



UNIVERSITY OF
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Just Stop Your Crying, It's a Sign of the Times!

An Analysis of the Media's Role in the Transformation of
Cricket during the White Ball Revolution

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of BA (Hons) Sports Media

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Abstract

Sport and the media have always been intertwined, and the beauty of their relationship is that one does not work as well without the other. With that in mind, no sport has embraced the advancements in technology and the media like cricket. The introduction of T20 cricket was the epitome of the modernization that sport and the media had experienced, with matches becoming much more of an event. What began as an innocent ploy by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to engage more spectators, quickly became a global phenomenon, with rights to broadcast franchise tournaments sold for over a billion dollars. The impact that the media has had on cricket cannot be underestimated, from the rules of the game legitimately being changed as a result of new and improved software, to viewers watching at home assuming the role of producers as their social media posts are displayed on screen by expert pundits.

Certainly, in the last decade, social media has become an ever-present in cricket, sport, and life in general. Previously, communication was one-directional and only media companies and broadcasters were able push out their content. The ECB felt that what was supposed to be the format to drive cricket's viewership and interest, T20 cricket, was not achieving that goal and so decided to introduce The Hundred. Using a now two-way communication format through social media, they set out to establish a younger and diverse audience of people watching cricket, while attempting to focus more on the experience of spectators rather than the results of the tournament themselves. The media's role during its inaugural season was one of vital importance, ensuring the sport was no longer stuck on subscription TV and allowing a once disinterested audience access to something they may have felt was not designed for them.

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Introduction

When the late Kerry Packer first entered the cricketing world of middle-aged white men, excessively sophisticated teas, and five-day matches which could somehow still end in a draw, the sport was in a somewhat comfortable position. But no one could have imagined the impact of trailblazers such as Packer and others would have on cricket, and the seemingly upward trajectory they have placed cricket upon. Without question, “the professional game has become far more closely integrated into highly commercial ways of marketing, and Twenty20 cricket has placed it onto a globalized stage watched and followed by mass audiences in many countries” (Rumford and Wagg, 2010: 19). This study debates how the exponential growth of T20 cricket has coincided perfectly with rapid advancements in technology which have allowed the relationship between cricket and the media to blossom. The viewing figures for the Indian Premier League show just how substantial T20 cricket has become since its birth in 2003. In the 2020 season, the reach for the first week of matches was a staggering 268 million people (Ayushi Kar, Hindu Business Line, 17th April 2022), over four times the entire UK population.

However, perhaps due to the era of the Internet and social media, on the surface it seems as though especially for the younger generation, our attention spans had greatly decreased. With that being the case, the England and Wales Cricket Board felt that even T20 cricket was stagnating and so to desperately attract a new audience, they created a new format known as The Hundred (Nick Hoult, Wisden, 15th June 2020). To succeed with their targets, there were a number of areas of the media which the organisers used to their advantage to engage with a different demographic of people and demystify cricket for them. For instance, many matches during the men’s and women’s Hundred were shown on the BBC, free-to-air TV. But the

ECB were determined to remove any ostracization and aimed to engross a much more diverse audience than the traditional cricket buffs. Their promotional website used bold typography, with fast-paced videos that used flashy graphics showing a young, family-oriented audience appearing to have lots of fun watching the action (Jake Bickerton, Broadcast, 23rd July 2021). Despite the vast planning and tunnel-visioned focus, The Hundred came under excessive disapproval from cricket's pre-established followers who argued that its creation was completely unnecessary and would struggle to reap the benefits of its promises. Instructing each and every commentator and analyst to use the term 'balls' rather than 'overs' sparked more controversy than you might have imagined.

Chapter 1

Sporting Trailblazers: Cricket's No Fear Attitude to Change

“The rise of T20 cricket has transformed the sport into a completely different dimension”

(Matthew Smith, Sporting Ferret, 15th April 2021)

This chapter analyses the different factors that have shaped the game of cricket, and how the media has been a key component in how it is consumed, as well as its importance in progressing the sport itself. Moreover, chapter one discusses the “concept that has redefined world cricket in the 21st century” (Andrew Ramsey, Cricket AU, 21st July 2014), Twenty20 cricket. Designed by the ECB in 2003, the global impact of T20 cricket was unimaginable upon introduction, with rights to broadcast tournaments such as the Indian Premier League being sold for a staggering US\$1.3billion.

Since the first official international match contested between the USA and Canada in 1844, the sport of cricket has gradually been reshaped and innovatively adapted to suit its players and the viewing public (Noorbhai and Noakes, 2015: 1), whilst attempting to move with the times. The media's role in achieving this has been vital with it being the vehicle in which sport is broadcast for people to watch and idolise their heroes, and dream of following in their footsteps. The landscape of cricket's relationship with the media has changed drastically since “the BBC became the first broadcaster to cover every ball of a Test Match” (BBC Sport archives, 2003) in 1957. Prior to the 1970s, cricket was very one-dimensional, as it was simply different countries playing five and sometimes six-day test matches against each other. But one of the most significant men in the sport's history, and the man responsible for

introducing the 'World Series of Cricket' competition in 1977 was Australian, Kerry Packer. Once he had assumed control of the Channel Nine television network in 1974, Packer's TV and magazine holdings were valued at about AU\$100 million (Westfield in Butler & Russell, 2000: 184), demonstrating the magnitude of his capabilities. As a "self-reported television addict, Packer took his passion for sports such as cricket, golf, rugby, and tennis, and looked at ways in which he could broadcast these games on Channel Nine, while making them more interesting for viewers" (Barry, 1993 in Butler & Russell, 2000: 184). That notion of making sport more interesting for viewers is where the media mogul made his mark on cricket, he envisioned higher profitability through a Channel Nine producer's idea of broadcasting one-day cricket rather than the traditional five-day tests, which he hoped would make cricket more accessible to a wider audience. This was a result of his failed attempt of securing the rights to show the Ashes on Channel Nine, rather than it continue with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). But ABC had an established reputation and its coverage "struck a chord with the traditions of the game" (Barry, 1993: 168). And so, under a veil of secrecy, and in direct competition to ABC, Packer signed 35 of the world's top cricketers to compete in his own breakaway competition dubbed World Series Cricket (McFarlane, 1997: 13).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the world's reaction to the news was mainly disbelief, shock, and horror - "The royal and ancient game was being assailed in a way never envisaged by the old guard authority that had ruled it so unequivocally and conservatively" (McFarlane, 1997: 13). No one had ever seen anything like this in the history of cricket but, as this study conveys, the "razzmatazz and excitement" (Barry, 1993: 189) would soon become an element which the cricket community would warm to. In addition, because of 'dwindling crowds', having to share revenues with Packer and a number of other factors, the Australian Cricket Board

agreed to give him exclusive rights to broadcast the Australian Summer test matches on Channel Nine (Barry, 1993 in Butler, & Russell, 2000: 185). After only three seasons of World Series of Cricket, Packer had struck gold and to avoid any further challenge to his reputation or forthcoming career in cricket broadcasting, he ended the competition. Packer was inaugurated as an official member of the MCC, and former Cricket Australia chairman Bob Merriman's comments at the ceremony epitomised the size of the impact he had on the game; "I think the two greatest influences in the last 100 years of Australian cricket have been Sir Donald Bradman and Kerry Packer" (Belinda Cotter, Fox Sports, February 12th, 2022).



Figure 1: Kerry Packer watching a World Series Cricket match

On the path towards The Hundred's inaugural season in 2021, there have certainly been a number of key factors within the sports media complex in cricket, Kerry Packer being the first trailblazer, who laid the foundations for the way it is perceived now compared to before his introduction to cricket broadcasting in the 1970s. The next watershed moment for cricket was without doubt the creation of a new format in 2003, Twenty-20 (T20). Stuart Robertson's name is one that is rarely mentioned, but while working as marketing manager of the ECB he was tasked with regenerating English cricket. As journalist Paul Newman notes, "There was a significant decline in attendances across the board and we came up with something that we hoped would appeal to people who were cash-rich but time-poor" (Paul Newman, Mail Online, 11th June 2008). That something emerged as T20 cricket, which in turn did not only offer a solution to rejuvenating the game for its audience, but "reinvigorated contemporary cricket as a televised spectacle via regular technological innovations" (Lopez-Gonzalez, et al, 2019). Although it was "initially conceived as a mid-season diversion to attract fans to county matches, Twenty20 quickly grew into an essential money-maker and stadium-filler for domestic leagues in the world's cricketing countries" (Agur, 2013: 542). As well as this, alongside the holy grail that is test cricket, the shorter format offered a huge appeal to broadcasters. So much so that the ECB in 2004, announced a new four-year television deal worth £220 million with Sky Sports, giving them exclusive live rights for all English international and domestic cricket from 2006 (Maxie Allen, TheFullToss, 14th July 2015).

A drawback that is often argued during debates on the impact T20 cricket has had on the game, is that for all the buzz, excitement, and positivity, the shorter format was having a negative effect on test cricket. The batsmen needed to have a defensive classic core to their technique and bowlers had to be attacking but economical (Anon, The Sporting Digest, January 17th, 2019). T20 cricket was all about high pace, high energy cricket, whilst there

was a disregard for the value of a player's wicket, their only objective was to score runs as fast as possible. Many pundits felt that the all-out attacking brand of cricket would result in the detriment of test cricket. Legendary fast bowler and commentator Michael Holding, famous for expressing his views on T20 said; "It's not even cricket! It's going to be very difficult for the West Indies to get on top in test cricket because of this T20" (Anon, Hindustan Times, 28th June 2021). The aim of cricket boards with the introduction of T20 cricket was to produce something that struck a balance that enticed fans of traditional test cricket, as well as a younger demographic. "Sport provides a controlled environment in which to express emotion" (Hoffman, 1992: 7) and when watching cricket, "we're looking to be entertained" (Nishi Narayanan, The Cricket Monthly, February 2017).



Figure 2: Michael Holding commenting in South Africa

T20 cricket symbolised a new era, not just for the sport itself, but the way that it is mediated. The vast improvements in technology which coincided with T20's introduction catalysed a new dawn for television coverage, and the features which were available for broadcasters to showcase to their audience. An example of this was Hawk-Eye which was designed to “follow the trajectory of each ball during play” (Gangal & Raje, 2007: 2) and when required (during reviews), was used to determine whether a batsman was deemed out or not, depending on the prediction of where the ball would go. Figures 3 and 4 highlight the evolution of the Hawk-Eye system, comparing examples from the 2005 Ashes series and the most recent ODI world cup in 2019.

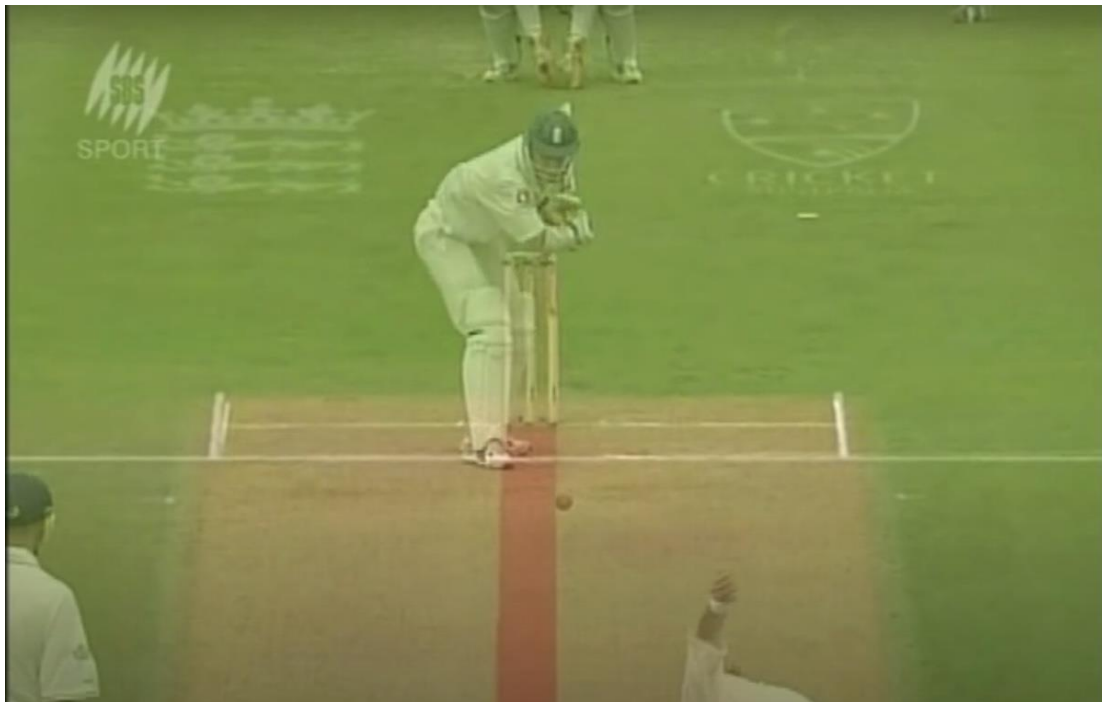


Figure 3: *A replay during the 2005 Ashes*

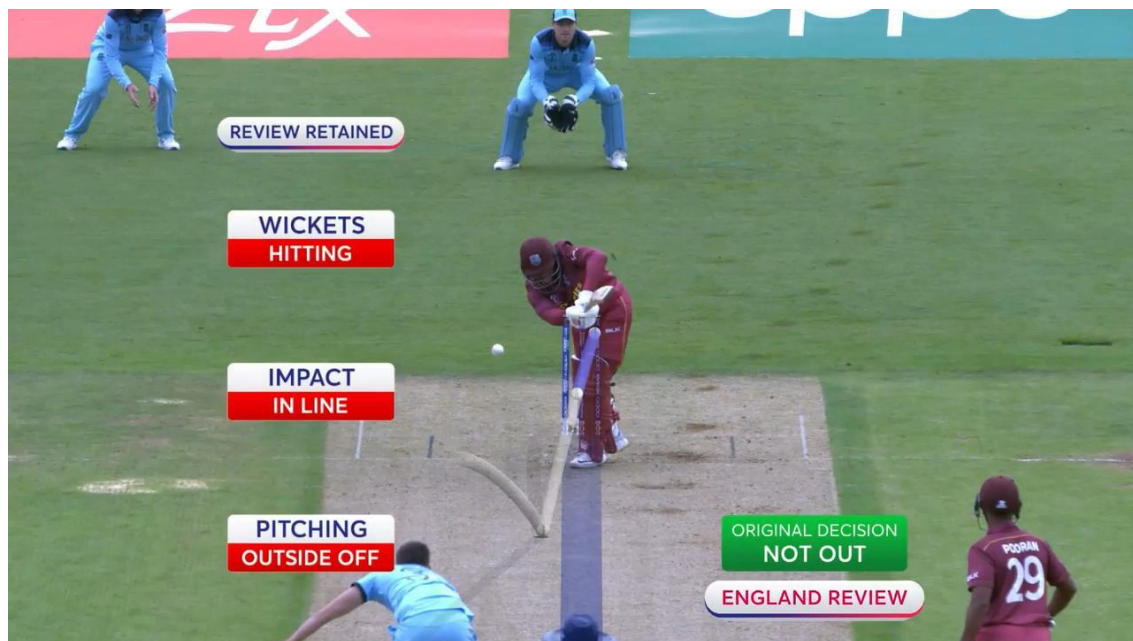


Figure 4: *An LBW review in the 2019 Cricket World Cup*

What was an integral part of showcasing T20 cricket as a successful brand and gave it legitimacy, which countered the pressures faced from the cricket world, was to innovate the “coverage of matches through diverse camera angles” (Anon, Rario, 29th July 2021). Until the late 1970s, cricket was filmed simply using one camera, but through World Series Cricket, Kerry Packer wanted to change the way cricket was watched forever. Being situated in the ideal spectator position during replays for things such as run-outs, no-balls, and stumpings is a given today. But it was not until Packer and his ideas took shape that we moved away from “half the overs in a day being filled by batsmen’s arses” (Haigh, 2007: 89).

For Bignell and Orlebar (2005), the two main focusses that draw television channels to cover sport are relevance to the audience’s assumed knowledge and interests and covering it in a way that exploits the possibilities of the television medium. The intentions of T20 cricket were perfect for utilising the great potential of multi-camera outside broadcasting (OB) for

live matches. Positioning cameras around various sides of the playing area to capture not only the blow-by-blow action, but varying shots of things such as characters in the crowd because of the change in cricket culture that came with T20. Furthermore, the emergence of these changing values during short-format matches allowed for stars and narratives to be created with which the audience could align themselves, something that cricket had rarely seen before. Whannel (2005: 67) argues that sport is a “social practice which irons out some aspects of individuality in order to maintain players as members of a team”. However, audiences want entertainment and “charismatic stars provide a break from the mundane” (Whannel, 2005: 195). He continues to express his belief that the media habitually focus on originality, and sports themselves must produce such personality in order to succeed, thus a conflict between needs and interest is created. Icons such as Lord Ian Botham epitomised this as he was seen by some as “vulgar and boorish, but inspirational by others” (Whannel, 2005: 217). Because of this, the British media faced the dilemma of wanting to present him as this superstar which every child in the country wanted to be, whilst not wanting them to follow his occasional features in tabloid newspapers in “drug and sex-related scandals” (Whannel, 2005: 217).

This idea of individual players becoming stars in their own rights has been elevated to an astronomical degree through the Indian Premier League (IPL). Figure 5 demonstrates the levels of popularity and affection that fans of the Mumbai Indians franchise, and Indian cricket fans in general had for Sachin Tendulkar. Axel and Huggins (2011) describe the format of T20s as “made for television” (Axel & Huggins, 2011: 1337), with the IPL being the most prestigious tournament and a hyper-compressed ephemeral spectacle.



Figure 5: A crowd desperate for pictures and autographs of Sachin Tendulkar

Rumford (2011) is of the belief that cricket as a whole has experienced an Indianization, largely due to T20 cricket. With the small matter of a population in excess of 1.3 billion people, it is no secret that the Indian market had endless potential for television broadcasters, and a wide range of businesses across the world. The graph below demonstrates the sheer popularity that the IPL's annual tournament generates, and the almost inconceivable numbers of unique TV viewers each edition gets.

Rumford continues by suggesting that "Twenty20 is a condensed version of the game which can be played to a finish in three-and-a-half hours, thereby allowing cricket to be promoted as a mass TV sport" (Rumford, 2011: 1311). It was because of this potential that Sony Television Network India and World Sports Group (WSG) secured rights to broadcast the IPL for ten years in a deal worth more than US\$1billion, \$908 million of which went to the Board of

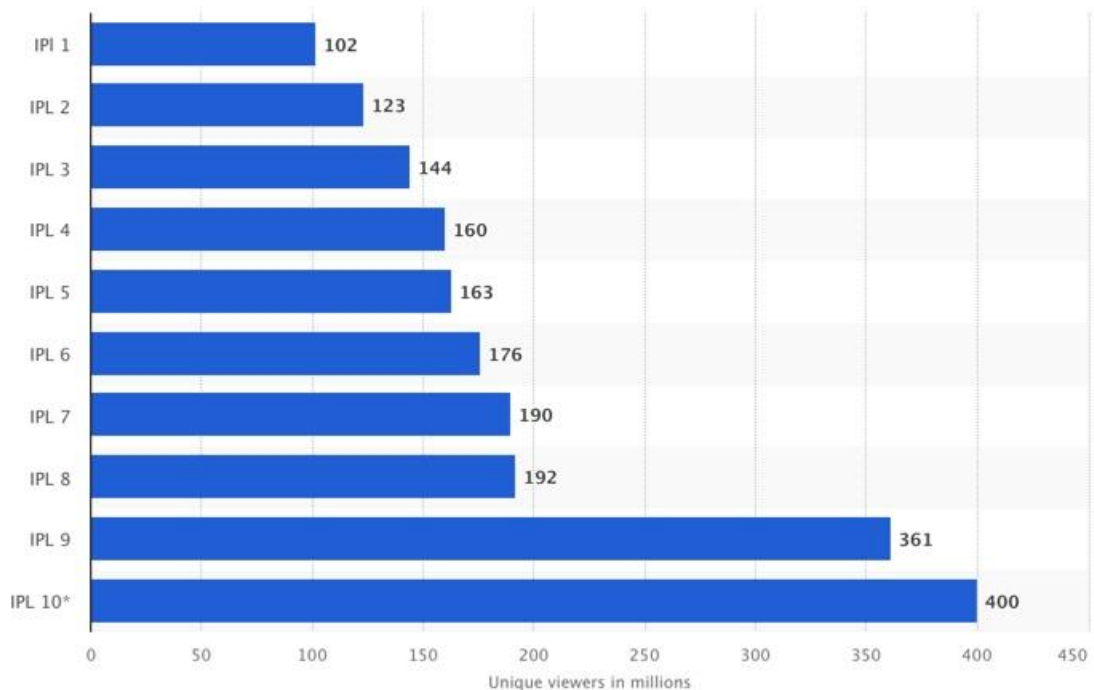


Figure 6: Unique television viewers of the IPL between 2008 and 2017 (Statista- 2021)

Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), and \$108 million used for promoting the tournament (Anon, ESPNcricInfo, 14th January 2008). Television rights agreements are an effective way of measuring the success and impact of T20 cricket. For instance, the current holders are Disney-owned Star India, who signed a US\$2.55 billion deal for five years in 2017 (Ed Dixon, Sports Pro, 23rd February 2022), an estimated increase of more than US\$1.5 billion, illustrating the meteoric growth T20 cricket and the IPL has had. In addition to that, the rights for the next five-year cycle could fetch more than US\$5.3 billion (Bansal, 16th February 2022). It seems as though the IPL, as of the 2022 season has become a haven for sponsors because they know the substantial viewership the IPL attracts. Some partnerships in recent years have certainly baffled many, and have even stretched to comical levels, as shown in Figure 7. The first six overs of each innings in T20 matches known as the powerplay in the IPL is sponsored by Cred, a service which allows customers to pay their credit card bills.

Speaking in 2008, BBC cricket broadcaster Jonathan Agnew questioned the integrity of the T20 format by arguing “the administrators are hell bent on squeezing as much money out of this shortened form of the game as possible” (Jonathan Agnew, BBC Sport, 17th July 2008). Fourteen years later and his claims still stand, Cred and cricket have no relation whatsoever yet the fintech company know the market they are reaching with their sponsorship and involvement in the IPL.

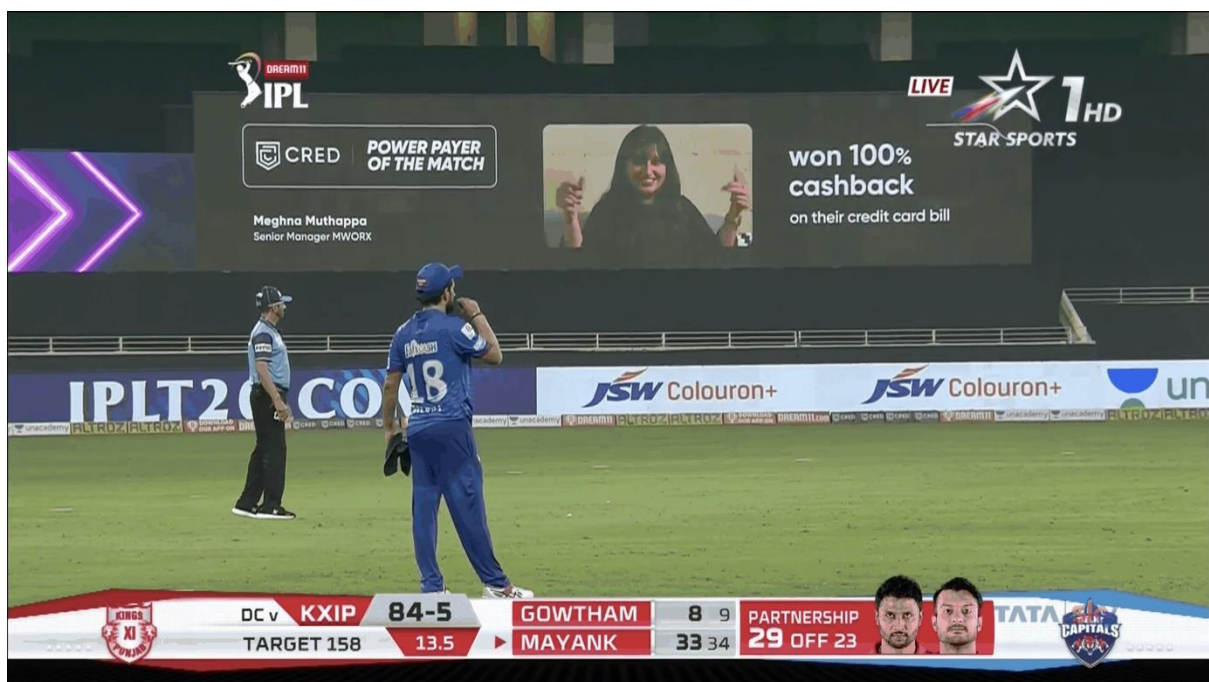


Figure 7: An example of a winner of Cred’s ‘Power Payer of the Match’ promotion

India was not the only country to design its own T20 league, Cricket Australia commissioned the Big Bash League (BBL), with its first season being 2011-12, replacing the ‘KFC Big Bash League’ which was almost seen as a dummy run. Sturm’s (2015) study details the way it was used, “BBL intentionally placed an initial emphasis on entertainment over serious cricket which allowed broadcasters to treat games as an experimental playground for trialling technological innovations” (Sturm, 2015: 84). As Axford and Huggins (2011) suggest, “Twenty20’s range of technologies make for hyper-reflexive viewing, with members of the

audience acting as consumer and producer, critic, and fan” (Axford & Huggins, 2011: 1332). Technological advancements are certainly a difference that lies between the IPL and the Big Bash. While money was seemingly the nucleus of the IPL, the BBL and its Australian broadcasters, in a similar vein to Formula One’s projection of a glamorous and high-tech spectacle of speed, focused on a series of “dazzling perspectives and seductive images to convert ‘smash and bash’ cricket into a potentially enthralling spectacle” (Sturm: 2015: 82). Their broadcasters such as Fox Sports and Channel Nine are known for their “pervasive use of multi-cameras, fluid framing and a high-intensity presentation style that relies upon rapid cuts, exuberant and hyperbolic commentators, and constant technology-infused innovations” (Sturm, 2015: 85).



Figure 8: An excited commentary box during a BBL game in 2019

Perhaps the biggest change to the landscape of cricket, alongside Twenty20s was the digital revolution that is social media. T20 cricket was almost viewed as an expression of the media

zeitgeist (Sturm, 2015: 86). Twitter as a platform for example allows fans from all around the world to connect and discuss players, matches, moments, all from tweeting. Cricket coverage was rather one-dimensional in the past, “commentary used to be the sole source from which analysis was disseminated” (Angikaar Choudhury, Scroll.in, 8th April 2016); social media has changed that dramatically.



Figure 9: A tweet from Jofra Archer about Chris Gayle in 2013

Wenner (1998) refers to the way in which communication in the world of sport is everchanging and this can be applied to cricket in more ways than one. For instance, Sky Sports Cricket’s feature known as the ‘Kids Coaching Clinic’ illustrates this. Viewers could use Twitter to send a video to the Sky cricket team of their friends and/or family playing cricket, and the expert commentators such as Michael Atherton and Nasser Hussain would give the kids technical advice. As Figure 10 shows, as of March 2022, their tweet has been viewed almost 17,000 times, highlighting the effectiveness social media has had on cricket. For Gauntlett (2007), consumers are becoming producers, in terms of content creation.

Further examples of Wenner's ideas were seen at the 2016 T20 World Cup. During the event, 46 million people across the world engaged on Facebook, while the 85 press conferences streamed live on ICC's Facebook page had more than 10 million views. And on Twitter, there were 5.75 billion impressions of tweets related to the event throughout the tournament (Anon, FirstPost, 18th April 2016). These stats indicate the magnitude of social media and signals the new way in which people discuss the game of cricket.



Figure 10: Sky's tweet encouraging people to send their videos



Figure 11: A screengrab of what viewers saw during a 'Kids Coaching Clinic' in 2021

Chapter two will examine the ECB's proposed idea for attracting a different audience to the game which may not have been enticed by T20 cricket, The Hundred. It will consider the reasons for its introduction and explore how one of its main objectives is to demystify cricket so that more and more people can get involved in it. Furthermore, chapter two highlights the different methods which were used to achieve this during the inaugural competition in 2021, ranging from things such as the difference in the vocabulary of commentators, simplified graphics on screen, and the benefits of broadcasting matches on free-to-air television.

Chapter 2

The ECB's Answer to Irrelevance: The Hundred

“The Hundred was sold hard to sceptics as the only way that cricket could save itself from increasing irrelevance”

(Emma John, The Guardian, 29th August 2021).

This chapter explores the new phenomenon that is The Hundred, discussing why the ECB felt it was needed and the crucial role the media played during its inaugural season in 2021.

Chapter two will also analyse the way that the media was used to simplify and demystify cricket, and how factors such as the commentators' vernacular were utilised to appeal to a brand-new audience. Sky and the BBC advised the commentary teams not to use cricket-specific language, terms like yorker, googly and bouncer were not banned, but needed an explanation (Nick Hoult, The Telegraph, 21st July 2021).

In an attempt to engage with an arguably much changed demographic compared to regular cricket fans, the ECB ensured that some matches were broadcast live on free-to-air television.

The £1.1 billion combined media rights deal signed between Sky and the BBC in 2020 included showcasing the men's and women's Hundred matches, as well as International T20s, bringing cricket back to the BBC for the first time in 21 years (Hardik Vyas, Reuters, 30th June 2017). Of course, widening and increasing the audience of men and women's cricket has always been of importance, but in recent years there has certainly been an effort in pushing the women's game further than ever before. According to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB), the opening games of The Hundred attracted more younger and female viewers than past seasons of televised cricket. 12% of viewers from the

opening men's game were under 25, and 39% were female (Holly Hunt, Insider Sport, 27th July 2021). In comparison, the average men's T20 match in 2019 and 2020 attracted a 27% female audience, illustrating the immediate benefits of the media's role in The Hundred. Figure 12 demonstrates that the decision to broadcast some of the men's and women's Hundred matches on the BBC was justified. 1.6 million people watched the first women's game on BBC Two, and just 170,000 watched on Sky, which required a paid subscription. The huge BBC Two viewership for the first Hundred women's match even eclipsed the number of viewers for the 2017 World Cup Final triumph for England's women which was 1.1 million. The figures will have delighted the ECB who have faced years of criticism over locking cricket away behind the Sky paywall. Although there were only ten of the 32 men's matches live on the BBC and eight from the women's tournament the ECB would have seen those as crucial for building a following away from the mainstream cricket audience. Former commentator and now England men's Director of Cricket Rob Key spoke of his excitement on the growth of the women's game and the huge benefits of The Hundred; "girls start to see playing cricket as the end goal and that it's not that far away. Now they know it's not just international cricket with England or nothing. You don't have to be one of the best 11 players in the country, although you can then aspire to that. We are starting to see more players

coming through and younger than in the men's game and have seen 16 and 17-year-olds performing well in this tournament." (Rob Key, Sky Sports, 27th August 2021).

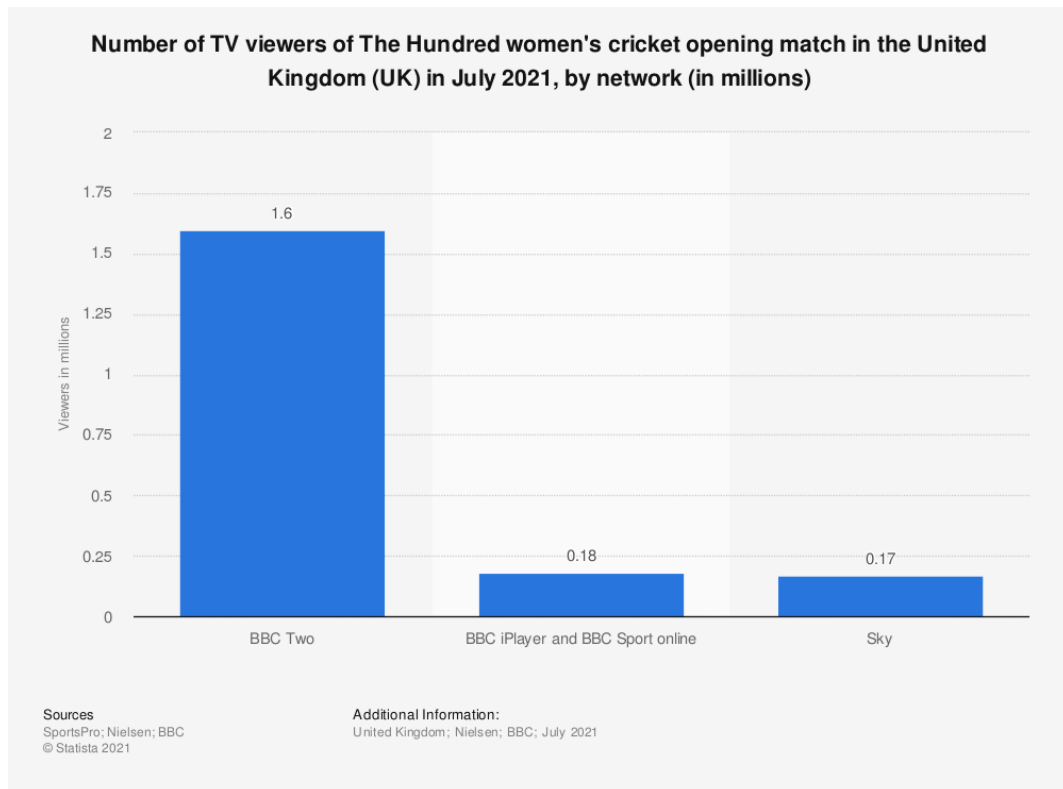


Figure 12: *The number of TV viewers of The Hundred women's opening match (Statista- 2021)*

The ECB were beginning to feel as if cricket in this country was somewhat stagnating. Notably, test cricket has been revamped with changes to its playing conditions and structure, these include day/night tests played under lights with pink balls since 2015, as well as the televisual technologies, techniques and innovations mentioned in chapter 1 which have also been embedded into test cricket (Redhead, 2011: 92). For too long, cricket has remained locked behind a paywall and attracting a new demographic encouraged growth in participation and revenue (Daniel Gallan, New Frame, 18th January 2020). Speaking to iNews, Stuart Robertson claimed that “The Hundred started as a bit of a political decision because it was clear that something had to be done to inject a bit more into the T20 format” (Richard Edwards, iNews, 11th August 2021). The idea behind The Hundred was to simplify

cricket, ensuring matches lasted two hours and did not drag on like the farcical four-hour IPL encounters. Two hours was deemed more palatable for television audiences who did not have to learn some of the more alienating elements of cricket's lexicon (Steve McCaskill, Forbes, 21st July 2021). Evidently, the terminology used by pundits and commentators during broadcasts of Hundred matches was possibly the most palpable change that was made. The move from overs to balls was a key feature of the ECB's endeavour to demystify the game of cricket (Andrew Miller, ESPNcricInfo, 12th July 2021). They hoped that it would enhance the viewing experience for the audience, and generally make it easier for first-time watchers to follow what was actually going on. However, many people were opposed to this shift in vocabulary, expressing that "overs help not just to understand when a particular thing happened, but also put into context with other things which happened around it" (Akash Ghosh, CricTracker, 29th July 2021). Despite the debate on the specifics of the language used, the importance of commentators for a new competition designed as a gateway for newcomers could not be underestimated. They are the ones who "pointed out the high-points, moments of controversy and give behind-the-scenes information about the players and teams" (Bignell & Orlebar, 2005: 153). This type of insight will have benefitted cricket newbies greatly, allowing them to better understand, follow, and interact with the competition, which was the precise impact the ECB envisaged when devising the format.

Besides changing the jargon of the game, another striking difference outlined during The Hundred were the on-screen graphics. The intention behind this was to continue with their belief in simplicity as,



Figure 13: An LBW review during The Hundred



Figure 14: An LBW review during the 2021 T20 World Cup

“The tournament’s broadcast has an entirely different look and feel to any other cricket competition, with bright coloured graphics, animations, and calls to action to vote on the app across the screen at all times” (Anon, Grabyo, 12th August 2021). Figures 13 and 14 highlight the contrast in how two different formats, T20 and The Hundred, broadcast LBW decisions using Hawk-Eye. In regular T20 cricket, phrases such as impact, in-line and pitching outside off are shown, which the ECB decided might confuse cricket novices. This meant that they only displayed whether the umpire, the Hawk-Eye system, and the overall outcome was out

or not, to make it more straightforward for viewers to grasp and understand. Similarly, figures 15 and 16 display the difference in scoreboard graphics used in the 2019 World Cup, and a match during the women's Hundred. The example from England's World Cup final triumph over New Zealand shows the regular implementation of graphics for the three main cricket formats, with the necessary information presented horizontally. But in The Hundred however, the organisers opted to place a team's runs scored or the number of runs required on the left and right sides of the screen, vertically. Many viewers voiced their criticism on the graphics, claiming that it was too difficult to work out the situation of the game. BBC Test Match Special scorer Andy Zaltzman described them as "some pleasingly rubbish 1980s graphics to appeal to people in their mid-40s like me". Other Twitter users called the graphics "an eyesore", "horrible", "awful and confusing" and "completely unreadable" (Tim Wigmore, The Telegraph, 22nd July 2021).

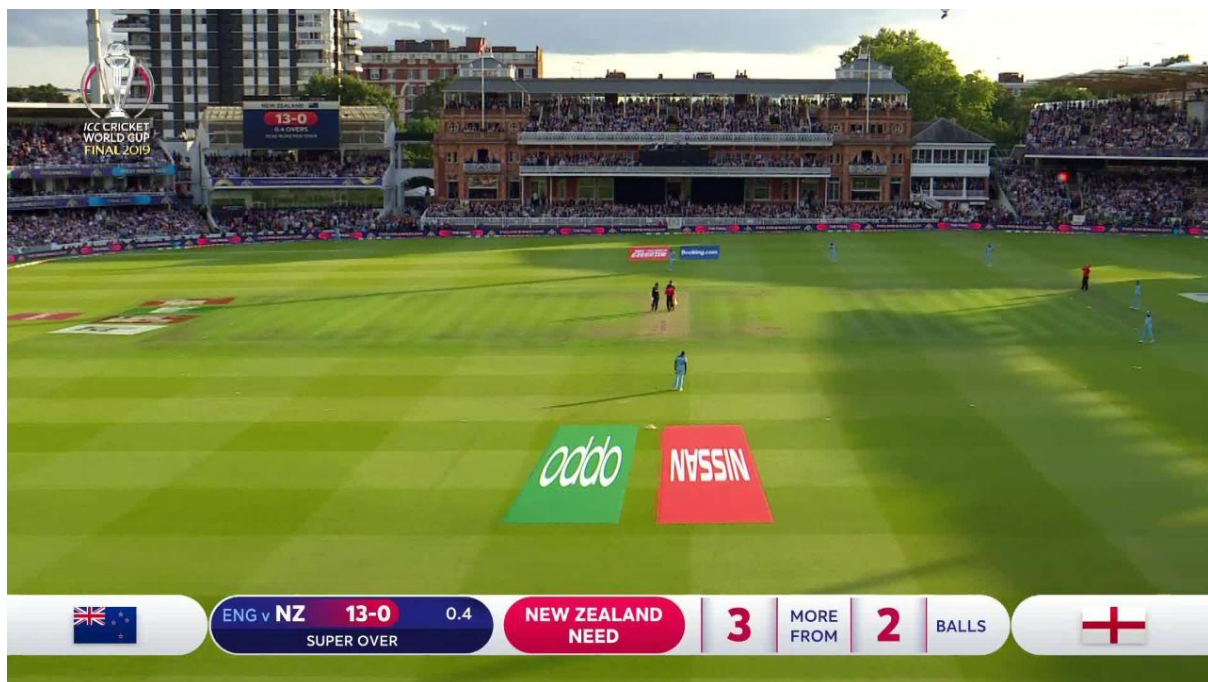


Figure 15: 2019 Cricket World Cup Final



Figure 16: A match during the Women's Hundred

Undoubtedly, a huge tool that The Hundred has tried to exploit is the ever-growing rise of social media and the digital age. As Real suggests, “The internet’s accessibility, interactivity, speed, and multimedia content have triggered a fundamental change in the delivery of mediated sports” (Real, 2006: 171). For a sport that is often referred to as plain and boring, cricket has arguably been the leader in facing and adapting to change, and nothing suggests this as much as the creation of The Hundred. Its brand was youthful, yet incredibly distinct in tone, colour, and energy. It was designed to build long-term memory structures, familiarity and recall rather than aesthetically please (Alex Charkham, SportsPro, 25th August 2021). Although these structures were already in place with its regular audience, much of those traditionalists felt that city-based teams, which do not have their own academies, were bad for the talent pipeline as they rely on counties and clubs to develop players. Nonetheless, the ECB were seemingly unconcerned with the established audience and used youth-focused marketing including DJs and live music at matches and bold visuals in a bid to lure more families and children to the game (Frank Dalleres, City A.M, 24th August 2021). While the plan was to tap into an unknown market, in actual fact that segment was already in place.

Dean Wilson's comments are pertinent, "there is a huge number of people that are in some way connected to the game, that have some kind of an interest. Even if it's just going to a game once, or following certain accounts on Twitter and social media, or whatever it might be. But what the ECB are desperate to do is make those kinds of slight bits of interest and turn them into proper engagement." (Dean Wilson, *Being Outside Cricket*, 9th May 2019). And in terms of social media and digitally speaking, proper engagement is undeniably what they got. Over 34.3 million views across The Hundred's digital platforms, as well as 264,000 downloads of the tournament's mobile app (Jonathan Easton, *Digital TV Europe*, 24th August 2021) demonstrates this. The decision to broadcast matches on teen targeted YouTube illustrates the exact route the ECB wanted to take, and signified a trailblazing moment for cricket and sport in general, transferring to the online element of the media.

It's clear that the launch of YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006) and other digital media tools meant that "journalists, fans, and athletes were afforded new ways with which to consume and create content, and bypass traditional mainstream journalism" (Jenkins, 2004: 38). Figure 17 underlines the decision to broadcast "all 34 of the women's matches and a significant number of men's matches via YouTube" (Anon, *TheCricketer*, 20th July 2021). Towards the end of 2020, YouTube reached the highest percentage of 15 to 25 year-olds in the UK, 82%, compared to all other leading social networking sites. As one of the main targets of The Hundred was to engage with a younger demographic, airing matches on the social platform used by more youngsters than any other, was a very smart way of achieving that goal.

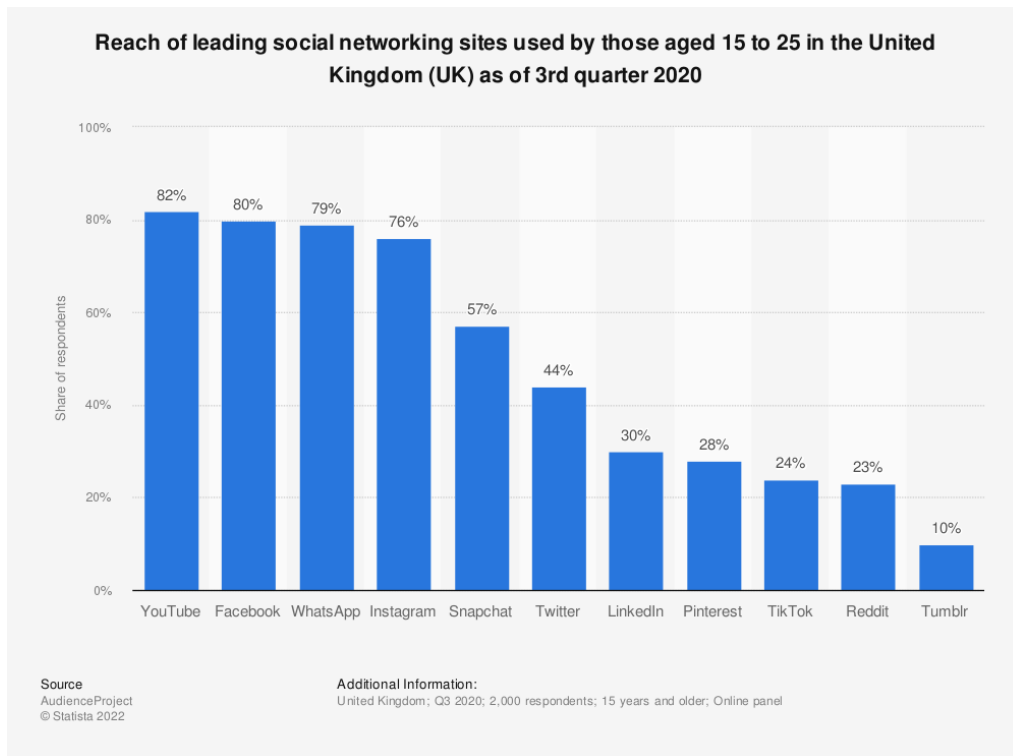


Figure 17: Social platforms used by 15 to 25 year-olds (Statista-2020)

YouTube was a perfect tool for the ECB to tell the story of The Hundred as it “emphasises content as a means of social connection” (Burgess & Green, 2018: 3). The most effective way of raising the profile of cricket in this country and demystifying the game for a new audience is to associate it with media platforms they are already familiar with. Ensuring the commentators and recognisable figures kept pointing viewers into the direction of both Sky Sports Cricket and The Hundred’s respective YouTube channels was key in not only reaching the targeted demographic and introducing them to cricket, but keeping them attached. An important aspect of why a fourth format was devised in the first place was to teach people who knew next to nothing about the sport, all about it. Many ‘how-to’ videos such as Kevin Pietersen explaining how to bat against spinners were a good way of doing this as it simply gave potential newbies tips on different parts of cricket that they may not have understood previously.

For decades, cricket has been viewed as an elitist sport, a closed shop. The Hundred was tasked with allowing regular people, without a private education access to it because too few outside cricket's establishment saw it as a game for them (Murad Ahmed, Financial Times, 17th May 2019). Another way in which The Hundred's essential relationship with the media was exhibited was through their mobile app. Kerr & Gladden (2008) state that communication technology such as social media have provided fans with unprecedented access to sport organizations. Simmons (2007) suggests that by using the Internet as part of their overall marketing strategy, brands can reach their desired audience, but in a personalized manner, and this is unquestionably what The Hundred's partnership with Sky Sports across their mobile apps achieved.

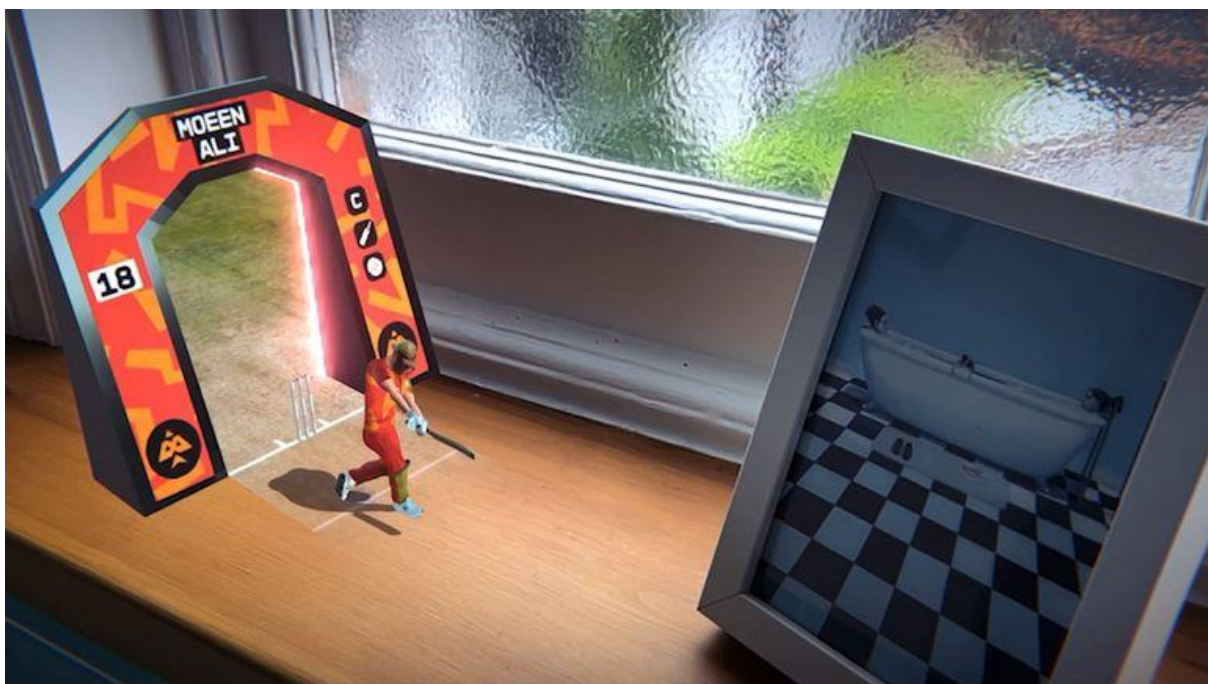


Figure 18: Moeen Ali as an avatar using The Hundred's App

Figure 18 demonstrates the digital experience which saw “some of the game's biggest stars captured as avatars” (Anon, Sky Sports, 21st August 2021). The avatars were created using MetaStar, Dimension Studio's hyper-real avatar solution, and the Augmented Reality experience in order to bring fans closer to the players than ever before. The idea was born out of a collaboration between The Hundred and Sky Sports in a bid to make cricket more

accessible and interactive for sports fans with the ambition of enticing new audiences (Anon, Sky Group, 19th July 2021). They felt that encouraging fans to simply download The Hundred or Sky Sports app and access this new feature would invoke that sense of affiliation and belonging with a sport which they may never have considered being a part of.

Further social media utilised by The Hundred included Twitter which allows for “two-way communication between users” (Kwon & Sung, 2011: 5). Not only was it a useful platform for the organisers to push content out themselves (see figure 19), but especially with it being the inaugural season, Twitter may have been one of many avenues used by the ECB as a review system to gauge the response that their newly created brand of cricket was receiving from the public. One instance of this was seen from a tweet posted by The Hundred’s official Twitter account which read; “When #TheHundred is over and you don’t know what to do with yourself for the next year”, accompanied by a GIF of Alex Hales and Rashid Khan sitting in the Trent Rockets dugout (Anon, Wisden, 22nd August 2021). To say the response to that tweet divided opinion would perhaps be an understatement. The Hundred had been actively promoting its new format, with the idea of bringing new audiences into the game, although, “there was much criticism over the fact that there had been little promotion of other cricket in England via The Hundred’s official channels through the entirety of its season, despite plenty of high-profile action taking place simultaneously – including the England-India Test series and the One-Day Cup” (Anon, Wisden, 22nd August 2021). As shown in Figure 20, many cricket lovers questioned The Hundred on why they were seemingly neglecting the amount of cricket that was available to watch at the time. This added further fuel to the feelings of certain fans that The Hundred was detrimental to the growth of the game as it was encouraging people not to engage with the pre-established formats like the

T20 Blast, One-Day Cup, County Championship, and Test cricket. Having endured the responses, that particular tweet was deleted a mere 12 hours later.



Figure 19: A Tweet from The Hundred's official Twitter account



Figure 20: A Twitter conversation in response to a tweet from the Hundred

From the outset, the ECB knew the mammoth job they were taking on with The Hundred. Speaking to Wisden, chief executive officer Tom Harrison said that “we know we are competing for attention in an ever-changing world. We all have so much choice for how we spend our time, and we know that this challenge is most pronounced across younger generations, who spend on average 30-plus hours a week online” (Tom Harrison, Wisden, 16th February 2020). The official Hundred app encapsulated Harrison’s beliefs because many aspects of it were entirely centred around the youths they wanted to attract. Figure 21 presents this as it shows the section within the app which users could navigate to all areas of it. The tabs included categories such as league tables, statistics, but most importantly news and video, and polls. As the ECB’s top man states, the younger generation spend the majority of their time online, which is why shorter lengths of content through clips and highlights, as well as short sharp polls fit perfectly with the desired demographic.

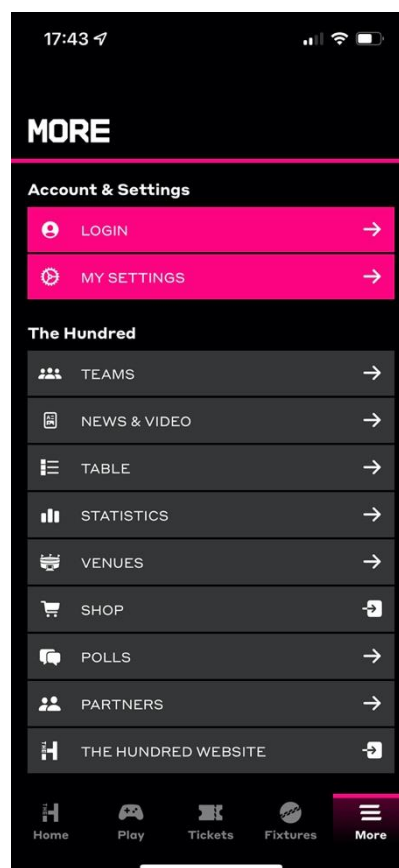


Figure 21: Tabs within The Hundred’s mobile app

There is no doubt that however controversial, The Hundred has well and truly capitalised on the digital revolution where sports media has acknowledged Twitter and other platforms as a “powerful and revolutionary tool” (Schultz and Sheffer, 2010: 231). The ECB and all the organisers involved put their reputations at stake, in an attempt to entice a new demographic of viewers and use different types of media to remove the stigma surrounding cricket which suggests that only the highest class of society are allowed in. The response to The Hundred was one of opposing opinions, many felt like on the surface it was a great way of opening cricket’s doors to more people. Others decided that it was simply unnecessary and that it was going to do more harm than good. Emma John’s comments after The Hundred’s first season in 2021 are one of coherence which depicts the feeling a large proportion of the cricket-loving public shared; “it would be nice if they could see our favourite sport like the rest of us- something to be enjoyed by whoever likes it at the time, something that doesn’t need to be loved by everyone or to be “mainstream” in every nation. A game that was invented for leisure, pleasure, and recreation, not a product to be sold and marketed incessantly, to bolster a bottom line and justify its executives’ bonuses” (Emma John, The Guardian, 29th August 2021).

Conclusion

The landscape of the game of cricket has evolved immensely from the founding of the Marylebone Cricket Club in 1787, right up to The Hundred in 2021. Its relationship with and eventual reliance on the media has increased considerably, with television directors working with third umpires during the review process, ensuring all necessary camera angles are broadcast and available to decide a batter's fate. Twenty20 cricket's development evolved alongside technology in general and has since been described as being an expression of the media zeitgeist. Previously, viewers on a broadcast of a standard Test match between England and Australia for example, would only be privy to one camera angle looking straight down the wicket and as Kerry Packer put it, be forced to look at batsmen's arses for five days. Since T20's inception, IPL matches have used more than 30 different cameras positioned in a vast array of areas ranging from the ideal spectator spot looking down the wicket, to placing the audience within a batsman's helmet. This gave them unprecedented access to try and plant themselves in the shoes of their heroes to get a taste of what it was like to face the best bowlers in the world. The IPL's mere 400 million viewers, depending on their preferences, were treated to an even longer edition of the tournament in 2022. An increase in the number of teams from eight to ten has seen, and will continue to see a rise in viewership, by the simple fact of there being more teams, therefore there are more games for people to watch. As well as advancements in camera and broadcasting technology, the never-ending ascent of social media has transformed the sporting world, and cricket has most definitely taken the digital age in its stride. If you had told a stalwart of the game such as Geoffrey Boycott that millions of people would soon be able to voice their opinions on his technique publicly for all to see, you may have received a rather unsavoury response. However, as has been proven over recent years, social media has its drawbacks with many instances of racism and discrimination being documented.

That type of prejudice and classism is the exact reason the ECB decided it was time for a fourth format of cricket to be conceived. Once they had published their concoction there was no turning back, and the organisers were forced to face the media backlash head on. Using a plethora of media, such as broadcasting matches on teen-targeted YouTube, The Hundred set its sights on improving the diversification of cricket's audience and creating an environment which abolished the notion that you had to be a wealthy white-male to witness the ancient battle of bat against ball. For too long, cricket had almost been looked upon with disdain, simply because of outdated perceptions that people have had suggesting that only the highest of classes were able to have associations with cricket, but The Hundred was designed to change that. Through their state of the art mobile app, users could bring a sport which they may have seen as elitist and otherworldly right on to their kitchen worktop using motion capture to create an Augmented Reality experience never seen in cricket before. That's a rather large shift from thinking cricket was a boring old man's sport to bringing the stars of the game right into your very home, simply using your mobile phone. Nothing symbolises the growth of social media and diversity of cricket like watching a British Asian all-rounder shadow batting on your sofa through your phone. The finals of The Hundred's first season last year saw a packed crowd of almost 25,000 at cricket's unofficial home of Lords, suggesting that there may well be a bright future for the format. But the ECB's biggest challenge for 2022 and beyond, now that they have got their desired audience, they must retain their interest and not waste the opportunity to develop the game further.

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