

Original Article

## Beyond Entertainment: Identity, Rituals, and Willingness to Spend in the Pakistan Super League: An Economic Anthropology Perspective

Farjila Adam<sup>1</sup>, Aahil Mushtaq<sup>2</sup> & Naveed Mughal<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Denning Institute of Technology and Entrepreneurship, Karachi, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> Future World School and College, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup> Provost, Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

This study adopted an economic anthropology perspective to investigate how team identification and sociocultural rituals drive a fan's willingness to spend regardless of athletic success. Utilising a quantitative research design, data were collected via a cross-sectional survey of active Pakistan Super League (PSL) fans through purposeful convenience sampling. Statistical analysis, including Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression and reliability tests, was employed to examine the relationships between team identification, fan intensity, ritual participation, and willingness to spend. The results provide empirical support for all three hypotheses; team identification (encompassing personal, role, and collective dimensions) is a highly positive predictor of Willingness to Spend (WTS), as fans prioritise regional pride and community belonging over winning games. Ritual participation, particularly through digital platforms such as fantasy leagues and interactive polling, significantly contributes to financial returns, effectively transforming passive spectators into active financial partners. Furthermore, fan intensity serves as a critical moderator; while casual fans exhibit fragile loyalties, the 53.6% of die-hard fans demonstrate high financial resilience and behavioural consistency, providing franchises with a stable revenue foundation. The study concludes that the PSL's commercial success is anchored in identity fusion where symbolic consumption and social connectivity override purely economic logic.

**Keywords:** *Economic Anthropology, Integrated Fan Identity, Pakistan Super League, Willingness to Spend*

\*Corresponding Author: Farjila Adam | [farjilaa@gmail.com](mailto:farjilaa@gmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

Pakistan Super League (PSL), established in 2015 has become a major source of financial and economic activities in Pakistan (Aftab & Naveed, 2021). It is now a major player in the sports economy of Pakistan since it receives income in the form of broadcasting rights, sponsorships, franchise investments, ticket sales, and merchandise. The league has now attained financial maturity, and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) reports that the league generated revenues of more than Rs 12.5 billion in 2023. Though initial losses were experienced in the first few seasons of the league, the Return on Investment (ROI) of the franchise owners optimized in the maturity stage where franchise owners would typically be in the profitability range by the fifth season (Aftab & Naveed, 2021). Economically, PSL is an indicator of the increasing commercialisation of sports in Pakistan where franchises are run as a business in an attempt to maximise profit and establish a strong fan base. Meanwhile, the consumer behaviour of fans spending money on tickets, team merchandise and match-related activities can be used to explain the impact of emotional attachment and social identity on consumer behaviour, not as a result of rational economic choices. This allows making PSL not only a platform of entertainment but also a significant example to analyse consumer demand, fan loyalty, and symbolic consumption in the context of the economics of sports and economic anthropology in general.

### Consumer Theory and Utility Maximization

The utility maximization hypothesis is a fundamental concept of modern consumer theory, which has been introduced by William Stanley Jevons, Carl Menger, and Leon Walras (as discussed Hosoya, 2024) as a conceptual shift in the marginal revolution to replace the older theories of the subjective exchange ratios with the rigorous theory of marginal utility. In this paradigm, one assumes that an economic agent will stop at a transaction only when their subjective exchange ratio equalizes the actual market price ratio, in effect maximizing their utility subject to a budget constraint. According to mathematical analysis, there are two axioms that are critical, namely, the weak axiom and the axiom of Ville, which are considered to be the key to the connection between pre-marginal subjective values and the modern utility functions (Ville, 1946). By following these axioms, a consumer will not be easily cheated by cyclical indifference and will be able to suffer an effective process of dynamic improvement to achieve a stable equilibrium. This model of rational choice is however usually supplemented by behavioural

finance and economic anthropology especially when it comes to applying this model to real world phenomena such as the PSL because the willingness of a fan to spend is often motivated by identity integration and emotional attachment and may not be the result of a purely rational decision on whether to spend based on athletic success or marginal utility (Hasaan et al., 2025).

### Research Gap

Although team identification has been examined, there is still a gap in the knowledge of the complex and multidimensional nature of fan identity, especially the merging of personal, role and collective identities. Conventionally, sport branding literature has conceptualized fan identity as only a collective or social identity without considering the interaction of these various layers and their changing over time. In particular, the role salience of fan roles in determining the social commitment and behaviour of a fan has been largely overlooked in the past research. Lastly, the research of behavioural economics and fan engagement is based mostly on WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) societies. It has been acknowledged that there is a need to test these behaviour insights in non-WEIRD contexts such as Pakistan to enhance the generalizability of theoretical models to the nature of the culture and social influence in spending behaviour of the fans.

### Research Questions

- How does team identification influence a fan's willingness to spend?
- In what ways do regional identity and spiritual community rituals override rational economic choices in a fan's willingness to spend?
- What factors drive unwavering fan loyalty for PSL teams that consistently underperform?
- What anthropological motives (such as team location, star athletes, or off-field attributes) drive the fragile versus "die-hard" loyalty patterns observed in the month-long PSL season?

### Significance of Study

The significance of this research does not only reside in the concept of sports as entertainment but also examines the PSL as a giant in terms of sociocultural and economic system in which the identity, rituals and the financial action are tightly intertwined. This study presents a clear perspective on how the Pakistani economic behaviour is entrenched within the social organization and national psychology by adopting an economic anthropology view. It also examines how

the PSL can be spiritual community and this allows fans to develop a unified sense of national identity grounded on a common collective memory and local pride that transcend the religious and ethnic divisions. The most important contribution of the study is that it examines the loyalty that cannot be explained by the standard economic logic; the fans of the unsuccessful teams manifest the impeccable loyalty because of the integration of the identity, and emotional attachment to the team, which means that the readiness to spend is not dependent on the success of the teams, but the belonging to the community.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Behavioural Economics and Identity Utility

Behavioural economics is an extension of the conventional economic theory, which uses psychological and other social science findings to acknowledge that real-world humans (*Homo sapiens*) are very different than perfectly rational actors (*Homo economicus*) of the neoclassical theory (Svorenčík & Truc, 2022). Whereas conventional finance deals with rational actors, behavioural finance deals with normal people making irrational decisions that lead to cognitive errors because of biases like overconfidence, loss aversion, and low willpower (Ullah et al., 2018). This discipline addresses the role played by so-called irrelevant factors (SIFs), like framing or temptation, in deciding actual behaviour as opposed to the optimal solutions (Thaler, 2016). A notable example is the investor sentiment where non-economic activities such as sports matches cause mood swings that are captured in stock market returns.

Identity economics, as it is explicitly defined by Akerlof and Kranton (2000), recognizes the fact that identity is a powerful social driver of an individual decision (Ille, 2017). It goes beyond preference orderings that are fixed to the definition of the individual being and their beliefs in the way they are seen by others. The identity utility in this context can be seen as the gratification that people gain by enforcing their own self-concept on the actions that are in line with their personal values or those of their peers (Chun & Sagas, 2022). Team Identification is a psychological construct where sports entities are linked with their respective sports fans through psychological connections (Chun & Sagas, 2022). Traditionally, sport marketing literature has conceptualized this construct through Social Identity Theory, focusing on a collective identity

where sport fans identify with their respective sports entities as interchangeable members of a social group (Lock & Heere, 2017). However, contemporary sport marketing scholars argue that this unidimensional conceptualization of team identification is insufficient and suggest a new Integrated Fan Identity model consisting of three dimensions: collective, role, and personal identity.

### Integrated Fan Identity

It has been found that there are three levels of identity, which are distinct but mutually dependent: personal identity (the unique self), role identity (social positions, being a fan), and collective identity (member of a social group) (Koo et al., 2025). These identities are managed through a dynamic developmental process known as identity work which refers to the process of development of self-meanings of an individual in order to form, repair, ensure, and strengthen or revise it. There is no fixed identity, people are constantly trying out and recreating their identities depending on the social circumstances (Caza et al., 2018).

### Systemic Biases and Deadlock

Exposure to identity group results in systemic biases and the further internalization of group-directed norms. Such biases might eventually result in a preferential deadlock where people will behave based on their group identity without necessarily having to be pressured by outside influences (Gagliardi, 2025). This process explains why fan loyalties can be fragile or changeable, as individuals reconstruct their identities based on shifting social contexts or player movements.

### Identity as Totem

Sports serve as a totem of national and regional identity, particularly in the context of the PSL, generating a spiritual community (Chunying, 2021). He states that this extreme identification gives a kind of utility that generates a strong desire to remain loyal despite the constant poor performance of a team.

### Economic Anthropology, Rituals and Symbolic Consumption

Economic anthropology and identity economics is no longer the neo-classical perspective of individuals as atomistic *homines economici*, but rather as other-regarding social entities whose economic practices exist within complex social systems (Ille, 2017). This school of thought highlights the concept of identity work

which refers to the dynamic developmental process of establishing, sustaining or updating self-meanings by using cognitive, behavioural, and discursive modes (Caza et al., 2018). Within this paradigm, the utility of an individual is optimized when the actions of individuals such as consumption are capable of aligning their personal, role, and collective identity, which formulates self-efficacy and inner coherence (Chun & Sagas, 2022)

### Rituals as Drivers of Preference Internalization

In economic anthropology, rituals and initiation rites are considered as very important processes that match individual preference with a social identity of a group (Ille, 2017). Instead of using outside forces or social ostracism to make people comply with the group, experiencing these cultural practices makes the collective good internalized in personal tastes, curbing the classic free-rider dilemma (Berman, 2000). These practices create an identity fusion, a strong group bonding factor that results in an extreme pro-group behaviours and creates a spiritual community based on a common history and collective memory (Newson, 2019). Cricket, in the context of Pakistan, serves as a national icon, that gives Pakistanis a bigger memory storehouse of national unity (Chunying, 2021).

### Symbolic Consumption and the Spectacle

Symbolic consumption submits that products and events are consumed because of their meanings and motifs as opposed to their material utility (Khondker & Robertson, 2018). In bigger tournaments such as the IPL, cricket has been turned into a consumable commodity and theatrical experience that can be consumed by a middle class in search of social status and entertainment. This new consumer culture brings a showbiz aspect into this sport where showmanship and celebrity status frequently take precedence over the traditional technical skills of the consumerized spectator (Winell et al., 2023). The consumption in such spaces is de-territorialized and global, that is, it combines global market logic and local cultural meaning to establish distinct space to enact identity (Clarke & Mondal, 2022).

### Willingness to Spend

Existing literature on Willingness to Spend (WTS) is based on the principle of demonstrated preference, which argues that an individual's actual behaviour reflects their underlying preference ordering at a given time (Rothbard, 2024). Behavioural economics extends this knowledge by recognizing supposedly

irrelevant factors (SIFs), such as emotional framing effects, salience effects, and emotional state effects, which shape Economic decisions and often dominate traditional rational choice approaches (Ullah et al., 2018). In the context of sports eco-system, identity economics argues that engagement in sociocultural rituals leads to the internalization of group preferences, which in turn leads to intrinsically motivated WTS and a 'preferential deadlock' wherein dedicated fans possess high WTS regardless of teams' underperformance (Ille, 2017). Ultimately, WTS is realized when a subjective exchange ratio of a customer aligns with the actual price of a product. This is stable when behaviour is consistent with identity integration and shown preference for regional pride, which holds that an individual's actual value is equal to a subjective exchange ratio (Hosoya, 2024).

### Utility Beyond Rational Choice

The example of resilient demand of teams not performing well is an economic puzzle that can be explained through the lens of economic anthropology (Hasaan et al., 2025). To the fans of such teams, emotional attachment and identification maintenance is what keeps the "willingness to spend" on the tickets and merchandise based on winning games. This action conflicts with the conventional utility maximization since the consumer is satisfying themselves by reinforcing their social self and regional pride and supporting their team as a source of social capital that will not fall even when success is not attained (Lock & Heere, 2017). Eventually, consumption is transformed into a national identity and a method of belonging to a cosmopolitan society, which transcends religious and ethnic boundaries (Khondker & Robertson, 2018).

### Fan Intensity and WTS

Literature on Fan Intensity distinguishes between the depth of emotional investment and the rate of behaviour among supporters (Saher, 2025). Fans are often categorized as either "die-hard" or "casual" fans. Die-hard fans are defined by high emotional investment, the intention to watch all matches, and the tendency to stay informed about team news. Casual fans support the team occasionally with low psychological investment. In this research, fan intensity is proposed as a moderating factor in relation to team identification and Willingness to Spend (WTS). The literature suggests that the level of fandom intensity determines the sustainability of a fan's financial commitment.

### Financial Resilience of Die-Hard Fans

Die-hard fans often experience "identity

integration,” whereby their team identity represents an extension of their personal, role-based, and collective identity (Saher, 2025). Such identity integration creates a “preferential deadlock” in which die-hard supporters of a sports team demonstrate a constant level of willingness-to-spend (WTS), regardless of underperformance or loss on the part of their sports team. Such spending on merchandise and tickets represents a rational investment in their “spiritual community.”

### Fragility of Casual Fandom

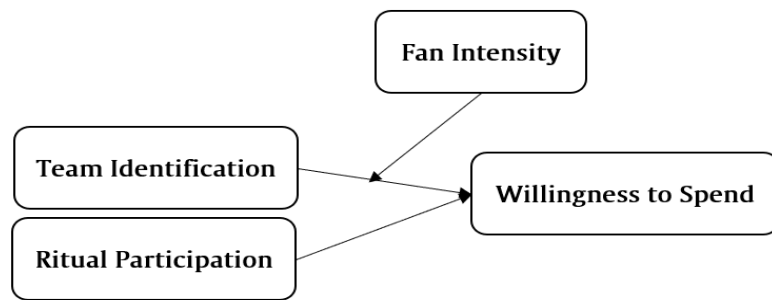
The casual fans, marked by a lower level of identity integration, possess loyalties that are tenuous and subject to alteration. The readiness to support (WTS) them is more prone to being impacted by factors considered supposedly irrelevant (SIFs), such as performance, star athletes, or physical proximity. Due to their lower level of engagement, they tend to be

more prone to loyalty substitution or detaching when a team fails to provide immediate utility in terms of winning games.

### Digital Transformation and Intensity

Digital rituals such as participating in fantasy leagues or interactive polls are tools that have the potential to increase fans intensity. The perceived ease of use of these tools is a primary motivator for the transition of casual viewers to active financial partners based on the catalyst of identity work and continuous engagement. Ultimately, fan intensity determines what will drive the willingness to support (WTS) of fans from social capital that transcends rational choice (die-hard) to a demonstrated preference that is dependent on team success (casual).

### Conceptual Framework



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual Framework

### Hypotheses

- H<sub>1</sub>: Team identification is a highly positive predictor of Willingness to Spend (WTS) of a fan, even in underperforming franchises.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Active participation at the rituals is a key contributor to the Willingness to Spend of a fan.
- H<sub>3</sub>: The relationship between Team Identification and WTS is positively moderated by the Fan Intensity and die-hard fans are more financially resilient than changeable ones.

### METHODOLOGY

The research design is comprised of a quantitative approach which will be used to address the complexities of this research psychologically and anthropologically in the context of the PSL. A cross-sectional survey design is used to investigate the relationship between fan identity, rituals, and spending behaviour at

one point in time. Respondents are asked to fill out a structured questionnaire that allows collecting data on key variables, measured with the help of standardized scales. Cross-sectional method will enable the establishment of trends and associations between these variables in the realm of the PSL. The data is analysed using statistical methods, including correlation and regression analysis, which can be used to test hypothesized relationships and give empirical information on the impact of fan identity and ritualistic behaviours on spending decisions.

The study targets active PSL fans, utilizing purposeful convenience sampling and criterion sampling. Participants must meet specific criteria, such as self-identifying as fans, having a favourite team or athlete, and having followed the most recent PSL season. Data is gathered via structured surveys distributed through platforms like Google Forms, focusing on demographic profiles, team loyalty, and actual expenditure patterns.

## Measurement of Variables

- **Willingness to Spend (WTS):** This is measured through fans' reported purchase intentions and actual spending on match tickets, team-licensed apparel, and franchise-related merchandise (Saher, 2025).
- **Team Identification:** Measured as a multidimensional construct encompassing personal, role, and collective identities. This evaluates the extent to which the team serves as an extension of the fan's social self (Chun & Sagas, 2022).
- **Ritual Participation:** Assessed through the frequency and intensity of engagement in traditional fandom rituals, social celebrations, and the "spiritual community" activities that reinforce national and regional pride (Chunying, 2021).
- **Moderating Variable: Fan Intensity** (die-hard vs. casual).
- **Control Variables (CVs):** Factors such as monthly income, and demographic details (age, gender, and urban/rural location) are included to ensure the robustness of the results.

## Data Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) value is used to confirm the internal consistency of the measurement scales with a threshold value of greater

than 0.70. Convergent validity is ensured by the use of Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The hypotheses are tested using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). These models estimate the effect of identity and rituals on WTS without taking into account economic and demographic differences.

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

This research is based on a quantitative survey data (n=322). The findings explain the complex factors that led to financial engagement in the PSL.

### Descriptive Statistics

The demographics of the PSL fans consists of urbanized and technologically integrated youth. **Age and Gender:** Approximately 46.4% of fans are aged 15–24, followed by 32.5% in the 25–34 bracket. The gender balance is fairly even, as there were 56 percent of men and 44 percent of women respondents. **Location and Occupation:** Most of the fans (68.1%) are located in urban regions with students (43.4) and employees (30.7%) take up the highest occupational group. **Fandom Intensity and Technology:** Majority of the participants (98.8%) having access to smartphone, 53.6% of them consider themselves die-hard fans, and 41.6% are casual fans. **Digital Engagement:** The league is interacted with via streaming apps (73.5%) and PSL mobile apps (61.4%), and YouTube (54.2%). Over 75% of fans give the league a "Good" or an outstanding rating of the digital content offered by the league.

**Table 1**

Descriptive Statistics: Demographic Profile of PSL Fans (N = 322)

Variables	Categories	Frequency (%)
Age	15–24	46.4%
	25–34	32.5%
	35+	21.1%
Gender	Male	56.0%
	Female	44.0%
Location	Urban	68.1%
	Rural	31.9%
Occupation	Student	43.4%
	Employee	30.7%
	Other	25.9%
Fan Intensity	Die-hard	53.6%
	Casual	41.6%
	Other	4.8%
Smartphone Access	Yes	98.8%

## Reliability Analysis

To validate the consistency of the quantitative

constructs, reliability and validity measures were applied:

**Table 2**  
Internal Consistency

	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Team identification	0.725	0.741	0.52
Ritual Participation (Fan Involvement)	0.752	0.772	0.54
Willingness to Spend	0.789	0.792	0.59

All major constructs exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold for Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was above 0.50 for all constructs, confirming convergent

validity. Discriminant validity was established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as the square root of each construct’s AVE was higher than its correlation with other variables.

**Table 3**  
Regression Results and Hypothesis Testing

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.055	.060		-.927	.355
Team Identification	1.299	.044	.622	29.699	.000
Ritual Participation	.358	.019	.386	18.447	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Spend

Results conclude that identity incorporation and emotional attachment can be used to maintain the unrelenting loyalty in spite of a long period of poor performance of the teams. To these fans, the team is their source of regional pride and community, and the desire to spend is a source of social identity reinforcement, but not an objective response to athletic success. The correlation between Fan Involvement and Economic Growth is significantly positive and it is very significant as seen in Linear Regression. As Fan Involvement involves digital-based rituals such as polling, highlights and fantasy leagues, this validates the fact that active engagement directly contributes to financial returns in terms of e-commerce and merchandise success. Although the short season of the PSL might result in the development of fragile or changeable loyalties due to performance, the findings indicate that the die-hard fan group (53.6%) has a high level of behavioural consistency. These passionate fans are financially resilient and remain spending and updating on their teams even when they are performing poorly which in effect offers a reliable revenue foundation to franchises.

**Summary of Finding**

The results of the study indicate that the financial participation in the PSL is a complicated interaction among integrated fan identity, sociocultural rituals, and investor sentiment that prevail in most cases against the conventional rational choice frameworks. Though the league has a short season lasting a month, which can create fragile or changeable loyalties due to the mobility of the players and the performance of the teams but

underperforming teams still have a stable revenue base due to the firmly combined identity and emotional attachment that help to retain the fan loyalty even in the case of constant failure in the field. Moreover, the digital transformation of the league has been effective in monetizing the fan engagement; the feeling of ease of use on mobile and streaming applications is one of the main reasons why fans engage, and franchises can switch their first-season losses into maximized Return on Investment (ROI) with the maturity of the league.

**Discussion**

The results of this study, analysed through the lens of economic anthropology, reveal that the Willingness to Spend (WTS) among PSL fans is a product of deep-seated social meanings and rituals rather than purely rational utility maximization. By replacing the idealized Homo economicus with “normal” Homo sapiens, the findings demonstrate how identity and group-driven norms serve as the primary determinants of financial behaviour within this sports ecosystem. Findings have shown that team identification is a complex construct that incorporates personal, role, and collective identities. This combined identity is a strong predictor of WTS; fans who consider their team to be a part of their social self, exhibit a strong disposition to spend on merchandise and tickets despite the team having a history of poor performance. To give an example, the supporters of the struggling teams are characterized by unwavering loyalty, which is achieved by means of identity integration and emotional attachment, which are more concerned with belonging to a community

rather than victories (Chun & Sagas, 2022; Chunying, 2021; Khondker & Robertson, 2018). Participation in both the conventional and the digital rituals is a great way of enhancing the financial output. Digital rituals like participating in value co-creation, interactive polls and fantasy league turn passive viewers into active financial partners. Linear Regression ensured that the more fans are involved, the more the Economic Growth, since the active participation in the rituals directly influences the sales in e-commerce and digital ticketing.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the behaviour of fans in the PSL creates an important economic puzzle, which the standard theories of utility maximization and rational choice do not adequately capture, considering the loyalty and willingness to spend (WTS) even on unsuccessful teams. The findings show that the financial engagement is largely fuelled by the integrated nature of the fan identity, which includes personal, role, and collective aspects. It is evident that the expenditure on the purchase of tickets and other merchandise is meant to affirm social self and regional identity, which is far removed from the rational behaviour exhibited towards the success of the teams. Furthermore, the importance of sociocultural and digital rituals, including fantasy leagues and interactive polling, is highlighted. These rituals contribute to the creation of identity fusion and internalization of group preferences, which effectively transform the fans into financial partners. It is also evident that this emotional and symbolic attachment is high among the 53.6% of fans categorized as “die-hard,” which shows financial resilience and behaviour consistency. As such, the league benefits from the fans’ loyalty and consistency, which is not dependent on the performance of the teams. Ultimately, the financial sophistication and optimal return on investment (ROI) lie in the young, urbanized, and technology-savvy population, which has ensured the widespread availability of smartphones.

### Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study is that it cannot be used to generalize results to the entire population. The sample size of the participants is also quite low, at 322 respondents, which could result in evidence of lesser generalizability. Moreover, sample is geographically confined to a single area and it does not take into consideration cultural sensitivities and consumer attitudes which could vary among countries or backgrounds. Although the study is conducted on a

national level in Pakistan, it is silent on the variation of technology accessibility on a local level, especially in rural or less developed regions where there is no infrastructure. Lastly, the study is an evaluation of current developments but does not indicate future impacts or long-term variations in the patterns of income and fan engagement within the upcoming years.

### Future Research Directions

In order to develop the results of these findings, future research must utilize quantitative research using larger and more varied samples to further support the results. The researchers are encouraged to use a longitudinal design where they can use the existing data as a benchmark to monitor the success and the trends of income over a period of time. It is evident that there is a need to investigate the differential effect of technology on rural cricket fans with emphasis on the obstacles posed by the inadequate infrastructure and insufficiency of digital literacy. Certain studies must also focus on the association between the level of fan income, education, and their involvement in revenue creation. The future research in the sphere of behavioural finance is to employ more advanced statistical variables to Pakistani sports sentiment. This also involves carrying out comparative research between the PSL and other leading leagues such as Indian Premier League (IPL), big bash league (BBL), or Caribbean Premier League (CPL) to determine effective monetization strategies in various regions. Finally, studies ought to be carried out on the pre- and post-impact of the PSL on the overall economic development in Pakistan, taking into account the mediating impact of hosting matches in various domestic and international stadiums.

### Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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## Author Biographies

**Farjila Adam** is currently working at Denning Institute of Technology and Entrepreneurship, Karachi, Pakistan. She completed her Masters Degree in Entrepreneurship from Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan.

**Aahil Mushtaq** is currently working at Future World School and College, Islamabad, Pakistan. He completed his Masters Degree in Entrepreneurship from Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan.

**Naveed Mughal** is currently working as Provost, Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan. He completed his Masters Degree in Educational Leadership & Administration from the University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom.