Why do People Tweet About Foreign Cricketers? A Content Analysis of Fans' Tweets in Pakistan Super League (PSL)

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Social media has played a significant role in the creation of athlete brands among fans. Researchers have agreed upon the importance of social media in the quest of establishing athlete brands (Arai, Ko, and Kaplanidou 2013; Arai, Ko, and Ross 2014; Hasaan et al. 2016). Twitter is a very important type of social media that represents fans' perspectives about their favorite (or disliked) athletes and provides solid feedback of fans which can be helpful in the context of image branding for an athlete (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, and Chadwick 2015).

Cricketers, and other athletes, are also considered as brands. Cricket since the introduction of T20 (a league-version of Cricket) has changed (Cannonier, Panda, and Sarangi 2015) as Cricket, traditionally, was played between countries (Malcolm 2001), which meant that cricketers couldn't achieve global stardom as fans only supported their own cricket teams/players. (Gupta 2005). But introduction of T20 format has changed this situation and now it is possible for fans to like foreign-league players.

In this context, current study employed a qualitative content analysis of Twitter users during PSL. Tweet collections began on the first day of the PSL 2017 (February 9,2017), and concluded on the final day of the competition (March, 5, 2017). Data containing #HBLPSL and #PSL was collected and tweets with names of foreign athletes were selected from more than 38,000 tweets.

Findings from this study suggested that fans' tweets about athletes could be separated into two major categories: 1) fans' related motives and 2) athletes' related motives. Fans' related motives were sharing information, visuals, predictions and feedback regarding certain athletes. Athletes' related motives were athletes' performance, athletes' style of celebration and athletes' comments.

Results of the current study have highlighted the motives that persuaded fans to tweet about a certain athlete during the PSL, therefore, this study provides a useful insight into twitter users' thinking, which can be useful for both academics and practitioners. Additionally, this study could provide managers of foreigner athletes with guidelines to reach out to the fans and improve their brand range.

Keywords: Athlete brand; Twitter; Cricket; sport marketing

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