

EXPLORING THE ADVANTAGES, DISADVANTAGES, AND NATIONALISTIC DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL-LEVEL FORMAT POPULARITY OF CRICKET

ISTRAŽIVANJE PREDNOSTI, NEDOSTATAKA TE NACIONALNE DINAMIKE POPULARNOSTI KRIKETA ZBOG NJEGOVA MEĐUNARODNOG FORMATA



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Abstract

Purpose – This study is aimed at bridging a critical research gap by extensively exploring the multifaceted consequences stemming from the popularity of cricket driven by its various formats. This exploration is particularly focused on the implications related to the absence of enduring league affiliations and distinct branding strategies. The study's overarching goal is not only to enrich our comprehension of cricket's allure worldwide but also to make a substantial contribution to broader conversations surrounding sports sociology, marketing, and nationalism.

Design/Methodology/Approach – To accomplish study objectives, an inductive qualitative approach was employed for data collection and analysis. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with a total of 32 participants, including 16 experts and 16 fans. The interviews were guided by a well-designed interview protocol, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

Sažetak

Svrha – Rad nastoji premostiti kritični istraživački jaz opsežnim istraživanjem višestrukih posljedica koje proizlaze iz popularnosti kriketa potaknutih njegovim različitim formatima. Istraživanje je posebno usredotočeno na implikacije vezane uz nepostojanje trajnih ligaških veza i različitih strategija izgradnje marke. Sveobuhvatni cilj rada nije samo obogatiti razumijevanje opće privlačnosti kriketa, već i dati značajan doprinos raspravama koje se vode u okviru sportske sociologije, marketinga i nacionalizma.

Metodološki pristup – Da bi se postigli ciljeva rada, za prikupljanje i analizu podataka korišten je induktivni kvalitativni pristup. Podaci su prikupljeni putem polustrukturiranih intervjua s ukupno 32 sudionika, uključujući 16 stručnjaka i 16 odanih navijača. Intervjui su vođeni temeljem dobro osmišljenog protokola za intervju, što je omogućilo sveobuhvatno istraživanje teme.

Rezultati – Rezultati istraživanja naglašavaju prednosti međunarodnog formata sportova kao što je kriket,

Findings and implications – The study's findings underscore the advantages of international-level format sports like cricket, including global appeal, cultural exchange, traditions, and national pride, while also highlighting drawbacks such as neglect of domestic leagues, athlete hardship, and political influences. The role of nationalism in these sports presents positive aspects like emotional connections and fostering sportsmanship as well as negative ones, including heightened rivalries, intolerance, and player pressure.

Limitations – The limitations of the paper stem from the research method, the sample used, and the choice of sport (cricket).

Originality – The originality of this study lies in its comprehensive exploration of the interplay between cricket's diverse formats, nationalism, and marketing dynamics. While this sport's popularity and the role of nationalism have been examined separately, the study uniquely combines these elements to uncover a holistic understanding of how they intersect and influence each other within the context of international-level format sports.

Keywords: cricket, international-level format sport, fan behavior, nationalism in sports

uključujući globalnu privlačnost, kulturnu razmjenu, tradiciju i nacionalni ponos, naglašavajući također nedostatke kao što su zanemarivanje domaćih liga, poteškoće sportaša i politički utjecaji. Uloga nacionalizma u ovim sportovima predstavlja i pozitivne aspekte poput emocionalnih veza i poticanja sportskog duha, ali i negativne uključujući povećano rivalstvo, netoleranciju i pritisak na igrače.

Ograničenja – Ograničenja rada proizlaze iz metode, korištenog uzorka kao i odabira sporta (kriket).

Doprinos – Originalnost istraživanja leži u sveobuhvatnom istraživanju međuodnosa između različitih formata kriketa, nacionalizma i marketinške dinamike. Iako su popularnost kriketa i uloga nacionalizma ispitivane odvojeno, istraživanje jedinstveno kombinira ove elemente kako bi otkrilo holističko razumijevanje načina na koji se međusobno presijecaju i utječu jedan na drugog u kontekstu sportova na međunarodnoj razini.

Ključne riječi: kriket, sport na međunarodnoj razini, ponašanje navijača, nacionalizam u sportu

1. INTRODUCTION

Cricket, a sport with its origins intertwined with British colonial history, has ascended to become the second most popular sport globally (Hasaan, 2019). Interestingly, amidst its reputation as a formidable undertaking, cricket distinguishes itself through its playing structure. Unlike the majority of European sports that spotlight clubs and domestic leagues, cricket follows a distinctive tradition of international competition, similar to the Olympic Games. This is in stark contrast to the prevalent prominence of domestic leagues in many European sporting endeavors (Malcolm, 2001). The absence of a comprehensive league structure and the dominant presence of international-level formats have introduced a range of fluctuations to the cricketing landscape. Additionally, the distinct structure of international-level competitions has occasionally led cricket matches to be interpreted through the lens of national sovereignty and independence, paralleling the rhetoric of warfare (Malcolm, 2001). Consequently, cricketers often find themselves exclusively representing their respective countries. This phenomenon, however, results in a distinct outcome: these cricketers ascend to the status of national heroes within their own countries, yet their potential for attaining widespread global recognition is constrained (Gupta, 2004).

In light of these dynamics, it is crucial to note that despite the intriguing nature of cricket there is a scarcity of in-depth studies comprehensively examining the sport based on its diverse formats and little endeavor to elucidate both their advantages and drawbacks. Given such context, this research study endeavors to fill the gap by delving into the multifaceted outcomes that cricket garners from its format-driven popularity, particularly in relation to the absence of enduring league affiliations and distinctive branding. The study is aimed not only at enhancing our understanding of cricket's global appeal but also at contributing to the broader discourse on sports sociology, marketing, and nationalism. By examining the interplay of these factors among Pakistani cricket fans, the research endeavors to

provide valuable insights into the dynamics that shape the sport's landscape. Moreover, by exploring how different formats are packaged and presented to audiences, the research will shed light on the marketing strategies employed by cricketing bodies and stakeholders. It strives to provide insights into the complex interaction among cricket, nationalism, and international sportsmanship, thereby contributing to theoretical understanding of these interrelated elements within the global cricketing context by exploring Pakistani cricket fans. Furthermore, the study seeks to uncover potential managerial insights into leveraging cricket's nationalist associations in marketing strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social identity theory

The Social Identity Theory is defined as an "individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972). This theoretical framework elucidates that social groups, whether broad demographic categories or more focused task-oriented teams, endow their members with a shared identity that dictates and evaluates their identities, beliefs, and behaviors (Hogg, 2016). According to the Social Identity Theory, individuals possess both personal and social identities, as articulated by Tajfel and Turner (1986). The social identity encompasses significant group classifications that can stem from demographic attributes such as age, gender, race, and nationality, as well as affiliations with educational institutions, political entities, sports teams, corporations, and other social agents (Turner, 1982; Rees, Alexander Haslam, Coffee & Lavallee, 2015). When an individual identifies with an organization, they experience a sense of unity or belongingness to that entity (Fink, Parker, Brett & Higgins, 2009).

The theory posits that individuals strive to cultivate or maintain their self-esteem by differentiating their "ingroup" from a comparable

“outgroup,” along dimensions that hold value (Mainardes, Alves & Raposo, 2011). This drive is rooted in the fundamental need for heightened self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The theory emphasizes that group members engage in social comparisons to enhance their self-esteem by fostering favorable attitudes towards their own group (Hogg & Abrams, 1999). Thus, this theory delves into the processes through which individuals shape their self-concept and derive self-esteem from their perceived inclusion in various social groups.

The attachment that individuals feel towards their group yields positive intentions, but these intentions are cultivated within the group itself. For instance, this phenomenon is evident in the context of athletes, teams, leagues, and sports (Rees et al., 2015). Such affiliations give rise to distinct primary forms of connection or focal points of attachment, which are contingent upon the nature of the sporting domains (Stewart, Smith & Nicholson, 2003; McDonald, Karg & Lock, 2010). Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, and James (2011) underscore that an individual’s identification with a particular community within a given context is distinctive and influenced by the community’s defining attributes. Moreover, brand communities centered around sports teams are profoundly impacted by associated communities like nations, cities, and universities (Heere & James, 2007). Even when fans support the same team, they derive a sense of identity from their association with their respective communities (Underwood, Bond & Baer, 2001). In this regard, Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar, and Diamantopoulos (2015) demonstrated that national identity exerts a distinct influence compared to consumer ethnocentrism within a domestic context. Consequently, it can be inferred that enthusiasts of domestic leagues and national teams would exhibit divergent behaviors and establish their individual points of attachment.

In addition to sports-related issues arising from international conflicts, consumers may harbor feelings of animosity toward specific countries

(Shoham, Davidow, Klein & Ruvio, 2006). These sentiments, driven by nationalist tendencies, reflect a strong dislike for particular nations (Han, 2017). Such animosity can significantly impact consumers’ purchasing decisions and create a negative perception of brands and products associated with the targeted country (Mandler, Bartsch, Krüger, Kim & Han, 2023). For example, Bayern Munich fans chose not to renew their sponsorship agreement with Qatar Airways due to concerns over Qatar’s alleged human rights violations (Koch, 2020). As noted by Angell, Bottomley, Brečić, Filipović, Gorton, Logkizidou, and White (2021), consumers in one country may hold unfavorable views of sponsors from another country. Fan behavior, influenced by organizational identity and legitimacy, often results in either approval or disapproval (Herold, Harrison & Bukstein, 2023). Consequently, consumers expressing higher levels of animosity are likely to react less favorably to sponsorship arrangements (Angell et al., 2021).

2.2. Nationalism

Nationalism functions as a cohesive element that binds nation-states together, generating positive sentiments among the populace towards their country due to their shared national identity (Smith & Kim, 2006). In the context of this study, the foundation of the social identity theory is employed to establish the theoretical framework. For instance, the work of Huddy and Khatib (2007) builds upon the principles of the social identity theory to construct the concept of national identity, given that this theory offers a range of predictions concerning the outcomes of national allegiance. National identity denotes “the significance of one’s affiliation with the nation and the subjective value of an internal connection with it” (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). It is fundamentally distinct from consumer ethnocentrism, which posits that favoritism to one’s ingroup arises from a sense of ingroup superiority, along with the perception of inferiority attributed to all other groups beyond one’s affiliation (Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015).

Scholars hailing from diverse disciplinary domains concur on the premise that sports wield social, cultural, and political import in the creation and reproduction of collective identities at local, national, regional, and global scales (Brentin & Cooley, 2015). For instance, the Tour de France serves as a conduit for nurturing the French national identity (Campos, 2003), while the Beijing Olympics were instrumental in shaping national identity and pursuing international prominence (Xu, 2006). Such competitions kindle a sense of national identity among fans. In this context, a robust national identity is anticipated to be cultivated among fans (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). This elucidates the rationale for national sports acting as patriotic stimuli that prompt the audience to unite under the national banner and express solidarity, akin to the phenomenon observed in the context of national conflicts and crises (Baum & Potter, 2008). Consequently, one may contend that while nationalism frequently emanates as a constructive force, it often carries an adverse corollary.

2.3. Cricket

In recent times, in certain countries cricket has evolved more than entertainment and sport to become a national identity (Anuranj & Sircar, 2024; Chunying, 2021). Thanks to its international format, fans automatically support their own country fellow cricketers automatically (Hasaan & Kerem, 2017). There are very few examples of cricketers who hold celebrity status among local and foreign fans of opposition teams (Hasaan, 2019). In association with the social identity theory, sport fans bolster their self-esteem with the national team's success (Prayag, Mills, Lee & Soscia, 2020; Yousaf & Laber, 2020). This type of competition has often led to the result of a cricket match being cited as a war of national sovereignty and independence (Malcolm & Velija, 2017). As a result, numerous cricketers have encountered a more complex narrative, at times even being regarded as antagonists in specific nations. For instance, Trevor Chappell from Australia faced such sentiments in New Zealand (McNamee, 2022). On the one hand, this sort of

situation enhances the opportunity for sponsorship while on other hand shutting the door to the opportunity to enter a market across the border, as athlete and team loyalty affect sponsoring brands (Shezi, 2022).

Prior research has extensively examined various facets of league branding and its impacts across different levels (Hasaan, 2019; Fajak, Frawley, Lock & Adair, 2022; Kunkel, Hill & Funk, 2013). However, very few studies have yet undertaken an examination of the advantages and shortcomings of leagues as a form of national-level sport. Interestingly, cricket and other international-level formats have been studied extensively to uncover the merits and demerits of such formats (Ray, 2022; Kashif, Fernando & Wijenayake, 2019). Despite the advocacy of the social identity theory, which posits that a sense of belonging to a larger fan community augments the overall fan experience, the exploration of the profound emotional investment triggered by team successes and losses remains underexplored.

Moreover, while nationalism has been a topic of academic discussion, primarily from the perspective of its role as a social spectacle, to the best of current knowledge, only a limited number of studies have made a deliberate effort to explore the impact of nationalism on sports fans arising from international-level competitions. Notably, Blank and Schmidt (2003) pointed out that the involvement of national sentiments engenders a dual social identity. Hence, the objective of this study is to investigate national sentiment attitudes among fans within the realm of international-level sports, specifically focusing on cricket. The purpose of the study is to investigate the positive and negative aspects associated with international-level cricket formats and how these are perceived by cricket fans. The study is aimed at providing managers with a clearer understanding of fan behavior regarding international-level cricket formats, thereby assisting them in devising more effective strategies to engage with cricket fans. With these considerations in mind, the research sets

forth the following array of research inquiries for further exploration.

RQ1: What advantages and disadvantages does cricket earn with its international-level format popularity?

RQ2: What advantages and disadvantages has nationalism generated due to cricket's international-level format popularity?

3. METHODOLOGY

The study opted for an inductive qualitative study as the method of collecting data and analysis. Qualitative research provides an in-depth exploration of life experiences within the context of social and cultural frameworks (Bengtsson & Carlson, 2015). An inductive exploratory approach allows for the capture and simplification of complex concepts that are socially constructed within the organizational reality of participants (Ponsignon, Kleinhans & Bressolles, 2019). This method is particularly useful for examining the perspectives of a diverse group, serving as a foundational step for future investigations to expand upon (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020). A semi-structured interview format was employed to collect data with participants.

3.1. Participants

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews using a guide designed for the purpose. The participants were categorized into two groups: experts and fans. The experts included academics, journalists, and sports managers. A total of 32 participants, consisting of

16 experts and 16 fans, were interviewed for the study. All participants were recruited from Pakistan, a deliberate choice based on the study's specific emphasis on cricket, which is the nation's most widely embraced sport. The criteria for participant selection guaranteed that experts possessed a minimum of three years of relevant experience, while fans had demonstrated a fandom of over two years in the respective domains. To ensure data richness, criterion sampling was used, as it is helpful in extracting valuable insights from a wide array of contexts (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hogwood, 2015). Experts were required to meet specific criteria, including having tenure of over three years in a university within the sport management department and a minimum of two publications. Sports journalists needed to have reported on sports for at least three years through any mass media channel (TV, newspaper, radio). Sports managers were included if they possessed over three years of experience in sports management. As for fans, selection was based on the Crawford (2004) model, identifying individuals who consider themselves obsessed with any sports entity such as a team, athlete, or celebrity. Additionally, only fans who had attended at least one match in a stadium within the last year were chosen. The rationale behind setting these criteria is to ensure the collection of data that is abundant in valuable information, as advocated by (Patton, 2014). Prior to giving their consent, participants were informed about research aims, data handling, and privacy safeguards. Pseudonyms (F1-F16 for fans, E1-E16 for experts) were assigned to ensure confidentiality.

TABLE 1: Participants background

Fans					
No.	Code	Gender M/F	Profession	Cricket fans (years)	Like other sport?
1	F1	M	student	3	Football
2	F2	M	bank manager	7	No
3	F3	M	salesman	5	Football
4	F4	F	student	3	Tennis
5	F5	F	housewife	6	No
6	F6	M	marketer	8	Football
7	F7	F	school teacher	10	No
8	F8	M	policeman	6	No
9	F9	M	self-employed	15	Hockey
10	F10	M	IT worker	4	Football
11	F11	F	receptionist	6	Wrestling
12	F12	F	secretary	5	No
13	F13	M	IT worker	4	Racing
14	F14	M	businessman	9	No
15	F15	F	school teacher	4	Badminton
16	F16	F	bank manager	8	No
Experts					
No.	Code	Gender M/F	Profession	Education level	Experience in the field
1	F1	M	academician	Ph.D.	5 years
2	E2	M	sports journalist	Master's degree	4 years
3	E3	M	sports journalist	Master's degree	3 years
4	E4	M	sports journalist	Bachelor's degree	6 years
5	E5	M	sports journalist	Bachelor's degree	6 years
6	E6	M	sports manager	Bachelor's degree	4 years
7	E7	M	sports manager	Master's degree	5 years
8	E8	M	sports manager	Bachelor's degree	4 years
9	E9	F	academician	PhD	10 years
10	E10	F	academician	PhD	10 years
11	E11	F	academician	PhD	9 years
12	E12	F	academician	Master's degree	3 years
13	E13	F	academician	Master's degree	4 years
14	E14	F	academician	Masters' degree	6 years
15	E15	F	sports journalist	Master's degree	3 years
16	E16	F	sports manager	Master's degree	3 years

Source: current study

3.2. Data collection

Semi-structured interviews followed the guidelines developed by Patton (2014), adapting questions to research objectives. The interview guide facilitated a reflective approach to the nature of the questions posed (Charmaz, 2014). Although the structure remained consistent, wording and sequencing varied to accommodate individual contexts. Interviews lasted from 40 to 55 minutes; they were individually conducted over a period of two months, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were divided into two sections aligned with research questions. The first section explored the advantages and disadvantages of internationally played sports (e.g., cricket) compared to domestically played ones (e.g., football). The second delved into the over two months of nationalism role and its pros and cons. For instance, participants were asked: (1) Do you believe that fans' sentiments are similar during international level competitions compared to local domestic league matches? (2) What do you perceive as the main advantages of international cricket tournaments compared to domestic competitions? (3) In your experience, how do international level cricket formats differ in terms of competitiveness and spectator excitement compared to local leagues? Probing questions were used for better understanding. The researcher acted as the tool to gather data by employing probing questions (Kvale, 1996), aiming to acquire deeper insights into and a better understanding of participants' perspectives. The method of back translation was chosen for interviews conducted in the Urdu language.

3.3. Data analysis

The analysis followed the completion of the first interview in this study. That approach was chosen to facilitate the researchers' familiarity with participant responses (Patton, 2014). The analysis process encompassed two levels of coding: open coding and axial coding. The initial phase involved open coding for preliminary

examination. During this stage, content was meticulously coded, and codebooks were formulated based on repeated examination. Initial coding involves disassembling data and defining concepts to represent unprocessed data segments (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Subsequently, axial coding was implemented to refine and categorize these initial themes. At the axial coding level, these preliminary themes underwent a process of integration, merging, elimination, and enhancement by iteratively navigating between research materials and initial coding. Axial coding denotes the process of connecting or interrelating the initial themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This iterative process persisted until no novel themes emerged, signifying the attainment of saturation. By employing such comprehensive analysis strategy, the research was able to delve deeply into the data, ensuring a robust understanding of the participants' perspectives.

To ensure the robustness of the findings, the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity were employed, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Rigor in terms of credibility was upheld through consistent engagement with both the subject matter and the data. To bolster credibility, the findings were subjected to review by experts possessing a Ph.D. in sport marketing. To maintain dependability, an external evaluator well-versed in both sport marketing and qualitative research was engaged to review and validate the outcomes. Confirmability was ensured by meticulously documenting all study procedures and producing a comprehensive research report. To enhance confirmability, the objectivity was maintained during interviews. In the pursuit of authenticity, various citations from participants were judiciously incorporated, elucidating the clear alignment between the results and the empirical data. Through the diligent application of these criteria, the study's findings were fortified and its scholarly rigor was upheld, thereby contributing to the reliability and validity of the research outcomes (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo, 2020).

4. RESULTS

The study's outcomes are derived from the investigation of two distinct research questions. In response to the first research query, study participants delineated several advantages associated with international-level format sports. These encompassed factors such as global appeal, cultural exchange, traditions, instilling national pride, fostering intense rivalries, and garnering significant media coverage. Conversely, participants also highlighted certain drawbacks, including the neglect of domestic leagues, athletes' hardship, economic disparities, and the influence of political rivalries within the context of international-level format sports. Turning to the second research question, the participants' insights unveiled the multifaceted impacts of nationalism on international-level sport competitions. The positive facets encompassed themes such as nurturing patriotism, emotional connections, social cohesion, fostering sportsmanship, and facilitating international diplomacy. In contrast, participants pointed to the negative repercussions of nationalism, which encompassed an intense playing atmosphere, the prevalence of intolerance and discrimination, xenophobia, and the player commitment level within this context. The subsequent section delves into a comprehensive exploration of the insights offered by study participants with regard to each of these identified themes.

Global appeal: The cricket format inherently possesses a widespread global allure. The essence of international competition, involving matches between nations, is that they engage at least two countries.

Cricket's international matches, such as Test matches, One-Day Internationals (ODIs), and Twenty20 Internationals (T20Is), have a broader global appeal. They bring together teams from different countries, fostering a sense of camaraderie and competition on an international scale [E9].

When two countries engage in a cricket match, it automatically garners more atten-

tion compared to contests between clubs. Amplify this scenario to events like the Asia Cup or the World Cup, in which numerous nations participate directly. The international-level format inherently possesses an appeal that extends globally. This is underscored by the example of football, a sport with considerable financial investment, which conducts events like the World Cup to further accentuate its global resonance [F2].

Cultural Exchange: When two nations come together on the sporting field, it offers stakeholders an opportunity for cultural exchange.

This is exemplified in international cricket, which facilitates a deeper understanding of diverse countries and their cricketing traditions. Notably, fans are exposed not only to diverse playing styles, strategies, and cricket cultures but also become acquainted with the fans' own cultures [E12].

The convergence of fans with teams during international competitions fosters a mutual familiarity with different cultures. This impact extends beyond fans to athletes and even TV spectators. Cricket, as a unifying medium, has disseminated knowledge about nations, with even Australians gaining insights into a country like Sri Lanka, its capital Colombo, and its island status, all attributed to the game [F16].

Traditions: Sports like cricket, operating on the international-level format, establish their own traditions and prestige. These traditions gain prominence and rigidity as they become emblematic of the respective countries.

In the context of international cricket matches, their longevity and traditional significance contribute to the sport's prestige. Noteworthy examples include the ICC Cricket World Cup and the iconic Ashes series, which are revered events in the realm of cricket [E6].

While local leagues also bear their own traditions, when nations become involved,

these traditions are elevated to the status of cultural heritage [F14].

National Pride: International matches transcend being mere sports events and assume the role of national pride.

The collective national involvement elevates them beyond mere matches. International cricket becomes a catalyst for national unity and pride, serving as a source of identity and patriotism [E1].

Triumph in international contests holds immense significance, representing a matter of national pride. Such victories resonate as national achievements, imbued with the fervor akin to that of a war, endowing victorious players with the stature of war heroes [F10].

Intense Rivalry: The involvement of nations infuses an extra layer of excitement and spectacle into contests, intensifying rivalries.

Major international tournaments like World Cups typify high-stakes competition, resulting in fierce rivalries that produce thrilling matches and unforgettable moments [E7].

The allure of rivalry in sports is universally acknowledged, with classics, derbies, and matches like the Ashes and Pakistan versus India evoking distinct atmospheres. The resonance of such matches lingers in fans' memories for years [F11].

Significant Media Coverage: International matches command substantial media coverage, driven by heightened viewer engagement.

The expansive viewership of international matches translates to amplified media attention and sponsorship interest. Consequently, international matches assume a pivotal role in driving the growth and financial stability of the sport [E7].

The phenomenon is akin to the media spotlight on events like the Olympics, which captivate widespread attention. In cricket, the international format holds a similar al-

lure, capturing the entire nation's focus and thereby attracting extensive media coverage and sponsorship support [F6].

One of the adverse facets of cricket's international format begins with the neglect of domestic leagues. The emphasis on international cricket occasionally casts a shadow over domestic leagues, potentially hindering players' opportunities and impacting the quality of local cricket.

The focus on international cricket can sometimes overshadow domestic leagues. Players may prioritize international commitments over domestic leagues, affecting the quality and popularity of local cricket [E8].

To be candid, I have never personally witnessed a domestic match of Pakistan cricket. While it might enjoy popularity in England, the same cannot be said for Pakistan and many other countries. There appears to be a lack of interest among people. Despite the emergence of T20 leagues, they are predominantly perceived by fans as sources of amusement and entertainment, rather than being viewed as serious sporting competitions [F10].

Athlete's Hardship: The international cricket format brings forth a range of challenges for athletes, including limited opportunities, heightened pressure, fatigue, injuries, and lofty expectations.

The pursuit of representing one's country introduces emotional and performance-related stressors that may pose difficulties for players. The weight of national expectations can be overwhelming, contributing to the challenges faced by athletes participating at the international level [E9].

The profound pressure associated with representing the nation in sport equates to the weight of being a soldier, where the smallest mistake can have lasting repercussions [F8].

Economic Disparities: The focus on international matches can contribute to economic

imbalances within cricket, favoring financially robust cricket boards.

This format can result in an uneven distribution of resources for player development and infrastructure. Consequently, certain nations hold a dominant position in international cricket, while others grapple with resource limitations, leading to a disparity that can impact the overall competitiveness and growth of the sport [E2].

Notably, the “Big Three” phenomenon in cricket governance is emblematic of this economic disparity, where certain boards exert disproportionate influence over policies and decision-making [F1].

Political Rivalries: Intense international rivalries can occasionally spill over into political realms, veering the focus away from the pure spirit of sportsmanship.

Intense rivalries can detract from the essence of the game and transform it into a political arena, overshadowing its inherent nature [E13].

A stark example is the contrast between club-level sportsmanship, where teams like Celtic and Rangers engage in classics and derbies regardless of their intense rivalry, compared to the realm of cricket. Here, instances like India’s reluctance to play against Pakistan or teams avoiding matches in certain nations underscore the sport’s susceptibility to political influences [F5].

The exploration of the second research question delved into the advantages and disadvantages of nationalism intertwined with the international-level cricket format. The initial advantage identified within this context is the sense of patriotism.

Within the realm of cricket’s international format, nationalism kindles a flame of national pride that illuminates stadiums and hearts alike, uniting fervent supporters under the banner of their respective nations [E6].

Cricket is not just a game; it is our national pride. When a match is held, it is not just the teams that face off but also the spirit of our nation that takes to the field, and in those moments, we all become patriots [F11].

Emotional Connection: Nationalism gives rise to an emotional bond that transcends typical fandom and loyalty.

Nationalistic fervor introduces an emotional dimension to the sport, elevating matches to a higher level of engagement and significance for fans. Victories become moments of exuberant celebration, while losses evoke deep and poignant emotions [E10].

When emotions intertwine with the contest, it transforms into more than a sporting event. Matches like the Ashes, Pakistan versus India, or Australia versus New Zealand are watched with heightened passion, as a special emotional connection with one’s country and its rivals intensifies the experience [F11].

Social Cohesion: Social cohesion is defined as the continuous effort of forming a collective based on mutual values, shared difficulties, and fair access to opportunities (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Nationalism in cricket can serve as a conduit to mainstream visibility for marginalized communities.

Cricket has the potential to promote social cohesion, uniting diverse communities under a shared banner. It can serve as a platform to bridge societal divides and promote inclusivity [E14].

Instances such as the promotion of a Kashmiri pacer or the representation of minority players as symbols of a united India illustrate how cricket can promote social cohesion and inclusion [F3].

Fosters Sportsmanship: Nationalistic sentiments elevate sports to a level beyond competition, emphasizing the spirit of fair play, respect, and camaraderie among athletes and fans alike.

Nationalism instills a profound sense of sportsmanship, encouraging players and fans to compete passionately while upholding respect for opponents [E12].

While winning or losing is an inherent part of sports, the infusion of nationalism elevates the stakes, enhancing the fervor and scope of the sport [F12].

International Diplomacy: The term refers to diplomatic interactions and relations that emerge between countries due to cricket matches and tournaments involving national teams.

Cricket serves as a diplomatic tool, facilitating exchanges and fostering amicable relations between nations [E8].

Prominent examples, such as cricket diplomacy between India and Pakistan, demonstrate how the sport can defuse tense situations and promote diplomatic relations [F11].

An intense playing atmosphere represents the first negative consequence of nationalism associated with international-level sports competitions. This term signifies the intensification of competition, animosity, and emotional fervor among cricket players from different countries, stemming from the infusion of nationalistic pride and sentiments.

Excessive nationalism can escalate rivalries between nations, leading to aggressive behavior from fans and players and even straining diplomatic relations [E9].

Cricketers can be quick to get heated due to the intense emotions stirred by nationalism. Players often view themselves as representing their nation rather than just their team, which can lead to heightened sensitivities and an amplified sense of responsibility on the field. This can sometimes result in a loss of composure, leading to disagreements or conflicts between players [F1].

Intolerance and Discrimination: Nationalism can evoke strong emotions and loyalties that may

lead to intolerance and discrimination when fans or individuals prioritize their own team or nation.

Extreme nationalism can result in intolerance, discrimination, and hate speech, as fans become overly invested in match outcomes. These negative behaviors can mar the inclusive and sportsmanlike atmosphere cricket strives to maintain. Nationalism, taken to extremes, can amplify these behaviors as people focus on asserting their identity and superiority over others [E4].

The incidents like the World Cup 1996 Semi-Final, where Indian fans set the stadium on fire due to an imminent defeat, highlight the potential consequences of unchecked nationalism [F13].

Xenophobia: Xenophobia refers to the aversion or distrust of foreigners (Tromp, Bachman & Kaufman, 2013). It is typically used to describe fear or dislike of outsiders.

Nationalistic sentiments can lead to biased judgments and favoritism, influencing decisions by officials and leading to controversies. Strong nationalistic sentiments may result in irrational fear or hostility towards individuals associated with opposing cricket teams or nations. Xenophobia in cricket can escalate tensions, creating an environment inconsistent with friendly competition and sportsmanship [E15].

Instances of xenophobic behavior are evident in chants that mock the accents or cultures of opposing team supporters, or fans' avoidance of interactions with supporters of other teams. Such behavior demonstrates a lack of respect for diversity and a willingness to belittle those who do not share the same national identity [F1].

Players' Commitment: The immense pressure on players due to their commitment to national team. It is an obligation to make oneself available for international duty at any cost due to national cricket competitions.

In the realm of international cricket, the national team is not just a selection; it is a calling—an irrevocable commitment that transcends individual aspirations, requiring players to stand ready to serve their country on the field, regardless of the sacrifices demanded [E3].

When you choose to represent your country, it is a commitment that goes beyond personal gain or individual interests. It is not merely a game for money or a transfer from one team to another in a league. It is a matter of national importance. Being available at any moment, without hesitation, is non-negotiable. Making excuses, whether it's for playing in a league or citing personal issues, signifies a lack of commitment to the nation and prioritizing personal ambitions over the honor and pride of representing one's country [F13].

5. DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the unique advantages and disadvantages associated with cricket's international-level format compared to popular domestic leagues worldwide. Additionally, the study was aimed

at examining the role of nationalism in terms of its benefits and drawbacks within the context of cricket's international-level format popularity. Through a qualitative inquiry, the study unveiled a range of findings. Responding to the first research question, participants highlighted various advantages of international-level format sports, including global appeal, cultural exchange, traditions, instilled national pride, intense rivalries, and significant media coverage. Conversely, participants also acknowledged drawbacks such as the marginalization of domestic leagues, athletes' challenges, economic inequalities, and the influence of political rivalries in the international sports context. Turning to the second research question, participants revealed the intricate impacts of nationalism on international-level sport competitions. Positive outcomes included nurturing patriotism, forming emotional connections, fostering social cohesion, promoting sportsmanship, and facilitating international diplomacy. On the flip side, participants identified negative consequences like an intense playing atmosphere, intolerance and discrimination, xenophobia, and the players' commitment level within this framework. These findings shed light on the intricate interplay between cricket's international-level format and the influence of nationalism.

TABLE 2: Result highlights

RQ1		RQ2	
Advantages of international-level format	Disadvantages of international-level format	Advantages of nationalism sentiments	Disadvantages of nationalism sentiments
global appeal	neglecting domestic leagues	nurturing national pride	heightened rivalries
cultural exchange	athletes' hardship	emotional connections	intolerance & discrimination
traditions	economic disparities	social cohesion	xenophobia
national pride	political rivalries	fostering sportsmanship	player's struggles
intense rivalries		international diplomacy	
significant media coverage			

Source: Current Study

The initial encouraging outcome underscores cricket's worldwide attraction, owing to its adoption of an international-level format. This observation echoes the conclusions of prior research, such as the study authored by Ostapenko (2010), which emphasized the Olympic Games' universal allure and manifold prospects due to its engagement of numerous nations. In the context of cricket, where nations compete against each other, this international engagement similarly contributes to its widespread allure. In a similar vein, the subsequent revelation about the role of cultural exchange resonates with existing scholarly research. In their study, Lorde, Greenidge, and Devonish (2011) pointed to the fact that the 2007 cricket World Cup serving as a platform for meaningful cultural interactions among the local populace. This highlights how cricket tournaments can also foster cultural exchange, akin to other global sporting events. The study's findings unveiled that cricket cultivates its distinct traditions, nurtured by its unique format. Shedding light on this within the realm of English cricket, Malcolm and Velija (2017) observed that the sport boasts a rich tradition that predates many others. Moreover, Litchfield, Osborne, and Gale (2022) explored the reasons behind the limited involvement of Australian First Nation people in cricket, pinpointing conflicts of tradition as a central factor. This underscores the intricate interplay between traditions and participation in the sport. Moving to the subsequent discovery, cricket bestows a sense of national pride upon its enthusiasts. Within this context, Verma, Sharma, and Srivastava (2023) illustrate how the triumph of India in the 1983 Cricket World Cup was not only celebrated as a victory but also hailed as an embodiment of national pride. Elevating this phenomenon further, the momentous victory of England in their first-ever World Cup triumph sparked jubilant celebrations across the nation, underscoring cricket's pivotal role in fostering community unity and shaping shared narratives (Holden, 2020). Therefore, enduring influence of cricket in fostering national pride among its followers, echoing the broader theme of the capacity of

sports to evoke patriotic emotions. Continuing with the subsequent revelation, the presence of fervent rivalries is reminiscent of the study conducted by Daniels, Wilkinson, Young, and Lu (2020). They highlighted that in sports played at national levels such as cricket and rugby, profound rivalries thrive among national teams. For example, a rivalry emerged between Australia and New Zealand in netball, fueled by their dominance at the national level (McCarthy, Martin & Watson, 2022). Consequently, the international format intensified rivalries among nations, enhancing the allure and intrigue of the competition. In highlighting the last advantage of cricket playing at the international level, an intriguing insight emerges from Litchfield et al. (2022), underscoring the amplified importance of sports coverage rights within the global marketplace. For example, television rights for international sporting competitions command higher prices due to the audience's strong national cultural associations (Haynes, 2015). This phenomenon underscores the broad reach and appeal of cricket beyond national boundaries.

Regarding the drawbacks associated with the international-level format, participants in the study highlighted several key disadvantages. The first noted disadvantage centers around the neglect of domestic leagues. Hasaan (2019) already discussed the manner in which internationalization posed a threat to the potential of domestic leagues, which once brimmed with opportunities. For example, the failure of the Sri Lanka Premier League can be attributed in part to the dominance of cricket's international culture (Wijewardena & Karunaratne, 2017). As a result, various cricket leagues are struggling to survive. The second drawback, as identified by study participants, pertains to the hardship experienced by athletes. McCabe and McCrea-Routray (2023) have already underscored the fact that cricketers at the elite level encounter stressors arising from a congested international calendar, contract uncertainties, injury concerns, and the relentless pressure to perform. Consequently, the international-level format renders cricketers more susceptible to these challenges. Economic

disparities between playing nations emerge as another disadvantage pinpointed by the study. This phenomenon has already manifested itself in cricket, as the wealthiest boards – India, England, and Australia – entered a revenue agreement that disregarded other countries and their cricket boards (Vistro, Rasheed & David, 2019). Meanwhile, the cricket boards of Afghanistan and Zimbabwe are grappling with financial challenges, hindering their ability to compete effectively (Szymanski & Wigmore, 2022). This led to the marginalization of dissenting voices (Ghai & Zipp, 2020), highlighting the common occurrence of economic inequalities within this format due to the diverse involvement of nations. The final negative aspect recognized by the study's participants relates to political rivalries. Roberts (2005) demonstrated the existence of political tensions within the cricketing realm. Recent instances such as the New Zealand team's abandonment of a cricket tour to Pakistan (Qadeer, 2021) and the Zimbabwean cricket boycott linked to governmental issues (Yousaf & Laber, 2020) underscore the interplay of politics in shaping cricketing events.

The second research inquiry centers on the influence of nationalism on cricket viewers. Within the scope of this study, participants highlighted both advantageous and detrimental aspects of this influence. The initial affirmative aspect recognized in this context pertains to the cultivation of patriotism. Storm and Jakobsen (2020) emphasized that global events often evoke sentiments of national pride among enthusiasts. It is important to note, however, that national pride bears correlation with feelings of patriotism and nationalism (Smith & Kim, 2006). This is exemplified by cricket, which illustrates how a form of entertainment evolves beyond its status as a casual pastime to become a symbol of patriotism (Armstrong, 2020). Furthermore, nationalism contributes significantly to the process of establishing emotional bonds. Earlier studies have identified nationalism as a catalyst for creating an emotional connection (Kohn, 2017). This emotional linkage aligns with branding paradigms that encompass brand affection,

brand allegiance, and brand equity (Trivedi, 2020; Keller, 1993). Yet, nationalism serves to intensify this connection further. The subsequent discovery is social cohesion. By fostering a shared identity and a sense of solidarity, nationalism aids minority and marginalized communities (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Cricket, by providing a platform for participation at the national level, facilitates the integration of such communities into the broader societal framework. For instance, Yassim (2013) observed that cricket's role in British society could bring about social transformation and community cohesion, notably in bridging the gap between the Muslim community and the wider British populace. Another consequential outcome is the promotion of sportsmanship. Cricket has been traditionally referred to as a "gentleman's game" (Malcolm, 2012). Furthermore, cricket players are evaluated not only based on their on-field performance but also on their display of sportsmanship (Chauhan, Mathur & Choudhary, 2023). In this regard, cricketers are viewed as ambassadors of their respective countries (Farland & Jennings, 2007), especially in the context of international-level competitions, and are therefore expected to exhibit exemplary sportsmanship. Lastly, the study identifies another positive construct in the context of international diplomacy. Parrish (2022) highlighted the employment of sports as tools of diplomatic engagement in numerous nations. Cricket, owing to its international format and inherent nationalist connotations, has emerged as a prominent avenue for fostering international diplomacy. From England's colonial relationships (Hurley & Heffernan, 2023) to instances such as the de-escalation of potential conflicts between Pakistan and India (Halder, 2021), cricket serves as a conduit for diplomatic endeavors.

On the downside of nationalism, one of the primary factors, as indicated by scholarly research, is the intense playing atmosphere. Lee (2015) pointed to how, in the post-colonial era, anti-imperialist nationalism intensified the rivalry between Korean and Japanese athletes. This phenomenon is similarly evident in the realm of

cricket. Ongoing social media clashes between Pakistan's Shahid Afridi and India's Gautam Gambhir, even after their retirements (Gupta, Zhao & Han, 2012), are a pertinent example. The second adverse aspect highlighted by studies is the nexus between nationalism and intolerance, often resulting in discrimination. Kingston (2019) elucidated on the manner in which nationalism can breed a sense of exclusivity that potentially gives rise to discrimination against specific groups (Choi, 2022). This phenomenon is also observable within the cricketing context. Notably, Kar, Arafat, and Menon (2023) underscore the disconcerting prevalence of intolerance within cricket, evidenced by instances of racial slurs making media headlines, which consequently incited public outrage among cricket enthusiasts and players alike. The next negative consequence identified is the association of extreme nationalism with xenophobia, a finding corroborated by previous research. Kubota (2016) and Kuhelj (2011) termed the more radical facets of nationalism as "xenophobic nationalism." This sentiment finds manifestation in cricket as well, with several instances exemplifying the presence of xenophobia. Lastly, the commitment challenges faced by players represent an additional drawback of nationalism. Cricketers are under constant scrutiny if they take breaks or leave the national team. Some opt for early retirement to join smaller leagues for financial gain, but this is often criticized by fans. For instance, Brian Lara of the West Indies faced constant criticism for his perceived lack of loyalty to his country, despite being one of the finest batsmen the West Indies ever produced (Beckles, 2010). Similarly, cricketers like Chris Gayle and Tamim Iqbal, who retired early from international cricket to focus on league cricket in various countries, received backlash from fans (Hasaan, 2019). Additionally, former English batsman Kevin Pietersen was heavily criticized for his commitment to the national team, ultimately leading to the end of his career (Desai & Vahed, 2010). Consequently, athletes representing their nations are subjected to heightened pressures compared to their counterparts in less nationalistic sports.

The study's findings illuminate the intricate dynamics of international-level format sports, particularly within the context of cricket, through the lens of social identity theory. These findings align with social identity theory, which posits that individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019) such as nations, and that this identity can influence behavior and attitudes. In the context of international-level sports, the identification with one's nation can fuel both positive attributes, such as pride and unity, and negative tendencies, such as rivalry and discrimination. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for sports organizations and policymakers to navigate the complexities of nationalism in sports and promote a more inclusive and harmonious sporting environment.

In the realm of marketing, this study recognizes the crucial role that branding, media coverage, and commercialization play in driving the popularity of cricket's diverse formats. The analysis of the study delves into the implications of branding for the sport's growth, revenue generation, and fan engagement. Moreover, the study explored potential tensions between traditional aspects of cricket and modern marketing techniques with the aim of identifying the instances in which commercialization might clash with the sport's cultural and historical significance.

6. CONCLUSION

The study's findings underscore the advantages of international-level format sports like cricket, including global appeal, cultural exchange, traditions, and national pride, while also highlighting drawbacks such as the neglect of domestic leagues, athlete hardship, and political influences. The role of nationalism in these sports presents both positive aspects such as emotional connections and fostering sportsmanship and negative ones, including xenophobia, intolerance, and player pressure. In terms of marketing implications, campaigns should celebrate diversity, promote historical pride, balance media

coverage, support athletes, and counteract negative nationalism through inclusive fan communities and empathetic storytelling, fostering a more unified and respectful fan base.

This study enriches multiple academic disciplines by offering nuanced insights into the multifaceted impact of cricket's international-level format and the role of nationalism. For instance, the current study elaborates on the research of nationalism and sport conducted by (Arnold, 2021) within the field of cricket. Additionally, this study extends the examination of xenophobia in cricket, drawing from discussions in football (Kersting, 2007) and other societal contexts (Patsiaouras, 2008). These insights provide a foundation for further research, discussions, and critical analyses across a wide range of academic fields, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersections between sports, identity, nationalism, and society.

This study's implications for managers extend far beyond the realm of sports alone. By offering a deep dive into the intricate dynamics of cricket's international-level format and its relationship with nationalism, managers across diverse sectors can harness these insights to make informed decisions, create impactful strategies, and enhance the overall experience for stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the broader landscape of sports, business, and international relations.

Limitations and suggestions for future study

As with any study, there are limitations that should be acknowledged and considered for future research. One limitation of this study lies

in the potential bias introduced by the exclusive recruitment of participants from Pakistan for a cricket-focused investigation. While this approach allowed for in-depth exploration within a specific cultural context, it may limit diverse perspectives prevalent in the global cricket community. As noted by Banerjee (2008), that brand heritage works within the cultural heritage of the country. Additionally, relying solely on qualitative data provides an in-depth understanding of this topic but it may introduce bias and restrict the broader applicability of the study's conclusions. Future research should consider alternative participant recruitment strategies and incorporate quantitative methods to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Moving forward, future research could explore the impact of innovative branding strategies on fan behavior and loyalty while also investigating the role of emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, in enhancing the fan experience and expanding the reach of cricket. Additionally, studying the effectiveness of cross-cultural marketing initiatives and the influence of social media on nationalistic sentiments in sports could provide valuable insights for sports marketers and scholars alike. By exploring these avenues, evolving trends and the manner in which to better meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and globalized fan base could also be addressed.

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