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Analysis of user-generated comments posted during live matches of the Cricket World Cup 2015

Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this explorative-qualitative paper is to analyze user-generated comments posted on social media while live matches were being played during the Cricket World Cup 2015.

Design/methodology/approach - Data were collected from Yahoo! Cricket, a website that allows people to submit comments during live matches. The comments were qualitatively analyzed using the grounded theory approach.

Findings - The key finding of this paper is that people like to consume live sporting events in an online social setting rather than as isolated individuals. In addition, the use of the grounded theory approach helped uncover several new findings related to people's use of social media during live matches.

Research limitations / implications - Since this paper studied the case of the Cricket World Cup 2015 and collected data from Yahoo! Cricket, caution is advocated in generalizing its findings.

Originality / value - Scholarly interest on the use of social media during live sporting events is growing. Building on such works, this paper highlights how user-generated comments posted during the Cricket World Cup 2015—mostly by individuals within the Indian subcontinent—intersected with broader issues such as culture, identity, politics and religion.

Keywords Information sharing, Qualitative analysis, Social media, Sport communication, User-generated content

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Advances in information technology have revolutionized the production and consumption of live sporting events. Traditionally, sports used to be broadcasted on television for passive viewing. However, social media applications now allow people to express opinions freely on the Internet, and actively engage with netizens during live matches.

As information technology continues to take over the world, sporting events need to become tech-friendly in reaching out to its increasingly tech-savvy fans. Such a development will allow forging strong sporting fraternity-fan connections, which lie at the heart of not only the development of sports but also the enhancement of fans' experience (Bhogle, 2017). Recognizing this, scholars have been studying sports-related social media use over the last decade (e.g., Kassing and Sanderson, 2010; McCarthy et al., 2014).

An emerging area of research focuses on user-generated comments posted by Internet users during live sporting events (Yu and Wang, 2015). This paper considers such comments to offer a unique vantage point into real-time sentiment on the ground. Hence, their analysis would extend the scholarly understanding of the use of information technology among people during live sporting events. Moreover, it could offer insights to sports marketers into ways to enhance the overall sport experience.

For these reasons, the purpose of this explorative-qualitative paper is to analyze user-generated comments posted on Yahoo! Cricket (www.cricket.yahoo.com) while live matches were being played during the Cricket World Cup 2015. Given the relatively under-investigated nature of the research area coupled with the lack of a priori frameworks, analysis of the comments was done using the grounded theory approach. Consistent with the nature of any explorative-qualitative research, the thrust of this paper lies in providing a rich description of the specific study context—not in its strive for generalizability.

The paper is significant for both theory and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, it deepens the scholarly understanding of how sports fans use social media during live sporting events. The premise that sports fans will use social media even while watching live matches is conceptually rooted in the notion of second screening, which refers to people's growing penchant to use multiple screens at the same time (Shim et al., 2017). Hence, it is quite feasible for individuals to watch live matches on a television, a computer, or a smartphone; and at the same time post online comments using a computer or a mobile device. Thus, by studying a relatively new phenomenon in a unique context—the Cricket World Cup 2015, the paper has practical implications for sports marketers on how to foster online engagement among fans.

The rest of this paper is structured in the form of five sections. The next section offers an overview of the literature on sports-related social media use. The section thereafter details the present study context and highlights its uniqueness. It describes the sport of cricket in general, the tourney Cricket World Cup 2015 in particular, and the social media platform Yahoo! Cricket. This is followed by another section that explains the research methods including data collection, coding, analysis and evaluation. The penultimate section of this paper presents the results. The closing section is devoted to discussion and conclusions. It discusses the findings in light of the literature, and highlights the contributions to theory as well as the implications for practice. Finally, it acknowledges the limitations of this paper, and identifies a few future research directions.

Related Works on Sports-Related Social Media Use

The literature on sports-related social media use has been growing along three major themes. One theme focuses on players' use of social media. For example, Sanderson (2008a) examined how Curt Schilling, a pitcher with the US Major League Baseball team the Boston

Red Sox, used his blog. Schilling was found to use self-presentation strategies to maintain a favorable social media presence. Kassing and Sanderson (2010) investigated tweets posted by a selection of riders during a three-week race in Italy. The riders were found to use Twitter to provide commentary and insider perspectives for fans. In a similar vein, Hull (2014) analyzed how PGA Tour golfers tweeted during the week of the Masters tournament. The tweets offered interesting glimpses into the golfers' lives for fans.

A second theme focuses on the social media presence of sports organizations. For example, Wallace et al. (2011) examined how the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)—an organization dedicated to the well-being and success of student athletes—used its Facebook Fan Page. A conscientious attempt to promote brand loyalty could be identified. On a related note, Sanderson (2011) investigated social media policies provided in handbooks for student athletes from a selected division of NCAA schools. More recently, McCarthy et al. (2014) analyzed how UK football clubs manage their brand presence on social media to foster engagement with their fans. Strategic social media use was identified as being crucial to drive not only web traffic to official websites but also commercial gains.

Another theme, on which this paper specifically builds, focuses on sports fans' use of social media. For example, Sanderson (2013) examined how football fans at the University of Cincinnati reacted on Facebook when their head football coach Brian Kelly left the school to become the head coach at the University of Notre Dame. The use of abusive language to derogate out-groups was particularly common. Babac and Podobnik (2016) analyzed user-generated comments posted on Facebook pages of a selection of football clubs. Both positive (e.g., joy) and negative (e.g., anger) sentiments made their presence felt. Frederick et al. (2016) examined the use of Twitter related to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games. Besides focusing on sports per se, tweets were often found to deal with broader political issues.

Within this theme, an emerging area of research specifically examines user-generated comments posted during live sporting events. For example, Yu and Wang (2015) examined sentiments expressed in tweets by US football fans during a selection of matches of the 2014 Football World Cup. Yang et al. (2016) investigated online discussions about the same tournament on the Chinese social media application Sina Weibo. At a granular level, some of the concepts brought to the fore include networking among fans (Jacobson, 2016), role of emotions (Sanderson, 2016), mediated interactions with players (Frederick et al., 2012), and the vitriolic nature of comments (Galily, 2008). Building on these works, this paper explores user-generated comments posted while live matches were being played during the Cricket World Cup 2015.

Present Study Context and its Uniqueness

Cricket

This paper uses cricket as the test case for investigation. It is a sport played between two teams. Each team comprises eleven players, who play three major roles—batting, bowling and fielding. While batting, batsmen use bats to hit balls and score points known as runs. While bowling, bowlers throw balls at batsmen to dismiss them. While fielding, fielders chase balls hit by batsmen to minimize the runs scored. One player from each team plays as a captain, who performs the toss. The winning captain decides which team would bat first. The team batting first has a single innings in which it tries to score as many runs as possible. The innings ends when bowlers from the other team have bowled 300 deliveries at the batsmen, or when ten batsmen have been dismissed, whichever occurs earlier. Thereafter, the teams change their roles. The other team gets an innings of 300 deliveries or 10 dismissals with which it tries to chase down the runs scored by the team that batted first. The team that scores

the higher wins the match. Matches are officiated by individuals known as umpires. Each match lasts for about eight hours.

Cricket was chosen for two reasons. First, unlike sports such as football or hockey that mostly comprise continuous sessions of gameplay, cricket entails distinct events of a few seconds—when batsmen hit balls thrown at them by bowlers followed by fielders chasing the balls—interlaced with temporary pauses—when fielders return balls to bowlers who prepare to bowl again at batsmen. Such pauses amid actions in an eight-hour long match give users ample time and opportunity to post comments without necessarily missing much of the live action. This in turn suggests that live cricket matches are conducive to the phenomenon of second screening (Shim et al., 2017). Hence, they offer the possibility to collect a wide pool of online comments.

Second, the researcher has been an avid cricket follower for almost 20 years. This ensures that he has sufficient knowledge to interpret the comments. This was necessary because familiarity of the researcher with the research context is crucial for conducting qualitative research (Habibi et al., 2014).

On the scholarly front, research on cricket is conspicuously rare. Among the few works, some discussed the impact of cricket on societies (Agur, 2013; Sturm, 2015) while others investigated the relation between internal communication and commitment of cricketers (Mishra et al., 2016). This paper extends cricket-related research by analyzing comments posted on social media during live matches of the Cricket World Cup 2015.

Cricket World Cup 2015

The Cricket World Cup is the sport's biggest tournament organized by the International Cricket Council (ICC), the governing body for the sport. This flagship mega-event is played every four years. It was first held in England in 1975.

Since its inception till 2011, the Cricket World Cup had been played a total of 10 times. The tournament had been hosted four times by England, thrice by the Indian subcontinent, once jointly by Australia and New Zealand, once jointly by South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe, as well as once by countries in the Caribbean. Australia had won the tournament four times, India and the West Indies had won twice each, while Pakistan and Sri Lanka won once each.

The eleventh edition of the Cricket World Cup was played in 2015. It was jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand. Specifically, the CEO of the hugely successful 2011 Rugby World Cup held in New Zealand was responsible to help the Trans-Tasman nations earn the hosting right (Newshub, 2016).

In the Cricket World Cup 2015, the top 14 cricket teams in the world played 49 matches across 44 days. The final match was played at Melbourne between the two host nations. Australia emerged as the winner (ICC, 2015).

Yahoo! Cricket (YC)

User-generated comments posted during live matches of the Cricket World Cup 2015 were collected from YC. For every match, the platform offers ball-by-ball commentary. Users have the option to post comments in response to the commentary corresponding to every ball. Figure 1 shows the screenshot of the commentary corresponding to the last ball of the tournament followed by an annotation indicating the number of comments received in response to the commentary till then (‘31’), and a link to post additional comment (‘Leave a comment’).

Figure 1. Screenshot

The option to leave comments after every ball makes YC a unique platform. Such a functionality is able to capture Internet users' instantaneous sentiments triggered by momentary events. Furthermore, YC is mostly visited by users from the Indian subcontinent. Its regional user base allows exploring how online conversations about cricket in the subcontinent intersect with broader issues such as culture, identity, politics and religion.

Methods

Data Collection

Comments posted on YC in response to every ball bowled in each match of the Cricket World Cup 2015 were collected. They were archived in a single-spaced Microsoft Office word document that contained some 93,430 words spanning across 347 pages. It specifically comprised 19,155 comments.

There were eight matches that failed to receive any comments. In general, these were the ones that had a generally strong team playing against a relatively weak side, for example, England versus Scotland, and New Zealand versus Afghanistan. This shows that matches that are expected to be one-sided receive little traction on social media.

In contrast, the highest number of comments received by a single match was 4,557. It was the semi-final match played between Australia and India. Perhaps, YC was abuzz during matches with high stakes. However, it did not receive a lot of comments during the final match played between Australia and New Zealand. This confirms that YC is largely

frequented by users from the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, it was found that matches involving the subcontinent nations generally resulted in a lot of online chatter. For example, the match between India and Bangladesh received 3,299 comments while that between India and Pakistan attracted 1,735 comments.

From the initial pool of comments collected, those that were not in English and those that contained nonsensical texts were eliminated. The cleansed document was 257 pages long and contained 68,745 words. In particular, it comprised 15,426 comments that were admitted for coding and analysis.

Coding and Analysis

The data were analyzed using the grounded theory approach by the researcher, who was trained with qualitative research methods. Each comment was the unit of analysis. The coding task started soon after data collection, and continued for a period of almost nine months. To minimize fatigue-induced coding errors, the task was limited to at most one hour of coding per session as well as to at most three sessions per day. Codes were revisited multiple times to ensure the consistency of the analysis.

Grounded theory requires a microanalysis of data involving a detailed line-by-line scrutiny to first generate initial codes and thereafter identify relations among the codes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Therefore, the data were first microanalyzed to generate emergent codes. Due to the interpretative nature of the analysis, the researcher allowed a single comment to be assigned multiple codes. After the initial categorization of codes (open coding activity), constant comparison was used by returning to the data in order to gain insights into the usefulness of the developed codes. They were compared to ascertain similarity and inter-relationships (axial coding activity).

The data were constantly compared and contrasted. This allowed for a fluid movement between data and the theory to be built. Development and enhancement of codes continued until new observations failed to add significantly to existing codes, thereby suggesting saturation. Table 1 gives a snapshot of the coding process. Finally, comments' tone—ranging from polite to unpleasant—was chosen as the core category to explain the results. The overall approach of coding and analysis is informed by the literature (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Papathanassis and Knolle, 2011; Sanderson, 2008b; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Table 1. Coding process.

Open Coding	**Axial Coding**
• Providing status updates to other users • Developing relations with other users • Interacting with players • Forging connection with YC commentators • Helping other users • Helping YC commentators • Advising other users • Advising YC commentators • Advising players • Advising team selectors	• Providing status updates • Developing relations • Attempting to help • Offering constructive advice
• Sharing anger with other users • Engaging in verbal duels • Pointing out commentary errors • Blaming the YC application • Complaining to the ICC • Abusing other users • Taunting losing teams • Ridiculing YC commentators	• Venting frustration • Complaining • Abusing • Mocking

Evaluation

Since grounded theory requires drawing inferences grounded in data, there was neither any predefined coding scheme nor any quantifiable results. The explorative-qualitative nature of this paper rendered inter-coder reliability analysis inappropriate (Burla et al., 2008; Papathanassis and Knolle, 2011; Sanderson, 2008b).

Nonetheless, in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the coding, the researcher contacted a coder, who had a Master's degree in Computer Science and was interested in social media research. He had knowledge about cricket but was ignorant of this paper's purpose. In a face-to-face meeting with the researcher, the coder was asked to independently think aloud about a randomly selected sample of some 200 comments. The thoughts of the independent coder generally concurred with the themes coded by the researcher. Validity and reliability was also guaranteed by later asking the coder to review and comment on the results of this paper. These approaches to ensure validity and reliability of results obtained using grounded theory are informed by the literature (Filieri, 2016).

Additionally, the rigor of qualitative analysis is often determined through auditability, credibility and applicability (De Witt and Ploeg, 2006). Auditability refers to the clarity and the correctness in the description of research methods. To establish auditability, the researcher provided as much information as possible about the research process in the Methods section of this paper. Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings can be confirmed by other works or by participants. Given the nature of data collection employed in this paper, the findings could not be confirmed by contacting users who submitted the comments. Nonetheless, the independent coder found the findings to be generally credible. Applicability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied in other settings. This paper leaves it to future research to examine its applicability.

Results

To present the results, this paper treats comments' tone as the core category because it could readily encapsulate all other codes emerging from the data. Some comments were polite in tone, and could be grouped into the following themes: (1) providing status updates, (2) developing relations, (3) attempting to help, and (4) offering constructive advice.

However, others tended to be unpleasant, and manifested along the following themes: (5) venting frustration, (6) complaining, (7) abusing, and (8) mocking.

Providing Status Updates

Users often provided status updates to their online peers as if YC were a social networking site like Facebook. Some highlighted delight as in "Hip Hip Hurrayyyyyyyyy." Others sighed, "My mood is off now."

Some comments regretted missing out on the live action, "I got busy in a call and missed…" Comments such as "this match is going to get over before I reach home :(" were perhaps written while commuting. This demonstrates how social media applications have revolutionized sports coverage by allowing users to stay abreast even on the move.

One user complained about how live streaming has been blocked in the individual's workplace by stating, "The office blocking all live stream." An ardent Indian supporter updated,

> I have to cancel the 5-star dinner treat I was supposed to give to my colleagues if India went through to the finals…I am sad as India lost, but more than that happy on account of saving a fortune of money.

Developing Relations

Several comments suggested that users enjoyed forging social connections with netizens during live matches. For example, in response to the commentary corresponding to the first ball of the tournament, a user commented, "The first ball is dedicated to all cricket fans." The initial stages of several matches attracted greetings such as "hi everyone," and "hello all." After matches ended, there were comments such as "bye all dear and near friends." At nail-biting match situations, comments such as "control your nerves dear" and

"keep calm guys" intending to calm others down were also quite common. Some users appreciated others' comments, "I love your comments…"

Users occasionally took the onus on them to engage the online community. For example, one user conducted a poll asking, "Who will be the man to score in today's match? Fast comments please." At times, they appeared eager to entertain others. For example, when rain interrupted a match, one user started chanting, "Rain rain go away." They often served as statisticians providing information such as "last 23 years, every world cup final saw at least one Asian team."

Users were also found to entertain the online community by playing with players' names and attempting to be funny. For example, when New Zealand's Trent Boult was playing well, a user commented, "plug…this boult with 6 inch bolt." Likewise, when Australia's Aaron Finch was going great guns, a comment stated, "Finch, I will pinch you." When England's Ian Bell was in action, a user posted, "Bell has now ring." These suggest that users did not lack a funny bone while watching live matches.

Users also attempted to develop relations with cricketers. There were several comments that seemed to have been written with the assumption that the cricketers could read the entries. For example, one user was so impressed with the performance of a player that the individual proposed, "Can I marry you?" Taking the cue, another user commented, "marry me…" perhaps hoping that the player would pay attention to the second proposal too.

Users collectively referred to the players of the team they were supporting as brothers as evident in the following comment, "Congratulations my brothers." When the legendary Sri Lankan Kumar Sangakkara, who had declared his decision to retire after the tournament, played his last match, there were plenty of comments of the form "Good bye Sanga," "Salute to you and your personality and your contribution to the game," and "We will miss you Sanga." One user asked, "Sangakkara, why are you retiring?" almost expecting him to

respond. These demonstrate parasocial interaction—development of mediated relations (Frederick et al., 2012; Horton and Wohl, 1956)—between users on the Internet and players on the field.

At the end of the tournament, the online community showed their appreciation toward the YC commentary team. This was evident from comments such as “Thanks Yahoo Team for your hard work” and “good boy yahoo. will miss-bye-takecare!” It was almost as if users were bidding adieu to their acquaintances.

Attempting to Help

Attempts to help netizens was unmistakably evident. For example, a user apparently ignorant of the rules of cricket questioned about a commentary, “What is this: 5 Wides? How can it be 5 Wides in 1 Ball?” In response, another comment clarified, “It seems like you are new to cricket if u don’t understand 5Wides. Wide with boundary (i.e. 4) so total 5. It’s a wide so mentioned like 5 Wides.”

Users were also apologetic about their incompetent writing style. They regretted causing inconvenience to others for submitting difficult-to-read texts. This is evident from comments such as “Sorry for the poor grammar.”

Occasionally, users extended their help to the YC commentary team. When one user complained that YC had mistakenly not provided the commentary of a ball—“one ball missing,” some users were quick to respond with the missing details. Users often corrected some of the inadvertent mistakes made by the YC commentators. For example, in response to a complain about a commentary error, one comment stated,

> Proper commentary: OUT! Elliot falls! Fuller length ball outside off, Elliot slashes it hard over the point region. The ball goes towards Taskin in the deep

who manages to hold on to that one. It was nicely played but he found the fielder unfortunately.

Offering Constructive Advice

Users did not shy away from offering constructive advice to all and sundry. For example, after a series of comments that vehemently rebuked players for their poor performance, one comment advised users to calm down:

> To all the viewers a humble request: sports for peace. Yes, it is meant only for peace. Be sportive. Don't look at any game as a war. Yes, I love sports…I love the game…Not any country or any player…No scolding…Have a nice day.

Users provided plenty of advice to the commentary team of YC. As evident from comments such as "Commentary in English should be free from cliché," and "Flowery language should be used with utmost care," users perhaps wanted a layman perspective in the ball-by-ball updates. Jargons and grandiloquent language failed to impress.

Users often behaved as self-appointed coaches. Advising players on the field, users posted comments such as "Bowl in line and length," "Don't take too much pressure…play freely," and "Now dot ball [a ball on which no run is scored]? Hurry up." Users almost seemed to believe that their comments would inform players, who would then adjust their strategies and tactics accordingly.

To cricketers, users also offered grooming tips. For example, some users expressed their dissatisfaction with the look of players with comments such as "please shave," almost expecting the player to run from the field to the salon.

Users often commented as if they were team selectors. For example, one comment stated, "he should not be in the team now" while another stated "please bring back Yuvraj in

place of Rahane." It was as if users were expecting the selectors to listen to their comments. One user went on to offer an advice buttressed with detailed explanations:

> Drop Finch and instead take Watson in that position because as you can see, Watson is a good opener. Just look at his record. And he used to open the innings. The team will get one bowler also…Watson is a great opener rather than a one-down batsman [one who comes out to bat after the first dismissal], Smith is in perfect position at one-down.

Venting Frustration

Several users sounded angry, and vented out frustration through comments such as "what the hell," "I hate this," and "It's a frustrating performance." Some of the comments were specifically directed to cricketers. For example, when a player struggled, one comment criticized, "Ashamed of you," highlighting parasocial interaction.

Despite the apparent camaraderie among the online community, there were occasional traces of verbal duels. For example, during a group-stage match, one user apparently serving as a fortune-teller predicted, "First Semi-final: South Africa vs New Zealand, Second Semi-final: India vs Australia, Final: New Zealand vs Australia." In response, the user was confronted by another self-appointed fortune-teller who responded, "Fool!! First Semi-final: South Africa vs New Zealand, Second Semi-final: India vs Pakistan, Final: South Africa vs India."

Complaining

Some users were quite critical about the errors made by the YC commentary team. One comment complained, "Du Plessis was caught by S. Dhawan. Please correct the score

card, it shows caught by Mohit Sharma!" Other similar comments include "Yahoo is showing wrong score" and "Please correct it. Not good."

Some users even compared YC with CricBuzz—another website that provides live ball-by-ball commentary. Complaining about the slow speed of the commentary update, one user commented, "Hey Yahoo! Cricket, you have to be quick, CricBuzz is faster than you." On a related note, another user commented, "It's better to use CricBuzz. It updates very instantly." One user complained about the Yahoo application, "I hate this Yahoo app. It's very slow."

Users did not shy away from complaining to the ICC. Some comments contained complaints about the performance of umpires. Such comments include "poor umpiring," "umpires should wear a pair of glasses to make decisions," and "the ICC should take a visibility test of umpires."

Some users were quite vocal in complaining about the cricketing rules that result in the dominance of batsmen over bowlers. Such complaints came especially during the knock-out matches. While some simply expressed disgust through comments such as "shame ICC," others offered a more detailed treatment as follows:

> Worst world cup!!! It's getting worse after each match! The rules do not care about bowlers. I don't know what these ICC fellows are doing…Let's see how many budding cricketers want to be a bowler in future. Batsmen scoring 200+ runs and teams scoring 400+ runs regularly. Why do we need bowlers in this game now? Place the bowling machines instead!!!!

Abusing

There were instances of cyberbullying through the comments. For example, one comment stated, "You all are f****D." The use of the f-word suggests that users do not

always follow the guidelines provided by YC—"Be considerate and respectful of your fellow posters" and "Don't post profanity, obscenities, abusive language, or otherwise objectionable content."

During a match between arch rivals India and Pakistan, a religiously sensitive comment stated, "It's pretty sad to see Indian Muslims support Pakistan even though they know how badly they will be treated if they visit there!" These abusive comments were mostly posted during crunch match situations.

Nonetheless, there were some sensible users who later apologized to the community after writing abusive comments. Such an apologetic comment stated, "Sorry, by mistake…I typed." It seems that users can be easily caught up in jingoism during live matches.

Mocking

Users were at their sarcastic best when teams were at the verge of being knocked out of the tournament. They often taunted managers of the losing teams, "book the return flight today, the players are too homesick." Some acerbically wished, "Have a safe flight back home." Others even ironically quipped, "When you come, please bring some chocolates from there." In addition, users were found to ridicule the YC commentary team for their errors with sarcastic remarks such as "hahahaaaaaaaaaaaaa."

Discussion and Conclusions

Findings

With information technology making rapid inroads into sports broadcast, netizens now have the privilege to post comments on social media during live sporting events. Hence, taking the case of the Cricket World Cup 2015, this paper analyzed user-generated comments

posted on YC during live matches. Grounded theory was used for analysis. The results show that users posted both polite and unpleasant comments.

Five major findings could be gleaned from the results. First, netizens enjoy consuming live sporting events in an online social setting rather than as isolated individuals. As evident from numerous comments, users almost felt like watching the matches together with their online peers. This finding lends empirical support to Jacobson's (2016) idea of networked spectatorship and Shim et al.'s (2017) concept of social co-viewing in the context of second screening. Users were keen to forge social ties with like-minded individuals passionate about a common sport. This concurs with previous works that highlighted the role of online comments in fostering interactions, developing relations, and constructing identities (Galily, 2008; Tenenboim and Cohen, 2015).

In addition, drawing from the uses-and-gratifications perspective, comments were forthcoming possibly due to users' psychological needs for information exchange and emotional outlet (Church and Smyth, 2009; Clavio and Kian, 2010; Hsu et al., 2015; Lee, 2012). Users seemed to be in need of the information provided in the ball-by-ball commentary coupled with others' reactions on them to stay abreast with the progress of the live matches in the online social setting. Concurrently, the plethora of comments that they posted was a testament to their penchant to share information. Their willingness to share remained active even when they were consuming live sporting events. This suggests that posting comments could hardly distract users during the matches. In fact, second screening provided users an outlet for euphoria and despair that in turn perhaps made following the matches a more pleasurable experience than otherwise (Babac and Podobnik, 2016).

The next finding is that user-generated comments posted during live sporting events are the by-products of users' emotions. Previous works on sports-related user-generated content found both positive and negative emotions to play a significant role in influencing

fans' experience (Babac and Podobnik, 2016; Sanderson, 2016; Yu and Wang, 2015). After all, sports are about the joy of winning and the disappointment of losing. Given that users usually follow sports wanting a team to win, they experience a variety of emotions. Moreover, the psychology literature has long suggested that emotions affect social behavior (van Kleef et al., 2004). Even in the online context, emotions influence individuals' response to situations (Chang et al., 2014). Therefore, it seems that the comments that were submitted on YC during live matches were triggered by the instantaneous emotions that users experienced during the matches.

In this vein, this paper also takes a step to respond to the call for research to study emotional shifts over the course of matches advocated by Sanderson (2016). It finds that the tone of the comments varied depending upon the stage of the matches. At the initial and the intermediate stages, most comments were friendly and cordial (e.g., "The first ball is dedicated to all cricket fans," "hi everyone," "welcome dear"). Specifically, the comments at the initial stages were interpersonal in nature while those at the intermediate stages were mostly focused on match situations. At the final stages however—specifically at crunch situations, the comments started to take abusive and sarcastic shapes (e.g., "Australia we Asians hate you," "dear Pakistani guys, be careful you have enemies everywhere," "I hate India").

It seems that some users calmly accept the reality about the teams that they support. Hence, they are able to maintain decorum in writing comments. In contrast, others perhaps do not hesitate to unleash their pent-up emotions to surface up to their comments, thereby occasionally making the entries unpleasant. This echoes the previous finding that sports-related online communication can occasionally lose its social polish, and become abusive whereby in-groups leave no stones unturned to belittle their out-groups (Sanderson, 2013).

The third finding is that user-generated comments posted during live sporting events foster parasocial interaction—development of one-sided bonds of intimacy through mediated interactions with those who are viewed through media (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Consistent with the literature, users were found to engage actively rather than passively in their friend-like relations with media personas—in this case, players (Frederick et al., 2012). Most sport viewers tend to have allegiances with players and teams. In consequence, parasocial interaction is expected to be conspicuous between users and their favourite players. Thus, fandom as an antecedent of parasocial interaction is conceivable.

In addition, this paper identifies parasocial interaction between users and their disliked players. This is evident from comments such as, "Please come to my home, bro. U're so handsome but good-for-nothing on cricket…" A somewhat similar finding was highlighted in Sanderson (2008b), which deemed criticism to be an aspect of parasocial interaction.

Overall, users who post comments during live sporting events appear as individuals wearing their hearts on their sleeves. They are consistently boisterous in praising as well as criticizing players. In consequence, they are equally likely to develop parasocial relations with players who perform well, and those who fare poorly. In contrast, parasocial interaction appeared to be limited between users and players who were average in performance.

The fourth finding is that users can easily get into confrontation while posting comments during live sporting events. Abusive comments were particularly common during matches involving teams that have had a history of rivalry (e.g., India versus Pakistan, and Australia versus New Zealand). This was partly expected as previous works have shown sports-related online comments to touch on broader political issues beyond sports (Frederick et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the current finding adds to the literature by identifying that abusive comments were particularly forthcoming during nail-biting moments. Perhaps, nerve-racking match situations turned an ordinary sporting event into almost a life-and-death encounter in

the minds of users. Viewing the situations through a gladiatorial lens, users started to abuse one another ignoring the guidelines provided by YC.

While works such as Galily (2008) found that users tend to post occasional violent comments on sports-related online articles, this paper shows that such a tendency is perhaps magnified manifold during live sporting events. As tempers flare, the abusive comments that users hurl at one another engender an atmosphere of jingoism and xenophobia. The Internet's advantage in terms of freedom of expression is unfortunately turned into freedom of incitement (Porat, 2011).

The final finding is that a number of themes were conspicuous by their absence in the comments. For one, there were no comments about the commentary on air even though there were comments related to the ball-by-ball commentary of YC. In addition, there were no discussion about the context of the tournament or the politics surrounding the event that often feature in mass media during mega-events. Perhaps, netizens remain uninterested in topics that are expected to be covered in traditional media.

Contributions to Theory

By studying the case of user-generated comments posted on YC during live sporting events, this paper contributes to research on media entertainment and second screening. The extant literature abounds in evidences to suggest that individuals rely on media for entertainment purposes (Vorderer et al., 2004). Prior research also demonstrates how social media applications serve as avenues for entertainment (Dogruel et al., 2015). This paper dovetails these lines of research by demonstrating how social media applications such as YC are used for entertainment during live sporting events in order to meet social, informational as well as emotional needs.

In addition, this paper gleans several new findings that have not been exhumed in related works. For example, it identifies cyberbullying to be a severe problem in social media communication during live sporting events. At the same time, it finds that social media communication during live sporting events can be a tool to build camaraderie among Internet users. Besides, this paper finds that Internet users have the power to partly dictate the nature of commentary on websites such as YC in real time. Moreover, this paper extends the literature on parasocial interaction in sports by showing that it is common between users and players who give noteworthy performances—either brilliant or abysmal—yet inconspicuous between users and players who give average performance. These new findings can pique further theoretical debates among scholars about sports-related social media use.

Interestingly, some of the a posteriori findings of this paper bear resemblance with extant theories. For example, the identified gratification factors that seem to encourage users to post comments during live sporting events—social, informational and emotional needs—are possible to explain based on the theoretical perspective of uses-and-gratifications (Clavio and Kian, 2010). Again, the ways in which users directed their comments to the players on the field are possible to explain through the theoretical perspective of parasocial interaction. These demonstrate how the findings uncovered in this paper using grounded theory can be lifted to a higher level of theoretical abstraction (Suddaby, 2006).

Implications for Practice

This paper recommends governing bodies and marketers of sports to keep a pulse on the opinions echoed by Internet users on social media during live sporting events. This is important because some users who post comments in real time tend to have good sense of the sport. Listening to their voices could help improve fans' overall experience. For example, as indicated earlier, one comment complained to the ICC about the future of bowlers and the

supremacy of batsmen in cricket during the 2015 world cup. However, the issue was officially taken up by the ICC only in the third quarter of 2016 to bring about a change in the rules (Devgan, 2016). Had user-generated comments been monitored closely by the ICC during the Cricket World Cup, such decision-making might have been fast-tracked. This in turn would have resulted in better utilization of social media as a communication channel between common sports fans and sports administrators.

In addition, this paper offers two implications beyond the setting of sports. First, it demonstrates that users do not necessarily comply with the guidelines prescribed by social media applications while posting comments. In this case, even though YC requests users to be considerate while submitting comments, users were often found using abusive language. Perhaps, users did not even look through the guidelines before submitting their entries. This calls for social media applications to be equipped with automated language detection systems that will censor comments that contain abusive language. After all, while preserving the plurality of opinions on social media is essential, silencing the voices that make the online environment hostile is equally imperative.

Second, this paper highlights the potential of user-generated comments to build camaraderie among users as well as to engage the individuals in dynamic arms race. On the one hand, goodwill among users was conspicuous in numerous comments. On the other hand, anti-national and religiously sensitive comments suggested how the online community was split along the fault lines of nationality and religion. This points to how social ties are easy to be forged and destroyed on the Internet (Frangonikolopoulos and Chapsos, 2012). In this vein, information and communication practitioners could explore strategies so that the ways to build camaraderie are promoted, and the fault lines diminished. Such attempts could help develop a healthier cyber-culture among the online community.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The paper is constrained by its data source coupled with the limited data collection window. Data were collected from a singular platform that is frequented by a regional user base during a single sporting event. This limits the generalizability of the findings. Drawing data from several social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook during multiple temporally-dispersed events would have facilitated a richer treatment of the research issue at stake. Moreover, non-English comments could not be coded and analyzed. Such comments might have further enriched the paper. Hence, the findings of the paper should be viewed in light of these limitations.

Nonetheless, as social media applications revolutionize sports coverage, exciting research avenues continue to unfold. In particular, this paper identifies two directions for future research. One direction involves identifying users' motivation to post comments during live sporting events. For this purpose, in-depth interviews could be conducted. Such an investigation would help determine why some users share while others remain lurkers. Additionally, it could also help determine ways to promote camaraderie among users, and prevent them from abusing one another during live sporting events.

A second research direction could seek to exhume the reasons for parasocial interaction during live sporting events between users and players. As evident from this paper, users were always willing to offer advices and wishes to players who were on the playing field. They almost expected the players to revert back despite knowing its apparent implausibility. By exploring psychological and cognitive perceptions of users during live sporting events, the scholarly understanding of parasocial interaction mediated by the Internet could be further enriched.

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