Community Engagement with Social and Digital Media Content: A Study on Online fan Communities of Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive world, every business is looking for ways to stand out from the competition and build a strong brand. One way to do this is through sports teams. In India, the Indian Premier League (IPL) is one of the most popular sporting leagues, and two of the most popular teams are Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB). The current paper is an attempt to study online fan communities of Indian Premier League teams: Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore by understanding how they engage with social media and digital media content. The social media and digital media spaces of teams has been studied for 18 months (January 2021 to June 2022) and survey on fan communities (n = 840) has been conducted to understand their loyalty, level of engagement with content, interaction with players, interaction within communities, offline engagement during match, and other online activities. The focus of this study is on fan community engagement with content rather than outcome of event or team's performance in tournament.

Keywords: fan community, content, social media, content engagement, media management.

Introduction

The way digital and social media have changed the landscape of sports is nothing short of remarkable. Digital and social media have drastically changed the way sports are consumed and experienced. Fans now have unprecedented access to their favourite teams and players, with real-time updates and content across multiple platforms. Teams can use digital and social media to reach a broader audience and extend their reach around the world. Social media has enabled fans to interact with one another and create an entire community of passionate supporters. The digital and social media landscape has also allowed for new avenues of marketing and promotion, creating unique opportunities to engage fans and build loyalty. Additionally, digital, and social media have opened new revenue streams for teams, allowing them to monetize their content and reach new levels of success. Today, fans can connect with their favourite teams and athletes around the clock through a variety of digital and social platforms (Vale and Fernandes, 2018). This constant connection gives fans a much more intimate experience with their favourite sports and allows them to follow their teams and players like never before. In the past, if a fan had a question or request for their favourite team, they would have to send a letter or make a phone call, both of which could take days or weeks to get a response. With social media, fans can reach out to teams and athletes instantly and get an immediate response. This level of access has created much stronger relationships between fans and the teams they follow.

This level of engagement is evident in the way that fans are using social media to connect with each other and share their thoughts and opinions on the content they are watching. For example, Twitter has become a hub for live-tweeting TV shows, which allows viewers to interact with each other in real-time while they are watching the same show. This creates a sense of community amongst viewers and encourages them to keep watching the show as well as discussing it with others afterwards. Similarly, Facebook groups and forums dedicated to specific TV shows or movies are another way that fans can connect with each other and discuss their favourite content.

These platforms provide a space for fans to share their thoughts, feelings, and theories about the content they are engaging (Kim and Kim. 2020).

The current paper is an attempt to study online fan communities of two Indian Premier League teams: Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore by understanding how they engage with social media and digital media content. The social media and digital media spaces of teams has been studied for 18 months (January 2021 to June 2022). The survey on fan communities (n = 840) has conducted to understand their loyalty, level of engagement with content, interaction with players, interaction within communities, offline engagement during match, and other online activities. The focus of this study is on fan community engagement with content rather than outcome of event or team's performance in tournament.

The current research can contribute to community engagement and fan engagement studies in different ways. It can provide insight into how fans are engaging with content and help identify potential areas of improvement. For example, to identify what types of content are resonating with fans and which content is not, as well as any potential gaps in fan engagement. Additionally, this paper can help to track and measure the success of fan engagement efforts, helping to identify areas of improvement and informing future strategies. Nevertheless, the current paper supports to identify potential new areas of engagement, such as influencer marketing or other creative strategies, that can further drive engagement with fan community.

Review of Literature
Fans consider themselves as a sports team fan more than just cheering them or for hobby. Porat (2010) noted that fandom is a way of life for them. From die-hard football fans in the UK to cricket lovers in India, there are all sorts of different fan cultures around the world. Even though, the fans represent different regions and cultures, when it comes "fan communities", they share common features and effect do have on the teams themselves (Mastromartino, et.al, 2018). Sports and sports events are an important part of people's lives and often help to shape the way that they interact with society. Sports has a significant effect on how people think about themselves, the world around them, and how it shapes what they believe is possible for themselves (Fox and Lindwall, 2014). Sports have always played a significant role in human society. They offer a way to physically express oneself, relieve stress, and socialize with others (Ghildiyal, 2015). They can also build character, implant values, and teach important life lessons. Sports have always played a significant role in society. They provide individuals with a sense of identity and belonging and give communities something to rally behind. However, there is a growing concern that sports are becoming increasingly commercialized and focused on winning at all costs. This has led to some feeling that sports are losing their ability to inspire and unite people.

The current paper is an effort to study the online fan community engagement with social media and digital media content of prominent IPL teams - Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore. IPL redefined the professional competitive sports in India and other cricketing regions. Competitive sports are important for many reasons. For an audience or fan, they teach important life skills such as teamwork, discipline, and how to handle adversity. There is evidence of IPL model of events followed in local level (such as clubs/professional bodies/educational institutions) (Kadapa, 2013). They also promote physical fitness and provide an opportunity to have fun and socialize with other people. Competitive sports can also help people develop a sense of pride in their community or country. Finally, they can serve to connect with other cultures through shared values and experiences. The popularity of European Football leagues in India is a such example.

In terms of sports and sporting events, Fan culture, also known as fandom, refers to the shared love and enjoyment of a particular sports team or athlete. It is the sense of community and camaraderie that fans feel towards each other. This culture is built on passion, loyalty, and a deep-rooted love for the game. Fan studies is an established academic interest which primarily seeks attention on fan culture, fan activities (Jenkins, 2012) and widely understand cultural value and reproduction of fan response and fan

content (Hellekson and Busse, 2014). The presence of fans for any celebrity/media text/event/teams is largely approved for majority. However, there is also a disadvantage to fan culture. It can often lead to unrealistic expectations (Nash, 2000) and demands from fans. It can also create an us-versus-them mentality that can foster hostility and even violence (Ostrowsky, 2018; Cleland and Cashmore, 2016). Outside sports, the fandom and fan studies has much more complicated relationship.

There are different types of sports fans. Some are reactionary fans who live and breathe out their team, while others are relaxed and informal fans who enjoy watching and cheering on their team but don't necessarily follow every move they make. There are also 'fair-weather fans' (Thompson, 2018), who only pay attention to a team when they're doing well, and bandwagon fans, who jump on the bandwagon of whichever team is doing well at the instance. From the point of view of sports team management, it is important to curate content for all kinds of fans and engage with them (Vale and Fernandes, 2018).

Sports and fan culture have always been intertwined. For as long as there have been sports, there have been fans eager to support their favourite teams and players. In recent years, however, the relationship between sports and fan culture has become increasingly commercialized. This can be attributed to trend in content creation on social media and digital media. Each sports team and players have agencies which develop, curate, and distribute content through different social media and digital media platforms. The current paper focuses on content appeared on social media pages and other digital handles of IPL teams Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore. Both teams are active on social media and interact with their fans regularly. Apart from the official handles, a handful of fans made social media subgroups and threads provide an impactful engagement. The details of content and fan community engagement is explored in following sections of the paper.

Theoretical Framework
In the era of social and digital media ecosystem, sports fans are no longer confined to consuming content about their preferred teams and athletes from traditional sources such as newspapers and television. With the rise of social media, sports fans now have a plethora of new platforms to engage with content about their favourite teams and athletes. The theoretical overview of fandom and social media content engagement in sports are discussed in this section. There are ample evidence of sports teams using social media to reach out to their fans and build stronger relationships around globe in different sporting events (Stavros, et. al, 2014; Watkins, 2014; Wang and Zhou. 2015). However, there is still scope in sports fandom models in the digital age. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of fan engagement with sports through social media platforms. This has led to a new wave of research looking into the motivations and behaviours behind why fans use social media to engage with sports. There are many different theories that have been proposed to explain fan behaviour on social media, but three of the most prominent ones are classical media usage and effects theories such as Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz and Blumler, 1974), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1982), and Para social interaction theory (Horton and Wohl, 1965).

Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that people use media to fulfil certain needs or goals. For example, fans may use social media to get information about their favourite team or players, to connect with other fans who share their interests, or to feel more connected to the team or sport they love. Social Identity Theory suggests that people identify with groups that they perceive as like themselves, and that they use social media to express and reinforce their membership in those groups. For example, fans may use social media to show support for their team or players, or to interact with other fans who share their same passion. Para social interaction theory posits that people form one-sided relationships with mediated figures, such as celebrities or athletes. It is widely accepted that social media has changed the way we consume sport. In addition to the traditional forms of fandom, such as attending live sporting events or following a team on television, social media has given rise to a new breed of fan who engages with sports content through digital platforms. This increased engagement has had a profound impact on the sports industry, with clubs and leagues now using social

media to reach out to fans and build relationships with them. In many cases, these interactions go beyond simply providing information about fixtures and results; they also provide a valuable opportunity for fan feedback and input. Valkenburg in her seminal work *Understanding Self-Effects in Social Media* states that self-effects in social media may be stronger online than offline and she further explains how "online self- and reception effects may coalesce and amplify each other" (2017).

It is important to study the fan's social media user behaviour to understand how they relate and interact with the content from social and digital media pages of their favourite teams. A content analysis of media text may provide us an insight on media planner and manager of team, but a user level study can provide us results which help to understand community level engagement.

Indian Media and Sports Ecosystem
Cricket is one of the most popular sports in India. People in India enjoy cricket either playing it or watch it on television and digital platforms. The popularity of cricket created sporting stars in India which led to huge fan following. Cricket news, event details and controversies often appear on news media with national importance. Cricket contributes to the economy of India as well. The sport brings in a lot of revenue through ticket sales, sponsorship, and broadcasting rights. Indian cricket is administered by Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) with teams representing male and female at different age groups. Indian cricket is played at international and domestic levels. Indian media is highly benefited by content from cricketing world. The cricket events are often linked with cinema (Bollywood), politics, product branding, advertising, and leisure (Nair, 2011).

The Indian Premier League (IPL), the event which is focusing on the current paper is a professional Twenty20 cricket league in India contested during the months of April and May of every year by eight to ten teams representing different cities in India. The league was founded by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in 2008. IPL is biggest cricket league in world in terms of players involved, budget, revenue, in stadium

audience, television viewership, digital reach, and popularity (Morgan, and Taylor, 2017; Axford and Huggins, 2011). It is no secret that the Indian Premier League has taken the country by storm. The flamboyant tournament has not only captured the imagination of cricket fans but also created a new breed of sports fan. Although it is still a relatively young league, the Indian Premium League has already made a significant impact on cricket in India as well as Indian media. Since introduced in 2008, the IPL had potential to change the landscape of Indian media, sports, and sports media. It is now impossible to imagine an Indian media sphere without the IPL. There is now more money in sports media than ever before (Munjal and Ghosh, 2022; Rasul and Proffitt, 2011). The reach of sports media has increased exponentially. IPL enabled sports media more competitive than ever before. There is now a greater focus on analysis and opinion, rather than just news reporting. The style and tone of sports media has changed dramatically, with a lot more emphasis on entertainment value. The IPL has seen a significant impact on the economy of India. IPL has been contributing massive profits to the GDP of India.

The academic interest over Indian Premier League is predominantly surrounded in the areas of economy (Parker, et. al, 2008: Lenten, et, al, 2012; Lakshman and Akhter, 2013), sports studies (Petersen, et.al, 2008; Singh, 2011; Majumdar, 2011), culture (Prakash and Majumdar, 2021) political economy (Rasul and Proffitt, 2011; Kadapa, 2013; Khondker and Robertson, 2018), data analysis (Lamsal and Choudhary, 2018; Kalgotra, 2013; Barot, et.al, 2020), and marketing (Gupta, et.al, 2013).

The success of IPL has inspired different countries and sporting organizations to adapt the model for conducting of their professional games. IPL could much highly attract global attention than its forerunners Vitality T20 Blast (England and Wales Cricket Board) and KFC Twenty20 Big Bash (Cricket Australia) which started in 2003 and 2005 respectively. Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), Pakistan Super League (PSL), Lanka Premier League (LPL), Caribbean Premier League (CPL) were inspired from IPL model of operation and CSA T20 League (South Africa) and International League T20 (UAE) (both planned from 2023) are good examples how Indian

brands owns the teams and mark their presence in global professional cricket arena (Samiuddin, 2021).

The involvement of major international players, commentators, match officials, broadcasters made IPL and global brand. The launch and evolution of fantasy sports platform created hype around the IPL not only in Indian subcontinent and other cricketing regions but also in non – cricking countries. The success of IPL in last three editions (2020, 2021 and 2022) proved its value by providing "**four hours of unadulterated entertainment every evening**" midst global health and political crisis (Bajpai, 2022; emphasized by authors).

Methodology
The paper attempts to study how fans of Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore interact with the social and digital media spaces. The study was created over a period of 18 months (starting in Jan 2021) and conducted an online survey on fans (n= 840) to measure fan levels of engagement, loyalty, interaction with players, interaction within communities, and other online activities. The survey was carried out with help of structured questionnaire with focus on understanding their interaction with social and digital spaces of the teams.

The details of fans were collected through social media subgroups on Facebook with help of random convenience sampling who are active and conduct serious discussion not only during IPL season but throughout year. The community are represented by the teams and managed by team officials as well as fans. Such social media subgroups are an example of a better democratic sphere in which the voice of fan (public) is also heard than content marketing. This also makes the CSK and RCB significant as 360 degree and 365 days team rather than seasonal team. Henceforth, the social media and digital media management of these can be understood by their fan community engagement. Both CSK and RCB are having millions of fans following on their social media handles (Table 1). Their websites and other digital media handles are also having high traffic and appearing on first pages of search engine results.

Table 1: Social media following of CSK and RCB as July 2022

Handles	CSK	RCB
Facebook	12m	9.4m
Twitter	8.8m	6.1m
Instagram	10.5m	9.3m
YouTube	2.64m	3.3m

In-Depth Analysis of Results
The current paper to analyse content on social media pages of CSK and RCB have identified 18 content indicators (Table 2). This classification is based on content posted on pages and theoretically supported by available literature on social media content on sports team. The analysis of posts shows that both teams are active on social media and focuses on increasing interaction during season and off season, However, there is an increased traction during the season and match days which demands more attention and detail. The results show also indicated that there are special efforts taken for fan engagement. This can be seen in their websites and blogs too. The fans engage with content when it comes from their favourite players or if they are involved in the post. It is also identified that, the post which is targeted to local communities (ex: Chennai and Bangalore) has great importance in their page. The results of social media post analysis were correlated with the survey results. The first part of survey was aimed at fans likelihood towards each identified content indicators. A total average of >3is achieved by fans of both CSK and RCB which shows a positive impact on likelihood.

A higher level of fans likelihood has observed in indicators such as pre- game teasers, players personal stories, regional festivals/ celebrations/ events, brand collaborations, fans personal stories, merchandising, live videos, live updates on match, local community, achievements of India (sports), live updates on other events, and pre- session team updates. These indicators were popular among fans and high interaction on social media handles and reshared within their subgroups.

The primary aim of social media posts is to drive offline engagement. Due to Covid pandemic, the IPL matches of 2021 was held in

Table 2: Distribution of content on social media and digital media platforms of CSK and RCB and its likelihood among fans

Identified Content Indicators	Percentage of Content Coverage on social media handles		Average Measurement of Fan Likelihood of Content on Likert Scale (1 -5)	
	CSK	RCB	CSK	RCB
Pre- Session team updates	5%	5%	3.2	3.5
Fan Contest	7%	6%	2.2	3.5
Pre- Game teasers	8%	8%	4.5	4.5
Memes	1%	1%	0.8	1.2
Players Personal Stories	9%	9%	4.3	4.2
Fans Personal Stories	6%	7%	3.8	4
Live Updates on Match	10%	11%	3.5	3.8
Live Updates on Other Events	2%	2%	3.4	3.6
Update on Indian Cricket Matches	4%	3%	2.9	2.2
Brand Collaboration	12%	13%	3.9	3.6
Merchandising	12%	10%	3.7	3.6
Local Community	9%	11%	3.5	3.6
Live Videos	4%	3%	3.6	3.3
Behind the Scenes	1%	2%	2.8	1.3
Regional Festivals/ Celebrations/Events	2%	1%	4.2	2.8
National Festivals/Celebrations/Events	2%	2%	1.5	3.3
Achievements of India (Sports)	2%	2%	3.5	2.5
Birthday Wishes	3%	3%	2.4	3.2
Other Posts	1%	1%	1.5	1.3
Total Percentage	**100%**	**100%**		
Average Fan Likelihood on Content			**3.12**	**3.11**

India and Dubai with limited audience and 2022 was held in India with limited venue (Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad) considering Covid related protocols and regulations. Offline engagement is defined as fan activity that happens outside of the digital world. This can include attending a live match, purchasing team merchandise, or even talking to friends, family and fellow fan member about their team, players, match etc. The second part of fan survey was aimed to understand how social media and digital media connect with fans online, to drive offline engagement.

The results (Table 3) shows >3 for both CSK and RCB which also indicates a positive result of online fan engagement. Even though, Bangalore didn't host 2021 and 2022 editions of IPL, but Chennai hosted few matches in Indian leg of IPL which was briefly stopped due to increase in Covid cases. The rest of matches were held in UAE. The fan community of CSK and RCB enjoyed engagement in terms of interaction with players (during online live sessions), interaction within fan communities, offline engagement like fan special screening of match at community levels.

The fans showed interest in creating content for their teams through personal accounts and groups in form of short videos, posts, memes. They were often recognised and shared by official pages of players and teams. Comparing other levels of engagement, the merchandising purchase of sponsored brand found lesser interest which questions the financial benefits of fan engagement in terms of marketing.

Table 3: Measurement of Fan engagement with teams

Level of Engagement	Average Measurement of Fan engagement with Teams on Likert Scale (1 -5)	
	CSK	RCB
Content Engagement (on social media)	3.12	3.11
Interaction with players (Online)	2.8	2.7
Interaction within fan communities	4.2	4.3
Offline Engagement (During Match)	3.8	3.5
Purchase of merchandising items	2.4	2.2
Content Creation and Distribution	3.6	3.4
Average Score	**3.32**	**3.20**

Findings and Discussion

Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) are two popular teams in IPL. Both teams have built up strong brand identities that resonate with fans, and as a result, they have become household names. Both teams enjoyed presence of marque players and went through turbulent phase due to team management disputes, controversies, ban (CSK) and unsuccessful tournament campaigns (RCB). Both CSK and RCB are known for their fan base which is active both online and offline. It is interesting to study how both teams uses social media and digital media contents to collect, organise and engage their fan community.

CSK is the first unicorn sports enterprise of India owned and operated by Chennai Super Kings Cricket Ltd with India Cements as the major stakeholder. The name of Chennai Super Kings was derived from name of host city (Chennai), Super (used in Tamil Nadu such a s Superstar Rajinikanth) and Kings from Coromandel Kings (cement brand owned by India Cements). The CSK team management used their Tamil speaking fan base which gained them support from #YellowArmy. The theme song *Whistle Podu* (To Whistle) was not only popular among CSK fans but enjoyed by wider audience. The CSK brand is built around the team's success on the field, as well as their strong connection with the city of Chennai and its people. The team's colours and logo are both inspired by the city,

and they have a close relationship with local organisations and businesses. This strong connection with Chennai and its people is one of the key reasons for the CSK's popularity and success. It is also something that sets them apart from other IPL teams. Along with Rajasthan Royals – another IPL team, CSK served a two-year suspension from the IPL starting July 2015 due to the involvement of their owners in the 2013 IPL betting case. The suspension was followed by Lodha Committee report which was submitted on 14 July 2015.

Disney+ Hotstar produced a documentary web series titled Roar of the Lion (2019) followed by the Chennai Super Kings' comeback season of 2018 edition after serving ban. The documentary featured their major players like MS Dhoni, Suresh Raina, Ravindra Jadeja, Shane Watson, and Dwayne Bravo. The documentary is released in both Hindi and Tamil considering the interest of their regional and national audience and fans. They have won the championship four times, and rank first among all teams in the IPL with a win percentage of 58.98%. CSK and their fans enjoyed a status of leaders and certainly defended their team during the suspension years.

On other hand, RCB, bears an unwanted tag of "underachievers" (Ananthanarayanan, 2018), despite having notable players such as Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle, Yuvraj Singh, AB de Villiers and Ross Taylor. RCB took its name from liquor brand Royal Challenge, which is owned by United Spirts, who also owns and operated RCB. This shows similarity between CSK and RCB in title branding. RCB also mobilise fans from Bangalore who chants famous "RCB – RCB" during the match. RCB has fan based outside Bangalore city who supports the team and their expectations for lifting an IPL trophy grows year by year. Yet, there is no downfall in fandom in RCB. The Royal Challengers anthem changes yearly, with the first anthem being "Jeetenge Hum Shaan Se" and the latest being "Play Bold." For the 2017 season, "Play Bold" was composed in six languages (English, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, and Punjabi) by Salim–Sulaiman.

RCB's team management had tough time when controversies around their chairman

Vijay Mallya left India and moved to UK and later, he was accused with financial fraud and money laundering charges. There is no doubt that the CSK and RCB brands have taken a hit after all the controversies. But they continue to remain strong and have many followers. This is because, these two brands have built up a lot of goodwill over the years. They have been able to win over the hearts of their fans and followers, who continue to support them through thick and thin. The in – stadium and online support from fan community are evidence for the same. To be precise, there were examples of fan lead campaigns to support the team, players, and management when the team met with negative turn in game and outside. The success of the IPL has also had a positive impact on the value of the CSK and RCB brands. According to a recent study, the brand value of CSK has increased by 20% since the team won the IPL in 2010, while the brand value of RCB has increased by 30% since the team reached the final of the IPL in 2011 (Parameswaran, 2022).

One of the most obvious differences in branding of both teams are in their team colours and logos. CSK's colours are yellow and blue, while RCB's are red and black. This may not seem like a big deal, but it can play a role in how fans perceive the two teams. CSK's colours are associated with happiness and positivity, their "lion" logo is one of the most iconic in Indian cricket. RCB's colours convey a more intense and serious tone. Their slogan "Play Bold" encapsulates the aggressive style of play that they are known for.

The presence of M.S. Dhoni (in CSK) and Virat Kohli (in RCB) is also a major factor in continued fan following and emotions build around it. If we skip over two-year stint of M.S. Dhoni with Rising Pune Supergiant (during the CSK ban period), both M.S. Dhoni and Virat Kohli were part of CSK and RCB since beginning of IPL in 2008. It is also to worth note, that both players captained Indian Men's cricket team and known for collaborations players and team leaders. This is also a reason why each team has majority sentiments from Indian cricket fans and attention from global media and cricket fans. However, this has helped CSK and RCB as a brand so that management used their icon players while planning and curating the content on social media and digital platforms.

Conclusion

Model of professional matches are based on fandom and their interest in watching and attending the matches. In a diverse country like India, it is perfect to use the sentiments of the fan community-based sports and teams. Fans are now seen as consumers of sports content, and team owners and leagues are looking for ways to monetize their fan bases. This has led to the rise of things like branded merchandise, premium seating, and pay-per-view broadcasts. While these changes have made it easier for fans to show their support for their favourite teams, they've also driven up the cost of being a fan. So, what does the future hold for sports and fan culture? It's hard to say. But one thing is certain: the relationship between sports and fans will continue to evolve as both try to capitalize on each other's popularity. The study on content from social media and digital media content from CSK and RCB, and further survey on fan community shows that social media posts can be quite accommodating in offline engagement in sports. They can help to create a sense of community and connection between fans, as well as helping to promote and publicize events. Of course, it is important to use social media wisely and not overdo it, but if used correctly it can be a powerful tool for getting people involved in sports engagement.

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