as this significantly drives fan loyalty (Lim, Hwang, Kim and Biocca 2015) and thereby the revenues of the sport clubs (Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012). In recent years, social media has become an important channel for sharing engaging content (Forbes, 2018), and is therefore widely used by sport clubs to engage with their fans. Due to the strong group cohesion among the vast number of sport fans on the internet (Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014), social media content serves as a potential tool for sport clubs to engage their fan communities. However, recent studies have revealed that while the volume of social media content shared by various brands has continued to increase at a rapid rate, the engagement level of social media users has not proportionately followed (Trackmaven, 2016). It is possible that the nature of content being shared is not always appropriate for increasing social media engagement. Therefore, there is a need for all brands, including sport clubs, to reassess the characteristics of the content they are sharing on social media. However, the extant literature has largely focussed on offline transactional behaviours in sport (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa & Biscaia, 2014). While a few studies have explored online behaviours, their focus was limited to the non-transactional aspects of fan-behaviours (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Stavros et al., 2014). Thus, previous research provides limited insight for sport clubs to manage their social media presence effectively (Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Abeza, O'Reilly, Séguin & Nzindukiyimana, 2015).

In view of the limitations of the extant sport management literature, the issue of increasing fan engagement through sport clubs' social media content strategies has yet to be addressed. Such an endeavour would satisfy a glaring void in sport management research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between sport clubs' social media content strategies and fans' engagement behaviours. The current study aims to aid

sport clubs in designing their social media content strategies by studying “What kind of content shared by sport clubs on social media influences fans to engage actively?”.

Our study is grounded in the ‘Uses and Gratification’ (U&G) theory (Katz, 1959) to study fans’ engagement behaviour. The U&G theory states that by using certain media types and content, people derive gratification and fulfil certain needs and desires (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010). The extant U&G research explains that the users’ desires for gratification acts as their motivator. This drives the users’ preference in consuming or using specific media and also the satisfaction level obtained from the engagement (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). In the online context, the users’ participation is manifested through various social media functionalities - tweets/posts, comments, and retweets/shares (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Sport clubs use various social media platforms to engage fans, by enabling content transfer among like-minded people, and allowing them to express themselves. Our study focuses on sport fans’ engagement with Facebook (FB) content shared by sport clubs.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, we present a literature review on social media engagement of sport fans and develop our conceptual framework. We then describe our mixed-method empirical study which is based on the FB fan pages of professional clubs of the top global cricket league – the Indian Premier League. The netnography study investigated approximately 4000 FB posts generated by sport clubs, and over 76 million fan-impressions on the official fan pages of these sport clubs over a three-year period (2015-2017). The research findings section presents and explicates the influence of the content characteristics of the sport-club generated social media content on fan engagement. Finally, we discuss our theoretical and practical contributions and offer suggestions for future research.

2. Social Media Engagement of sport fans

Common interest towards a subject, for instance, sport, binds fans as communities over social media (Popp, Wilson, Horbel & Woratschek, 2016). Fan engagement is observed to be a form of customer engagement behaviour in the sport context that focuses on the fan's non-transactional extra-role behaviour (Yoshida et al., 2014). The extant sport management literature suggests that fans have various motives that lead them to engage on social media. These motives include information gathering (Özsoy, 2011), entertainment (Witkemper, Lim & Waldburger, 2012), benefiting from promotional offers (Gibbs, O'Reilly & Brunette, 2014), and the need for social interactions (Clavio & Walsh, 2014). Thus, in order to gratify innate needs such as information, entertainment, remuneration and socialisation, sport fans engage with the content shared by the sport clubs on social media.

Fans engage in various forms of behaviour on social media through a spectrum of activities, some relatively passive while others being more active in nature (Malthouse et al., 2013). The Consumers Online Brand Related Activities (COBRA) framework categorises the fan-activities as consumption, contribution, and creation (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Consumption, the most prevalent form of engagement (Muntinga, Moorman & Smit, 2011), refers to mere viewing of the content shared (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy & Goodman, 2016). Contribution, a moderate level of engagement, covers activities such as liking, sharing or commenting on existing content (Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski, 2016; Dolan et al., 2016). Creation is the highest form of engagement, where the users actively conceive content such as posting reviews, photos, and using hashtags (Dolan et al., 2016). Content consumption rate or volume is usually not declared explicitly on social media platforms. The creation of new content is controlled by the sport clubs and fan-created content is often not included on official pages. Therefore, the contribution activity of sport fans is of interest. It is explicitly observable through measuring the volume and valence of activities on any social

media platform. Specifically, valence plays a vital role for sport clubs because fans with positive experiences are more likely to share content with others (Wakefield & Bennett, 2018), thereby enhancing the contribution aspect of fan engagement.

3. Hypotheses development

This study explores the means through which sport clubs could increase fan engagement levels. Based on a review of the extant literature (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2011; Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015; Steuer, 1992), we focus on two content characteristics: (a) content vividness and (b) content type. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework underlying this study. In the following section, we develop hypotheses within this framework.

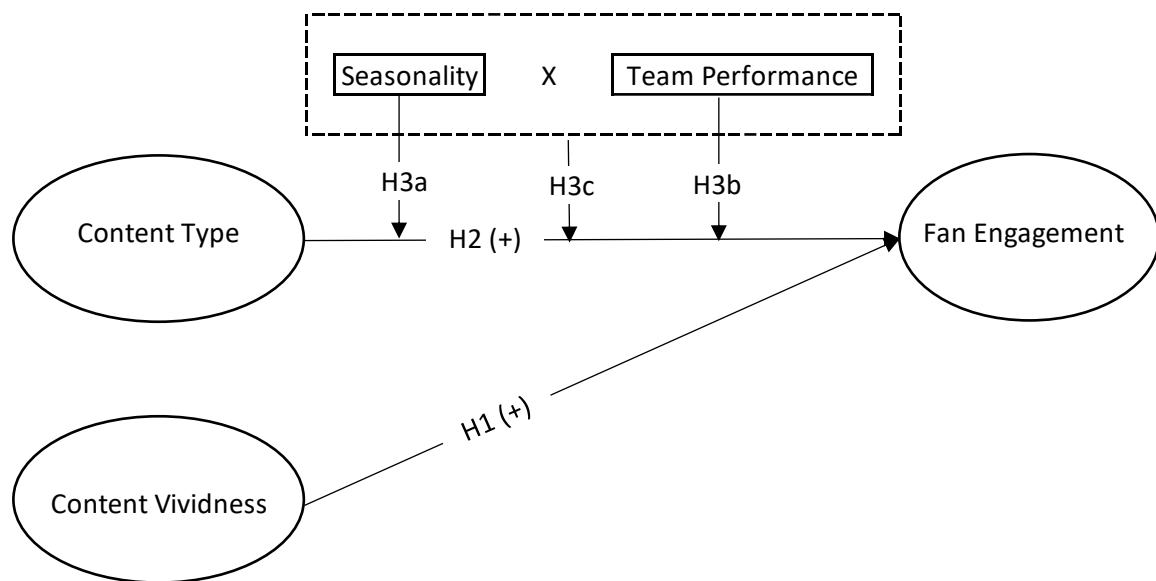


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

3.1. Content vividness

Content vividness, or media richness (Daft and Lengel, 1986), is the degree of sensory stimulation aroused by the content (Steuer, 1992). According to self-determination theory, a greater feeling of pleasure is a source of intrinsic motivation that represents individuals'

natural inclination toward spontaneous active engagement behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, the underlying rationale for the impact of content vividness on fan engagement is that hedonic benefits such as pleasure, fun, and beauty derived from content vividness enhances fans' desire to engage in social media activities associated with their favourite sport clubs. Different levels of vividness trigger varying impacts on sensory stimulation (Coyle and Thorson, 2001). For instance, the social media content in which a photo is shared has less vividness than one in which a video is shared. This is because videos stimulate both sight and hearing, while photos only stimulate sight. A greater degree of sensory stimulation, in turn, has a positive influence on social media engagement (Tafesse, 2016). Hence, we hypothesise that a greater degree of content vividness positively affects the sport fan engagement, and therefore:

H1: Content vividness level has a positive association with fan engagement, such that content with high vividness results in enhanced fan engagement.

3.2. Content type

Past research indicates that a brand can establish a meaningful relationship with consumers by sharing content with them on social media and that a brand's social media communication is enhanced by being active, humble, honest, interesting, and unprofessional (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The various types of content shared on social media can broadly be categorised as content related to providing information, entertainment, remuneration, and social activities (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2011; Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015) and the same have been explored in the study.

Information-seeking is one of the prime reasons for users to engage in a virtual community (Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004). The social media community can act as an information hub for users sharing product attributes, specifications and technical details

(Tafesse, 2015). In the sport context, fans actively seek information about their favourite teams and players (Tapp & Clowes, 2002). When sport clubs provide information related to their players, games, and fan-friendly services on social media, their fans are motivated to engage in seeking, sharing, and cocreating informative and entertaining content not only with the clubs, but also with other knowledgeable fans (Vale & Fernandes, 2018; Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, Shibuya, & Fujiwara, 2018).

Further, social media usage is driven by the associated entertainment value (Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo, 2004; Witkemper et al., 2012). The entertainment oriented content drives users to consume, contribute and create content on online platforms (Muntinga, Moorman & Smit, 2011). On social medial platforms, entertainment content often does not directly refer to a brand or to a specific product. The entertainment content comprises funny videos, tales, memes, teasers, and slogans (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013) that satisfy the users' motives to distract and divert themselves from their daily routines (Bronstein, 2013). In fact, sport fans also indulge in spectator sport with the motive to seek entertainment and find an escape from their daily routines (Milne & McDonald, 1999; Wann et al., 2001; Trail & James, 2001; Vale & Fernandes, 2018).

On social media platforms, remunerative content attracts attention and informs users about the availability of promotions, trials, coupons, and offers (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2011). Users who are driven by remuneration motives tend to engage in seeking and obtaining economic incentives on social media (Muntinga et al., 2011) and expect the brand to incentivise them for engaging with the brand's content (Kujur & Singh, 2017). Previous research has shown that sport fans are motivated to engage in their consumption behaviour because of economic gains (Tsotsou, 2012; Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Therefore, fans are likely to show higher engagement with remunerative content.

Apart from information, entertainment, and remuneration, one of the key drivers that motivates people to engage in online communities on social media is socialisation (Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2010). Social content consists of questions and statements to encourage sharing memories and pleasant consumption experiences that trigger responses and interactions among users (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). In the context of sport, socialisation and nostalgia are observed to be essential motives for engagement (Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2009; Milne & McDonald, 1999; Wann et al., 2001; Trail & James, 2001; Vale & Fernandes, 2018). For instance, in the context of NCAA athletics, the need for social interaction was found to be one of the key motivations for fans accessing FB (Clavio & Walsh, 2013). Also, nostalgia has been widely used to trigger online engagement (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011; Youn & Jin, 2017; Hickman, et al., 2018) because nostalgia is primarily a positive emotion that fosters social connectedness and increases one's self-esteem (Sedikides et al., 2008). For instance, the FB platform uses nostalgia as a potential tool to engage through its "On This Day" post or "Friendship Anniversary" reminder. Nostalgia in the sport context is defined as "the ability of the sport team to conjure up feelings from the past and fond memories" (Gladden & Funk, 2001, p. 73). For example, a fan may fondly recollect the glorious moment of action by ones supported entity (team or player) or the personal experience associated with the event. Further, sport fans are observed to be users in need of high social interaction and are expected to enthusiastically participate in sport-related activities on online platforms (Smock et al., 2011). Therefore, sport fans are likely to show higher levels of engagement with social content. Combining these considerations, we hypothesise the following:

H2: The type of content (i.e information, entertainment, remuneration, social) has a positive association with fan engagement, such that rich content enhances fan engagement.

3.3. Moderating Variables

The extant customer engagement literature suggests that in an online brand community, the influence of firm-engagement on user-engagement is moderated by the product, user and context (Wirtz et al., 2013). In sport, the product factors include the team's success, star player, head coach, team members, and team play (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011). The team performance, based on team play and success, drives fans to engage as they can influence the players' efforts and performances during a game through their participation in cheering for their favourite team (Yoshida & James, 2010). In relation to contextual factors, Wallace, Wilson and Miloch (2011) reported that social media content had a varying effect in different playoff sport seasons. However, their study did not focus on the off-season period during which the sport was not played by the teams. Studying fan engagement in the off-season is crucial as well because of the continuous engagement exhibited by the devoted and fanatical type of fans (Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw, 1999). Our study considers the moderating effect of seasonality and team performance in the relationship between content type, content vividness and fan engagement. Therefore, in the following section, we explain why seasonality acts as a moderating variable in this study.

3.3.1. Seasonality

Seasonality refers to the temporal imbalance in a phenomenon (Butler, 1994) representing a recurring periodic pattern. Sport is one such dynamic phenomenon (Loy, McPherson, & Kenyon, 1989) that is characterised by seasonality as many leading sport tournaments are played only over a few weeks or months in a year (Higham & Hinch, 2002). The nature of fan engagement is affected by the seasonality of sport – peak season or off-season. The off-season, i.e. a period when teams are not actively participating in a tournament, is marked by a low level of exposure of fans to a sport or a team. The off peak season is a challenging period

for the sport clubs to engage with their fans (Meng, Stavros, & Wetberg, 2015). Given the limited options for fans to interact around game-related matters during the off-season, social media forums facilitate connectivity and flow of information (Gantz, 2013). During the off-season, sport clubs associate with fans through various means such as showing special occasion wishes, conducting fan-appreciation events, and sharing club-related updates. In the off-season, sport clubs also share news about the performance of their players who are active in the national team. While the fan engagement during the peak season represents the voice of all kinds of fans, the fan engagement during the off-season period typically represents the voice of those highly identified fans who are motivated to seek and demonstrate fan engagement behaviour and social interactions in their fan communities (Stavros et al., 2014). Hence, the moderating effect of seasonality in this study is observed as:

H3a: Seasonality moderates the influence of content type on fan engagement, such that the impact of content type (information, entertainment, remuneration, social) on fan engagement is stronger in the peak season than in the off-season.

3.3.2. Team Performance

Sport fans are affected by sport team performance as their favourite team's success or failure is felt as a personal success or failure by the fans (Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson & Kennedy, 1992; Sutton, McDonald, Milne & Cimperman, 1997). Team identification and team performance are the two major constructs influencing spectator sport consumption (Mullin, 1985; Van Leeuwen, Quick & Daniel, 2002). Since sport fans exhibit a high degree of tolerance for poor performance of their favourite team (de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000), a team's failure in a particular event may have a small effect or no effect on the support exhibited by the fans. However, while sport teams can receive fan support during an unsuccessful season, it is also true that a team's good or bad performance results in various

behavioural reactions among fans. Fans desire a winning result for their favourite teams (Robinson, Trail, Dick & Gillentine, 2005; Funk, Beaton, & Alexandris, 2012) and react more positively when their team wins (Madrigal & Chen, 2008; Jang, Wann & Ko, 2018). From a theoretical standpoint, researchers have shown that fans tend to exhibit varying coping strategies with their team's wins and losses by basking in reflected glory (BIRGing), cutting off reflected failure (CORFing; Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980), basking in spite of reflected failure (BIRFing; Campbell, Aiken & Kent, 2004), and cutting off reflected success (CORSing; Campbell et al., 2004). The coping mechanism is also manifested in the fans' social media activities (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011) and is expected to have an influence on the relationship between the content shared by sport clubs on fan engagement. In this line, Pronschinske, Groza and Walker (2012) advocate the need to consider team performance while studying fan engagement on social media. Hence, a moderating effect of team performance is proposed as follows:

H3b: Team performance moderates the effect of content type on fan engagement, such that superior team performance strengthens the effect of content type (i.e. information, entertainment, remuneration, social) on fan engagement.

During the peak season, a team's wins or losses during the league matches will influence the effect of content shared on fan engagement. However, during the off-season, a team's performance is represented by the team's ranking, player statistics, and the fans' subjective evaluations in the context of the previous season. Generally, the teams which qualify from the league matches to the final rounds of a tournament are perceptually differentiated from the other teams, and are referred to as 'performing teams'. In contrast, the teams that are in the bottom positions in the league tables are referred to as non-performing teams. In this regard, Santos, Correia, Biscaia and Pegoraro (2018) emphasise the need to explain the fluctuation in fan engagement on social networking sites during different time periods and in the face of

varying team performances. Hence, we hypothesise the joint moderating influence of team performance and seasonality as follows:

H3c: Seasonality and team performance have an interactive effect in moderating the relationship between content type and fan engagement.

4. Method

We followed a mixed method approach (see Figure 2), combining quantitative and qualitative methods (Creamer, 2017) for this study. The qualitative approach, consisting of netnography and content analysis, was used to understand and answer the research questions for sport fan engagement. First, netnography was used to identify an appropriate social media platform (i.e. FB), and record the sport clubs content characteristics and fan engagement. Second, content analysis was used to identify the underlying themes in the FB posts. Third, sentiment analysis was used to capture the sentiment related to the FB comments made by fans. Finally, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to study the influence of independent variables and moderators as detailed in Figure 2.

4.1. Netnography

Netnography analysis is an online research method that studies the user interactions on the internet. Compared to other techniques, netnography reveals the story underlying the conversations over a digital platform. It is useful in studying complex social phenomena from where thematic inferences about user opinions can be drawn (Kozinets, 2002; Rageh, Melewar & Woodside, 2013).

Domestic cricket leagues and the associated sport clubs have gained prominence in the last decade with the emergence of the Indian Premier League (IPL) in 2008. The IPL is the most prominent domestic cricket league in the world, and players from most major cricket playing nations participate in the league. In a short span of time, the popularity of IPL clubs

has grown exponentially, and some IPL clubs have over 10 million fans following the official fan pages on social media platforms. Given its prominence and rapid growth, the IPL was selected as the focus of the netnography study.

A total of eight clubs have participated in the league regularly. The brand pages were included based on the performance and continuous participation of cricket clubs in the IPL. As two of the clubs, i.e., Chennai Super Kings (CSK), and Rajasthan Royals (RR) were suspended during the 2015 and 2016 season, the other six cricket clubs'¹ social media pages were considered for investigation. Out of all the social media sites, FB has the largest active user base. FB has more users than the combined total users of Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram put together (CNBC Social Media, 2014). This makes it imperative for sport clubs to consider FB as an essential platform to enhance fan engagement (Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013; Yoshida et al., 2018). Online groups that show active interactions by a large number of individuals are considered as an appropriate source for data collection (Kozinet, 2010). On the official FB pages, sport clubs possess well-organized posts over an extended timeline and serve as a potential platform for the sport clubs to connect with the fans. Hence FB was chosen as the source for data collection.

¹ The six IPL clubs included in our study are: Delhi Daredevils (DD), Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), Kings XI Punjab (KXI), Mumbai Indians (MI), Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB), and SunRisers Hyderabad (SRH)

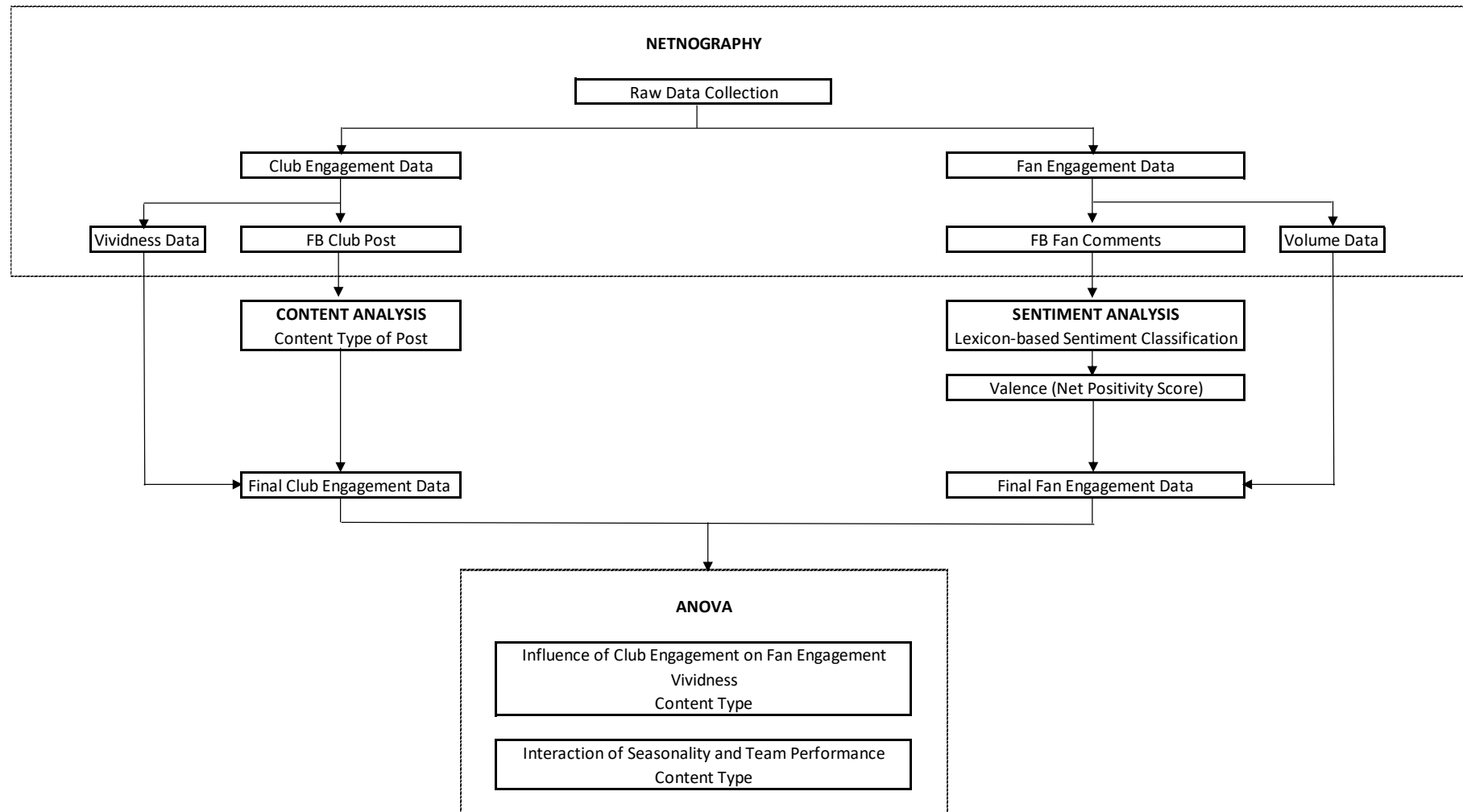


Figure 2 Mixed Methods Research

To ensure data accuracy and avoid changes on the platform, the online data was retrieved in a narrow timeline (Krippendorff, 2013) within two weeks in July 2018, using the application program interface (API), Netvizz (Rieder, 2013). The data consisted of all posted data on the FB fan pages of the six sport clubs for the period of April 2015 to November 2017. The data can be broadly categorised into two parts based on the primary action of the involved stakeholders (sport club and fans) namely – (1) sport club action of content sharing on FB platform and (2) fan contribution in the form of likes, comments and shares. . We retrieved all the post objects shared by each brand’s page administrator and categorised them as ‘brand posts’. The relevant details shared in each post contained: the message (post content), type of post media, number of likes (all reactions), comments and shares, the creation time, and the comment content. Only the posts shared by the page administrator were retrieved. For further content analysis, we retrieved a total of 3881 posts published on the six IPL club pages. The unit of analysis was the FB posts shared by the sport club.

4.2. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a standard approach to systematically identify the presence of concepts and themes within data sets (Bryman, 2017; Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012). Neuendorf and Kumar (2002) defined content analysis as a scientific approach for quantitative analysis of messages that is not scoped by the context or the type of variables. The approach is widely used to find common sport themes in social media research (example: Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Content analysis was found suitable for this study as it provides a systematic method to classify the types of content in a larger dataset. During content analysis, the codebook and definitions were adapted based on theoretically supported categories (Wright, Gaber, Robin & Cai, 2018; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Su, Reynolds & Sun, 2015; Luarn et al., 2015).

Data were coded manually by an independent coder, who had knowledge of cricket (specifically IPL) but no knowledge of the proposed research hypotheses, and by one author involved in this study. The coder was provided an explanation about the codes and doubts were clarified after a sample of posts were coded together (10% of the posts, n = 389). Further, the coder was asked to make a subjective call based on his experience on posts that did not fall on the above-shared outline. The intercoder reliability for the commonly coded sample was 0.89 and was within the accepted range of 0.8-1.0 (Krippendorff, 2012; Perreault & Leigh, 1989). The differences in coding were examined and resolved by the researchers.

4.3. Variable Operationalization

The content type and content vividness are operationalized as part of club engagement. The primary engagement activities of the fans are operationalized under fan engagement. The proposed research model with the operationalized variable is detailed in Figure 3.

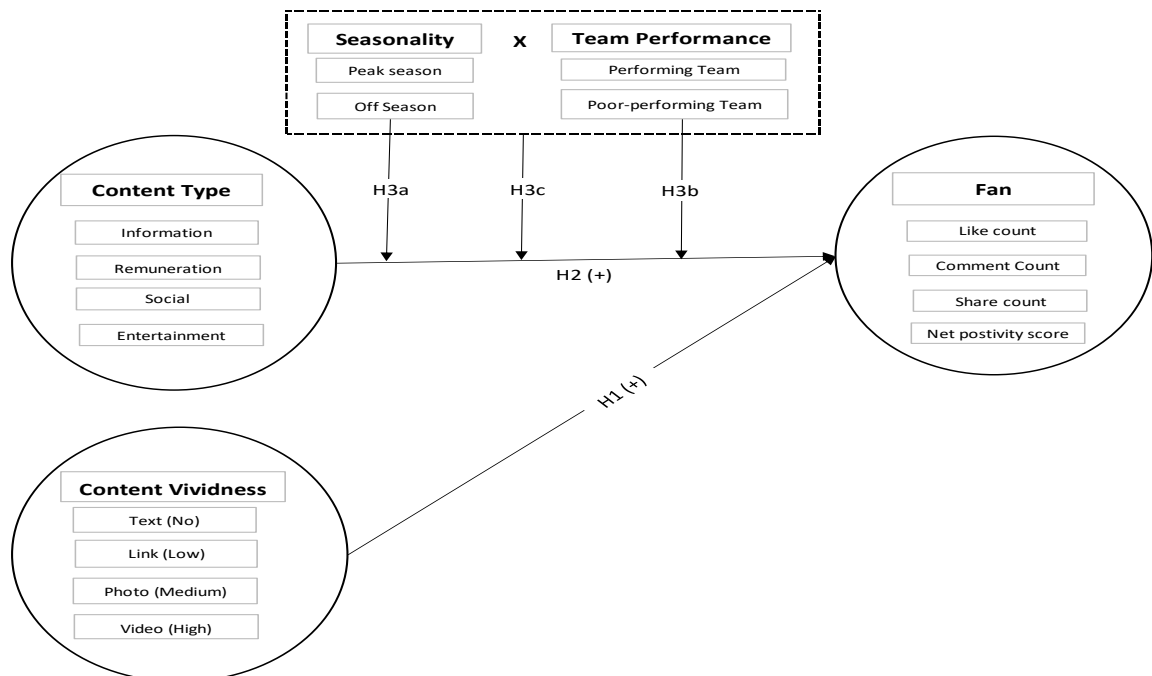


Figure 3: Research Model with Operationalization of Variables

4.3.1. Independent variable: Club engagement

Content vividness: In line with the relevant literature (Fortin and Dholakia, 2005; Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013; Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015), the vividness of FB content was observed at four levels. The content containing (1) videos – rated as high vividness; (2) photos as medium vividness; (3) website links that redirects as low; and (4) only text as no vividness.

Content type: In line with literature (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; De Vries, Gensler & Leeftang, 2012; Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015), the type of FB content was classified into four content types namely (1) information – i.e. content about club, team, player and associated marketing activities; (2) entertainment – i.e. content containing funny videos, narratives, teasers, slogans and banter; (3) remuneration – i.e. content on promotions and offers; and (4) social – i.e. content regarding questions and statements to trigger socialization and fan interaction.

Moderators: Team performance was categorised into either performing team or poor-performing team. The teams' winning percentage at the end of the season is an unbiased assessment of how well the team met a common goal held by all teams (Timmerman, 2000). The study categorised the teams with the highest winning percentage in the league stage games as performing teams, and the teams with the least winning percentage in the league games as poor-performing ones (Table 1). For instance, SRH and RCB were categorised as 'performing teams' as they secured the top two positions in IPL 2015. Similarly, KXI and DD were considered as poor performing teams as they were placed in the last two positions among the teams considered in IPL 2015. In this way, the team performances were demarcated by distancing the team positions through game outcomes. Seasonality was categorised into peak season and off-season. This classification was used to examine the differences in effect under four different conditions of the interaction variables, namely: (1)

performing team and peak season, (2) performing team and off-season, (3) non-performing team and peak season, and (4) non-performing team and off-season.

Table 1 Team Performance

Year	Performing Teams (Position/Rank)	Poor-Performing Teams (Position/Rank)
2015	MI (1), RCB (3) ²	KXI (8), DD (7)
2016	SRH (1), RCB (2)	KXI (8), DD (6) ³
2017	MI (1), KKR (3) ⁴	RCB (8), DD (6) ⁵

Notes: MI, Mumbai Indians; RCB, Royal Challengers Bangalore; KXI, Kings XI Punjab; DD, Delhi Daredevils; SRH, SunRisers Hyderabad; RCB, Royal Challengers Bangalore

4.3.2. Dependent variable: Fan engagement

In line with Vale and Fernandes (2018), fan engagement on sport club-owned fan pages was categorized as (1) consume – read content, view picture, and watch video shared by club and fans; (2) contribute – like, share and comment on content shared by club and other fans; and (3) create – craft new content as post. As explained previously, the study is restricted to the contribution activities of fans measured by – the number of likes, comments, and shares. Net Positivity score was utilized as the valence measure. Data from less-bounded social networking sites such as FB consist of complex conversational data with repeated letters in a word to convey stress on emotion (‘terificccc!!!’), impromptu abbreviations (lol-laughing out loud), misspellings and typing errors, and use of emoticons. Sentistrength is a widely used lexicon-based sentiment analysis tool (Thelwall, Buckley & Paltoglou, 2012) and is effective

² 2015 – CSK was positioned as the second-ranked performing club. Since the team was suspended as a disciplinary measure in 2016 and 2017, the club was not included in the study.

³ 2016 – Rising Pune Supergiant was positioned as the second last non-performing club. Since the club was a make-shift arrangement for only 2016 and 2017, the club was not included in the study.

⁴ 2017 – Rising Pune Supergiant was positioned as the second performing club. Since the club was a make-shift arrangement for only 2016 and 2017, the club was not included in the study.

⁵ 2017 – Gujarat Lions was positioned as the second last non-performing club. Since the club was a make-shift arrangement for only 2016 and 2017, the club was not included in the study.

to extract FB comment sentiments (Tang, Fang & Wang, 2014). The tool has inbuilt lookup tables to identify emoticons (‘ 😊 ’), trimmed word for emotions expressed through extra letters (‘terrific*’), booster words (‘really’), slang words (‘alol – actually laughing out loud), idiom (‘whats up’), and negating words (‘don’t’). The tool segregates positive and negative sentiments of each comment based on an built-in pre-defined set of words, and assigns scores from -5 to -1 for negative sentiment, 0 for neutral sentiment, and +1 to +5 for positive sentiment words. Net positivity score was calculated as the number of positive comments minus the number of negative comments per post (Goh, Heng & Lin, 2013).

5. Data Analysis

5.1.Descriptive Statistics:

The average number of club fans was 9,864,916 per club (SD = 4,561,714); the average number of posts per club was 646.83 (SD = 290.45). Table 2 shows the summary statistics of the fan engagement per club page considered in this study.

Table 2 Summary statistics of the online engagement per sport club fan pages considered

Club	Total Fans	Total posts	Likes		Comments		Shares	
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
DD	4,710,818	981	6,372.91	13,980.06	92.03	180.43	55.41	139.67
KKR	16,823,334	381	21,484.30	28,594.71	293.80	1,121.71	538.62	1,453.01
KXI	8,835,017	568	16,946.65	19,411.61	161.31	268.48	125.10	343.68
MI	13,400,762	608	41,863.01	81,239.60	458.34	1,142.43	1,085.20	3,124.15
RCB	9,471,857	1,011	16,830.13	24,826.81	169.89	447.26	361.43	2,273.50
SRH	5,947,711	332	16,424.99	27,190.66	169.89	267.62	278.96	1,069.56

Notes: M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation

To determine how FB club pages are used, we first examined the distribution of the selected variables (Table 3).

Table 3 Summary statistics of content vividness and content type

	Types	Post Count	Like		Comment		Share	
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Content vividness	High (Video)	852	11,479.97	20,202.27	297.56	1,134.04	566.83	2,826.76
	Medium (Photo)	2,947	20,855.90	43,843.94	184.63	421.70	326.69	1,432.07
	Low (Link)	86	10,003.80	10,149.80	50.64	65.22	61.31	160.60
	No (Text)	2	412.50	330.22	27.50	30.41	4.00	4.24
Content type	Information	2,016	18,401.53	38,305.06	188.69	681.76	345.75	1,279.61
	Entertainment	444	23,213.65	49,683.41	192.90	584.27	664.73	3,628.70
	Remuneration	293	10,348.95	29,086.26	229.16	642.60	121.96	314.91
	Social	1,134	19,107.44	39,384.75	237.07	608.14	374.21	1,800.33

Notes: M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation

5.1.1 Content vividness: Medium vividness content (photo) was the most frequently used (75.82%) media type, followed by high vividness (video; 21.92%). There were only two text-only posts (representing no vividness). Therefore, the text-only posts were categorized by clubbing together with posts with links, representing low vividness (2.26%).

5.1.2 Content type: Posts containing information were most frequently used (51.87%) by the clubs, followed by social posts (29.17%), entertaining posts (11.42%), and finally, remuneration posts (7.54%). Accordingly, the individual engagement measures such as like, comment, share and sentiment does seem to be affected to varying degrees by the independent variables - content type and content vividness.

5.2. Hypothesis testing:

The descriptive statistics of different types of online fan engagement measures are shown in Table 4. We can observe that the individual measures violate the assumptions of normality, as the skewness and kurtosis of the variables are greater than |3| and |10| respectively. To address this, the individual values are transformed by converting them to logarithms and these were used to test the hypotheses (Moore & McCabe, 1989). The interpretations are reported based on the transformed values.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics of different online engagement types

No.	Engagement	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Correlation		
						1	2	3
1	Like	18,550.15	39,569.03	13.06	318.62	1.00		
2	Comment	206.34	647.52	12.80	267.17	.38	1.00	
3	Share	373.29	1,821.33	19.38	538.32	.52	.41	1.00

Notes: M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation

5.2.1. Effect of post vividness on fan engagement

Content with high vividness is expected to exhibit more online engagement than the content with medium and low vividness. From Table 5, we can observe that the level of vividness showed a significant differential effect on online engagement (like: $F = 31.08$, $p < 0.001$; comment: $F = 34.98$, $p < 0.001$; share: $F = 57.13$, $p < 0.001$; net positivity: $F = 20.64$, $p < 0.001$). Analysis for online engagement in the form of likes, comments and net positivity scores revealed that fans are more likely to engage with medium vividness content than with content with high vividness. In contrast, fans are more likely to share high vivid content than share medium vivid content. Therefore, H1 was only partially supported.

Table 5 ANOVA Analysis for the effect of post vividness

Dependent Variable	Vividness	M	SD	F	<i>p</i>
Like	Low	3.69	0.59	30.09	.000
	Medium	3.94	0.61		
	High	3.77	0.5		
Comment	Low	1.30	0.69	34.98	.000
	Medium	1.81	0.69		
	High	1.66	0.73		
Share	Low	1.23	0.68	57.13	.000
	Medium	1.81	0.76		
	High	2.03	0.72		
Net postivity	Low	0.95	0.49	20.64	.000
	Medium	1.36	0.62		
	High	1.25	0.74		

Notes: M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation; F, *f*-value; *p*, *p*-value.

Post hoc analyses was conducted to further test H1. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance revealed that there was significant difference in variance across subgroups for like (Levene = 16.98, $p < 0.01$), share (Levene = 4.15, $p < 0.05$) and net positivity score (Levene = 15.18, $p < 0.01$) and non-significant difference in variance across subgroups for comments (Levene = 0.48; $p < 0.62$). The violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption is tolerable as the variance of one sub-group is no more than four times the variance of another (Tilley, 1990). Further, Games-Howell's and Tukey's comparison procedure was used to investigate the differences among the levels of vividness (see Table 6). In brief, medium vividness gained maximum likes, comments and net positivity score, and high vividness gained maximum shares.

Table 6 The results of post hoc tests

Dependent Variable	Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Games-Howell's/ Tukey's Test
Like ^a	Low	Medium	-0.25***	Medium>Low
		High	-0.08	High>Low
	Medium	High	0.16***	Medium>High
Comment ^b	Low	Medium	-0.52***	Medium>Low
		High	-0.37***	High>Low
	Medium	High	0.15***	Medium>High
Share ^a	Low	Medium	-0.57***	Medium>Low
		High	-0.80***	High>Low
	Medium	High	-0.26***	High>Medium
Net positivity score ^a	Low	Medium	-0.41***	Medium>Low
		High	-0.30***	High>Low
	Medium	High	0.11***	Medium>High

Notes: ^a Games-Howell's Test; ^b Tukey's Test; * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

5.2.2. Effect of post content type on fan engagement

The effect of post content type on fan engagement showed a significant primary effect, supporting H2. Table 7 provides the results of ANOVA.

Table 7 ANOVA Analysis for the effect of content type

Dependent Variable	Content type	M	SD	F	<i>p</i>
Like	Information	3.88	0.59	89.58	.000
	Remuneration	3.46	0.55		
	Social	4.07	0.54		
	Entertainment	3.69	0.53		
Comment	Information	1.72	0.69	62.12	.000
	Remuneration	1.67	0.78		
	Social	2.00	0.64		
	Entertainment	1.42	0.55		
Share	Information	1.83	0.76	60.89	.000
	Remuneration	1.32	0.67		
	Social	2.02	0.74		
	Entertainment	1.70	0.72		
Net positivity	Information	1.28	0.63	69.45	.000
	Remuneration	1.08	0.57		
	Social	1.54	0.66		
	Entertainment	1.00	0.54		

Notes: M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation; F, *f*-value; *p*, *p*-value.

Further, post hoc analyses was conducted to test H2. Because the result of the Levene's test (Like: Levene =6.01, $p < 0.01$; Comment: Levene =7.24, $p < 0.01$; Share: Levene =2.27, $p < 0.1$; Net positivity: Levene =5.43; $p < 0.01$) suggest that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was rejected, we used Games-Howell's comparison procedure to further investigate the differences among the four content types (see Table 8). In brief, social content received the highest level of engagement for both volume, and valence measures of fan engagement, followed by information content.

Table 8 The results of post hoc tests

Dependent Variable	Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Games-Howell's Test
Like	Information	Remuneration	0.42***	Information>Remuneration
		Social	-0.19***	Social>Information
		Entertainment	0.20***	Information>Entertainment
	Remuneration	Social	-0.61***	Social>Remuneration
		Entertainment	-0.23***	Entertainment>Remuneration
		Social	0.38***	Social>Entertainment
Comment	Information	Remuneration	0.06	
		Social	-0.26***	Social>Information
		Entertainment	0.35***	Information>Entertainment
	Remuneration	Social	-0.31***	Social>Remuneration
		Entertainment	0.29***	Remuneration>Entertainment
		Social	0.60***	Social>Entertainment
Share	Information	Remuneration	0.51***	Information>Remuneration
		Social	-0.19***	Social>Information
		Entertainment	0.14*	Information>Entertainment
	Remuneration	Social	-0.69***	Social>Remuneration
		Entertainment	-0.37***	Entertainment>Remuneration
		Social	0.32***	Social>Entertainment
Net Positivity	Information	Remuneration	0.21***	Information>Remuneration
		Social	-0.25***	Social>Information
		Entertainment	0.29***	Information>Entertainment
	Remuneration	Social	-0.46***	Social>Remuneration
		Entertainment	0.08	
		Social	0.54***	Social>Entertainment

Notes: *p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5.2.3. Examining moderating effects

The results of ANOVA analysis of the moderating effect of seasonality and team performance on the relationship between content type and fan engagement are presented in table 9 and 10.

Table 9: ANOVA Analysis for the moderating effect of seasonality

Content Type	Seasonality	Like		Comment		Share		Net positivity	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Information	Off-season	3.58	0.72	0.99	0.74	1.27	0.82	0.89	0.64
	Peak season	3.93	0.55	1.84	0.61	1.92	0.71	1.34	0.61
Remuneration	Off-season	2.87	0.62	1.05	0.85	0.81	0.72	0.80	0.54
	Peak season	3.55	0.48	1.76	0.73	1.40	0.63	1.11	0.57
Social	Off-season	3.95	0.56	1.65	0.76	1.76	0.78	1.39	0.70
	Peak season	4.09	0.54	2.04	0.63	2.07	0.72	1.56	0.65
Entertainment	Off-season	3.40	0.63	1.19	0.95	1.24	0.78	1.05	0.84
	Peak season	3.73	0.51	1.40	0.53	1.76	0.69	0.99	0.49
F		64.83		91.16		70.04		50.00	
p		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Notes: M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation; F, *f*-value; *p*, *p*-value.

Table 10: ANOVA Analysis for the moderating effect of team performance

Content Type	Team Performance	Like		Comment		Share		Net positivity	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Information	Poor-performing	3.66	0.55	1.5393	0.693	1.45	0.63	1.10	0.58
	Performing	4.1	0.54	1.9038	0.646	2.21	0.68	1.45	0.63
Remuneration	Poor-performing	3.3	0.46	1.615	0.73	1.14	0.57	0.97	0.48
	Performing	3.7	0.6	1.7479	0.859	1.60	0.71	1.25	0.66
Social	Poor-performing	3.9	0.47	1.8785	0.591	1.67	0.56	1.36	0.58
	Performing	4.23	0.55	2.074	0.723	2.35	0.73	1.69	0.69
Entertainment	Poor-performing	3.48	0.63	1.1846	0.677	1.28	0.69	0.90	0.59
	Performing	3.85	0.37	1.5341	0.47	2.03	0.55	1.07	0.49
F		125.57		55.79		205.89		70.72	
p		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Notes: M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation; F, *f*-value; *p*, *p*-value.

When seasonality was chosen as the moderating variable, there was a significant difference in the fan engagement measures (like – F: 64.83, $p < 0.001$; comment – F: 91.16, $p < 0.001$; share

– F: 70.04, $p < 0.001$; net positivity – F: 50.00, $p < 0.001$). In other words, fan engagement differs across peak season and off-season. When team performance was tested as the moderating variable, there was a significant difference in the fan engagement measures (like – F: 125.57, $p < 0.001$; comment – F: 55.79, $p < 0.001$; share – F: 205.89, $p < 0.001$; net positivity – F: 70.72, $p < 0.001$). This means that fan engagement differs across performing and poor-performing teams. Thus, hypotheses H3a and H3b were supported.

We also tested the combined moderating effects of seasonality and team performance (see figure 4) and found differences in fan engagement measures (like – F: 71.75, $p < 0.001$; comment – F: 69.36, $p < 0.001$; share – F: 119.51, $p < 0.001$; net positivity – F: 41.76, $p < 0.001$). Analysis showed a significant combined interaction effect of seasonality and team performance on the influence of sport club engagement on fan engagement supporting H3c. This indicates that taking seasonality and team performance jointly into consideration, adds a nuance to our understanding of fan engagement. There was higher fan engagement for all content types in the peak season than in the off-season, and for performing teams compared to poor performing teams. The likelihood of fans liking posts varied in a decreasing order of social, information, entertainment, and remuneration. The differences with respect to the engagement measures are detailed below:

Likes: Social content shared by poor performing team during off-season (M: 3.93; SD: 0.53) garnered more likes than during peak season (M: 3.89; SD: 0.46). Remunerative content was more useful to obtain likes for a poor performing team (M: 2.92; SD: 0.47) than for a winning team during off-season (M: 2.79; SD: 0.79).

Comments: The pattern of comments during peak season were in line with the overall pattern wherein social content gained the highest number of comments. However, remunerative content shared by non-performing teams during off-season (M: 1.25; SD: 0.81) received

higher comments than that shared by performing teams (M: 0.77; SD: 0.86). Also, social content shared during off-season by non-performing teams (M: 1.66; SD: 0.80) recorded higher comments than that shared by performing teams (M: 1.63; SD: 0.72).

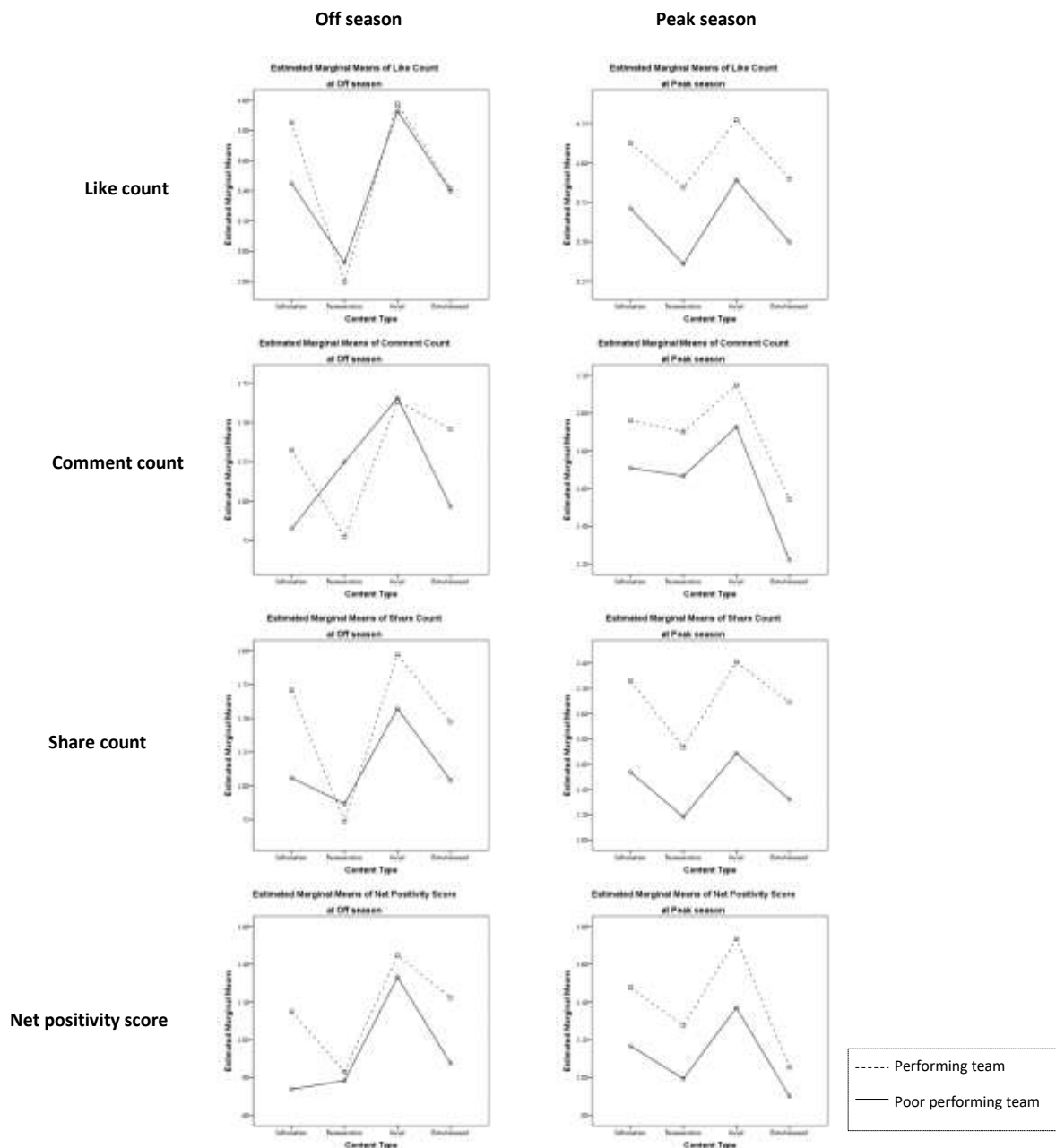


Figure 4 Interaction effect of seasonality and team performance

Shares: Remunerative content during the off-season gained lesser shares by performing teams (M: 0.74; SD: 0.88) in comparison with poor-performing teams (M: 0.87; SD: 0.61).

Net positivity: Entertainment content shared by performing teams during the off-season garnered higher positivity score (M: 1.22; SD: 0.80) than that shared during the peak season (M: 1.05; SD: 0.45). For the poor performing teams, information content shared during the off-season received the least positivity score (M: 0.74; SD: 0.57) in comparison to social content (M: 1.33; SD: 0.72), entertainment content (M: 0.87; SD: 0.89) and remuneration content (M: 0.78; SD: 0.48).

6. Discussion

6.1. Content Vividness

Consistent with earlier findings on online users, our study found that the vividness of content shared by marketers significantly influences engagement of end users (Coyle and Thorson, 2001; Fortin and Dholakia, 2005; Luarn et al., 2015). Sport clubs' posts with higher level of vividness encourage fans to express themselves. Posts with videos (representing high vividness) gained higher shares compared to posts with photos, which is consistent with Xu, Oh & Teo (2009). However, in contrast to Xu, Oh & Teo (2009), high vividness posts gained less likes and comments compared to those with photos, as observed by Luarn et al. (2015). This suggests that social media engagement (specifically FB) is context-specific for vividness measures, and maybe unique to the sport domain. A possible explanation for medium vividness (photos) to have higher number of likes and comments is that videos, unlike photos, consume longer time to view (De Vries et al., 2012; Luarn et al., 2015), thereby discouraging certain fans from watching them fully. Therefore, fans show greater willingness to like and comment on posts with medium levels of vividness. A possible explanation for the difference in sharing by fans can be attributed to the differential impacts of liking, commenting and

sharing behaviour in FB (Kim & Yang, 2017). The sharing action expresses a higher level of commitment in comparison to liking and commenting as the shared post constitutes a part of the users' self-presentation on FB. The content shared by the fan gets posted on the fan's newsfeed, profile page, and is also displayed to the fan's network. While liking and commenting on a post appears on the fan's newsfeed, it gets pushed out of the newsfeed before long. Therefore, high vividness with increased features may be required to justify the sharing action of fans, who are characterized by a self-expressive nature (Abosag, Roper & Hind, 2012), by catering to the high degree of emotional involvement.

6.2. Post Content Type

The findings establish that content type plays a vital role in posting strategies because it significantly influences the online engagement level, which is in line with previous studies (Luarn et al., 2015; Vale & Fernandez, 2018). The affinity for social content was the highest for both volume and valence measures of fan engagement. This points to the value of sharing content that triggers the need for interaction among fans. Vale and Fernandez (2018) observed that the need for integration and social interaction trigger the contribution activities of fans namely liking, commenting, and sharing on FB. Here, the sport clubs sharing content serve as communities for integration that share a sense of belonging, symbolism, and social recognition (Popp et al., 2016), while the social content enables social interaction (Stavros et al., 2014). Further, the content triggering nostalgic feeling (grouped under social) was highly associated with sport fan engagement (Vale & Fernandes, 2018). Therefore, fans may actively engage in nostalgic sport content for the associated psychological benefits such as positive affect, self-esteem enhancement, and social networking opportunity.

The content with information was considered the second most engaging form by fans, thereby establishing the possibility of increased engagement with information content, . One of the

most significant reasons for the presence of fans on social media is the desire to obtain information (Stavros et al., 2014). As such, sport fans access social media to gratify the need for information on event updates, club activities, merchandise, teams and players (Ozsoy, 2011; Witkemper et al., 2012; Clavio and Walsh, 2014). Therefore, in line with literature, it is appropriate that information content has gained increased engagement among fans in our study.

Surprisingly, content classified as remuneration garnered comparatively lesser engagement. Customer engagement literature on brands has observed remuneration content to have a leading influence on engagement (Luarn et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2017). A possible explanation for the lack of engagement with remuneration content in the sport context can be offered through uncertainty aversion tendency that explains the preference of individuals for known risks over unknown risks (Ellsberg, 1961). A certain reward, say 'win tickets' or 'win goodies', may convey a fixed and immediate compensation than an uncertain reward, say 'win tickets, goodies etc.'. Post-hoc analysis of the remuneration themes categorised as certain rewards and uncertain rewards that are comparable (certain: 'win tickets' or 'win goodies'; uncertain: 'win tickets, goodies etc.'), validated that the sport fans tend to engage on contents that detail a specific reward such as a ticket or a goody as against a content with vague reward like tickets, goodies etc. (Table 12). The other reason could be that the fans might be interested in competition announcements but not on subsequent updates (Schultz et al., 2017). For example, the winner announcements of the contest may not attract significant engagement as it is often limited to the network of the winning participant and thereby engages only a part of the target audience.

Table 11 Average engagement measure for comparable remuneration categories

Reward Certainty	Like count	Comment count	Share count
Certain reward ('Tickets' or 'Goodies')	5419	198	56
Uncertain reward ('Tickets, Goodies etc.')	2878	205	23

Note: The significance of the observation is not tested and is based on descriptive statistics

In our study, entertainment content garnered relatively less engagement. This is in contrast to previous studies that found entertainment content garnered maximum shares for FMCG brands (Luarn et al., 2015), and maximum likes in the context of fast food brands (Wright et al., 2017). In the sport context, Witkemper et al. (2012) also highlighted entertainment to be one of the key motives driving fans to use social media. One possible reason for the relative lack of fan engagement in the sport context may be that the entertainment content deviates from the mainstream action of the sport. In general, the motivation of fans to follow sport is because of the associated entertainment, and as a means to escape routine. Therefore, entertainment content beyond the context of IPL itself (shared as funny updates, pictures and videos) may not motivate fans to engage in comparison to social or information content pertaining to IPL.

6.3. Seasonality

Seasonality has a significant moderating influence on the effect of content type on volume and valence measures of fan engagement. During both peak season and off- season, the liking of fans was similar to the overall pattern observed in hypothesis 2, with social content recording the highest engagement, followed by information, entertainment and remuneration respectively. Peak season registered higher likes than off-season across content types because the primary club activity of participating in the event happens during the peak period. Based on Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw (1999) classification of fans, the peak season registers

engagement across all types of fans while the engagement during off-season is restricted to only devoted and fanatical type of fans.

During the peak season, fans comment in decreasing order of social, information, remuneration and entertainment content. The same is not observed during off-season where entertainment content gets more comments than information and remuneration. This deviance is possibly because of the lack of interest or restricted interest for information on secondary activities of clubs (such as conducting events that engage the local institutions like schools, corporates etc). It is likely that the fans are not as interested in these as compared to their interest in the major sport events and thus engagement in off peak season gets relatively restricted to the social circle of the partakers. The comment sentiment measured through net positivity are largely similar to the observations of comment volume. The positive sentiment is high during peak season than offseason, which is again consistent with our earlier discussion. However, entertainment content gathered higher valence during off- season than peak season. This might be because the IPL is typically followed by fans from India, and the offseason period coincides with many popular Indian festivals such as Dusschera, Diwali, and, Durga Puja. In contrast, very few festivals, such as Easter, are celebrated in the month of April and May which is the peak IPL season (Lonely Planet, 2018).

6.4. Team Performance

Team performance significantly moderates the effect of content type on the volume and valence measures of fan engagement. In lines with hypothesis 2, fan liking for content was in a decreasing order for social, information, entertainment and remuneration content. Across content types, in line with extant sport literature, the performing teams registered more likes than the poor-performing teams. This is because the fans are inclined to bask in reflected glory (BIRGing) on their team's winning performance and cut-off reflected failure

(CORFing) on their favourite team's losses (e.g., Yoshida et al., 2014). In sport, this can be witnessed when the fans in a stadium loudly celebrate their supported team's victory, and are rather muted when their supported team loses. A similar pattern recurs in the sport fan's social media engagement (Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw, 1999; Vale and Fernandes, 2018).

Team performance did not moderate the effect of content types on comment volume and valence. A possible reason for this is that since sport fans display a high degree of forbearance for the supported team's performance (de Ruyter and Wetzels, 2000), their team's poor performance in a particular event may not upset the support exhibited by the fans. In line with hypothesis 1, the sharing of posts by fans (across performing and poor-performing teams) was in the decreasing order of social, information, entertainment and remuneration content. The similitude to liking is for the reason that share is a combination of like and comment (Kim and Yang, 2017). It is likely that the fans share the content without a comment, just as an affective response, and this appears analogous to the act of liking by fans.

6.5.Interaction Effect of Seasonality and Team Performance

Seasonality and team performance interact together and moderate the effect of content type on the volume and valence constituents of fan engagement. During peak seasons, the engagement of fans was similar to the overall pattern observed with social content gaining the highest, followed by information, entertainment and remuneration respectively. However, the pattern of fan engagement was different during the off-season. For garnering fan likes, comments, and shares, remunerative content works better for poor-performing teams than for performing teams. A probable cause for increased engagement might be that poor performing teams may share more attractive remuneration for the fans to engage. Also, information content was less effective in comparison to other content types during the offseason for poor

performing teams. A likely reason might be the fan's tendency to dissociate from failure (CORFing; example: Yoshida et al., 2014) and manage the self-presentation on FB.

7. Conclusion

From the perspective of sport clubs, FB is more than just an additional channel for broadcasting content. The FB platform allows fans to engage with the club, and share their sentiments with other fans and with others in their own network. Our findings show that specific content strategies are required for improving the volume and valence of sport fan engagement such as likes, comments, shares, and net positivity. The study also indicates that the online content communication strategies need to be different during peak season and off-seasons. The strategies should vary based on whether a team is performing well or performing poorly. These findings are useful for academics and practitioners alike.

This study is the first to empirically investigate the FB communication between sport clubs and fans based on interaction data in any team sport. Sport literature has studied the overall social media fan activities as consumption, contribution and creation (Vale and Fernandes, 2018). This study further differentiates the various levels of fan contribution activities, namely liking, commenting and sharing, on the FB platform and uses distinct measures for each of the activities. While a few previous studies have used this approach in a non-sport context (example: Luarn, Lin and Chiu, 2015; Wright et al., 2017), this is the first study to employ this approach in the sport context. In addition, the feelings of fans, as expressed through comments, are also captured through sentiment analysis. The study adopted a mixed method research using longitudinal data from a relatively under-researched Indian setting (Abeza et al., 2015; Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015; Yoshida et al., 2015). By focusing on the IPL, this study also addresses the call for research to move beyond the sport of football and study other sport contexts.

Our findings provide a guide for social media marketers regarding the vividness of FB content. For example, to achieve high likes, comments and positive sentiments, they may adopt medium vividness (photo), and high vividness (video) for shares. Also, our results show the varying influence of content types. To achieve high engagement as likes, comments, shares and positive sentiment, sport clubs may utilise more social content. Third, our study provides guidance for sport club marketers on varying their FB content preferences among fans with respect to seasonality and team performance. For example, a performing club desiring to have high likes and shares should avoid remuneration content during offseason as the content gains lesser likes than that of a less performing club. Finally, sport clubs should continuously monitor the contents shared and their fans' engagement to determine the effectiveness of various content characteristics.

Although this study delivered desired results, it has certain limitations. First, the study does not account for social contagion. The content need not necessarily get transmitted through a single or chain of triggers but multiple triggers independently from different sources in different forms like a complex contagion. The fan activities may also be influenced by external events. The current study has attempted to control this effect by choosing an appropriate time-period as off-season when there are no major events (such as player auctions) and when there is no player-participation in other leagues. Second, the fan engagement with each underlying themes of content type needs to be further explored. For example, does the social theme of nostalgic content or acknowledging fan support garner more likes from fans? Third, the study limits to only study the sport of cricket and future studies may attempt to study for other team and individual sport. Notwithstanding the limitations, we intended to answer the question as to what content characteristics drives IPL fans to engage in liking, commenting and sharing on FB, for which the current work provides valid and significant answers.

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