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Posted Date: 19 December 2023

doi: 10.20944/preprints202312.1384.v2

Keywords: ELM; Consumer behavior; digital marketing; digital consumption



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*Article*

# Understanding the Cricket Bat Buying Behaviour: Exploring Elaboration Likelihood Model and Digital Engagement

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**Abstract:** Extending from the current Elaboration likelihood model scholarship, this article proposes a framework for applying ELM to cricket bat purchase. Professional cricketers or fans require comprehensive and adequate pieces of information about cricket bat through the Internet. Buyers simultaneously encourage internet reviews for product impressions, and they experience meaningful associations. ELM and the Internet exemplify the cricket bat buying process by engaging buyers with product specification and create a meaningful relationship between buyers and sellers. At the same time, buyers feel empowered to choose a product of their choice. Describing the Elaboration likelihood model, we have facilitated an approach for cricket bats buying. This article has explored how ELM through the Internet can encourage buyers to be informative about cricket bats while silencing retailers' voices and visions into a unique buyer-seller relationship.

**Keywords:** ELM; digital interaction; cricketer

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## Introduction

Cricket bats are the vital medium of the game. The journey of cricket bats are not new; through a peripheral route of history, cricket bats have evolved due time (Metcalf, 1939). Traditionally cricket bats were used for unlimited over games. Undefined edges and ambiguous edges of a bat did not hamper the performance of test cricketers (Wren, 1965). Over the years, massive media coverage, leveraging youth with the game have created a fanbase. Sincerely, a dominant part of youth aspire to be a cricketer, and another part of the youth enjoy the game as a fan (Curtis et al., 2014).

Traditionally, the marketing of cricket bats was limited. Retailers regulated sports markets, and a buyer used to depend on personal expertise or the retailer used to act as a guide (Manzoor et al., 2016). Eventually, the retailer's knowledge was limited and quite often market used to have a group of dissatisfied buyers.

The advent of the Internet has created certain benefits for buyers. The affinity of internet access has created certain advantages. Prospective buyers can access internet websites or e-commerce pages for accurate pieces of information (Noorbhai, 2017). Although the flow of information is now available, immersion of the Internet has not given complete confidence to buyers. We feel authors have failed to understand the existing cricket bat buyers and their expectations from our literature review.

In this article, we have defined the type of cricket buyers and the importance of the Internet. Through the Elaboration likelihood model, we have proposed our conceptual framework. Further through ELM, we have suggested appropriate approaches manufacturers can use for future strategies.

## History of Cricket bat

Cricket is not a new sport. Several countries regularly play cricket and have developed a prominent fanbase. The game of cricket is exciting and requires some elements (Smith & Singh, 2008).

A cricket bat is often seen as the backbone of the game. The journey of a cricket bat is very different and unique. Earlier, a wooden designed structure used to be known as a cricket bat (Brooks, 2006). Over the years, the game started changing eventually demanded greater competence. Cricket as a sport gets followed rigorously. Similarly, we play different forms of cricket, which demands different cricket bats (Brooks, 2006).

According to the standards of the International Cricket Council, a cricket bat should have prescribed diameters (Bower, 2012). Over the years, we have witnessed several changes in the diameter due to the demands of the game. Cricket bats, from their inception, were seen as a thin wooden structure; now, the structure has changed. The composition of wood and rubber defines the stroke play (Grant, 1998).

Cricket bats are made of woods, and the structure of a quality cricket bat depends on polishing. Although the market is budding with reputed bat manufacturers, the choice of willow is limited (Semple et al., 1991). Past has seen the composition of cricket bats with English willow only. Several research has shown the efficacy of Kashmiri willow (Gilbert et al., 1992). Due to the efficacy of English willow and Kashmiri willow, cricket regulatory bodies encourage two certified willow codes (Gutaj, 2004).

Initially, the edge of a cricket bat used to be simple. Due to the limitations of games and limited competitive forms, the requirement for technicalities was limited. The last couple of years have encouraged limited-overs game, where stroke play depends on the edge of a cricket bat (Katiyar & Ali, 2018). So the demand for technicalities has increased.

So, over the years, cricket bats have seen a journey where it has changed the technicalities, forms of the game and demanded robust structure.

### **Cricket bats and marketing rationale**

The rationale of cricket bats and the marketing of bats are critical. The technicalities of a cricket bat define the customer base. In a country, cricket gets played differently (Ali et al., 2016). For professional cricket, the technicalities of a cricket bat are of utmost importance. Through technicalities, an individual decides the purchasing point. Simultaneously, for a non-professional player, cricket is a pleasure. Purchasing cricket bats are very different from them. For a non-professional player, the diameter of cricket bats are irrelevant; he should focus on its look and brand for quality (Sarkar et al., 2012).

Although, for a marketer, it becomes challenging to differentiate between professional and non-professional buyers. Quite often, the confusion creates dissatisfaction from a purchase (Knowles, 2020).

Marketing of cricket bats demands concurrent understanding of buyers. Due to the limited availability of knowledge, a manufacturer fails to understand its buyers. A manufacturer creates a dissatisfied consumer base for the market (Grant & Nixon, 2020). Now, since we understand the technicalities of cricket bats and its marketing rationale. We would like to understand the marketing tactics of cricket bat buying, and its relevance.

Traditional marketing of Cricket bats: our discussion begins from our previous discussion. Where we defined a professional buyer and a non-professional buyer. Traditional marketing of Cricket bats had been very different from any other durable goods. For our convenience and better understanding, we will discuss professional buyers and non-professional buyers separately.

Traditionally, any nearby sports stadium or practice arena would have a buying market for sports enthusiasts (Allen et al., 2014). The sports market situated with a group of retailers indulging in sales. Quite often, a professional player depends on the intuition of retailers (Wong, 1978). Experienced buyers differ from other opinions and ultimately depend on personal experience and judgement. Quite often, due to limited expertise and awareness, a retailer gets the upper hand and misleads it. In the long run, dissatisfaction arises from the purchase (Wong & Peece, 1978). Although a retailer has been a source of dependence for professional buyers, a retailer's credibility has been doubted (Sayers, 2005). The situation had been a matter of concern when we talk about smaller places or places where exposure to cricket is limited (Sayers et al., 2005). Mostly purchasing cricket bats for

professional players had been centric on personal judgment and inputs from reference groups (James et al., 2012). By reference groups, we talk about coaches and peer groups of a professional player.

Retail buying for non-professional buyers are completely different from professional buyers. Non-professional buyers trust cues. Purchasing is inherently dependent on impulses (Hariharan & Srinivasan, 2012). A non-professional buyer aims to create a purchase through role models. Quite often, a brand of bat plays a vital role than the technicalities. Retailers are essential, as they provide necessary supplies to a non-professional buyer. The lifespan of a cricket bat for a non-professional buyer is higher (Stretch et al., 2004).

Disparities arise due to misunderstanding. Quite often, a retailer or a manufacturer fails to target it is a segment. Errors due to the segments create miscommunication and create a dissatisfied consumer group (Katiyar, 2018).

Cricket bats are a need for professional and non-professional buyers. A professional group of buyers require sound technicalities and specific products. Simultaneously non-professional buyers demand robust performance. Over the years, buyers of both groups are in a constant state of dissatisfaction.

Although the market of cricket bats are niche, we must accept the service upgradation. The emergence of newer brands and technical upgradation have helped specific buyers (Wani & Jaisawal, 2011). In upcoming sections, we will understand the current situation and role of the Internet. Later we will propose our conceptual model.

### **Usage of the Internet and Marketing of cricket bat**

The Internet has been seen as a resource of sports goods. Cricket bats have been a part of this revolution. Earlier information on cricket bats was unknown, usage of the Internet has cleared several confusions (John & Li, 2002). Brands are now aware of internet usage and the power beyond boundary connection (Katiyar et al., 2016). Several established brands and emerging brands are now using the Internet for promoting cricket bats. Surprisingly, buyers' usage has been welcomed, and a niche segment has legitimate sellers on eCommerce websites (Busch & James, 2007).

The Internet has been welcomed for multiple resources. Primarily, the Internet offers a wide range of customisation for buyers. Separate categorical segments are dividing buyers (Slater, 2018).

Previously, access to information was under crisis, and buyers were confused. Quite often, relying on retailer was challenging and required more significant emphasis on personal experience. The Internet came as a blessing for buyers (2014). Regular access to required information was an inherent need. Internet as a mode of usage was able to fulfil the need.

Usage of the Internet has been beneficial for cricket bat manufacturers. It has omitted the middleman concept. Simultaneously, fruitful informative websites have benefited emerging cricketers. Further internet access has omitted the barriers of location (Curtis et al., 2014).

### **Digital engagement**

Sports good manufacturers have always limited themselves from marketing and promotional activities. Profoundly, sports goods are demanded by a niche group of people. Since we are talking about cricket bats, we see a larger market and a constant demand (Yoon et al., 2018). Since cricket bats require greater demand, so begin with the concept of digital engagement.

Over the years, the demands of cricket bats have grown. Several cricket championships have been introduced. Eventually, professional and fans have demanded cricket bats. The engagement has been critical when we have tried to establish the current digital engagement.

Although internet and eCommerce websites display cricket goods with specifications, features are limited (Budge & Burness, 2018). Similarly, they require greater engagement.

Digital engagement is significant for the brand. Digital engagement abolishes boundaries and encourages better interactions (Eigernaam et al., 2018). Quite often, a buyer seeks information before making a purchase. Adequate pieces of information sometimes create an information load, and the buyer fails to make a good choice (Drummond et al., 2020). Situational changes happen through digital engagement; a buyer seeks information, digital engagement enable a buyer to position his

need (Vazquez, 2019). Further, digital engagement empowers a buyer and helps in developing a customer base.

We figured out through our literature review that a buyer goes through process interactions before purchasing a cricket bat (vigila et al., 2018). Unlike the buying behaviour model, here, a buyer is aware of the product. Since we have identified the type of buyer previously, so based on the need, a buyer decides the technicalities of a cricket bat.

We propose the prominence of engagement, as digital interactions work as facilitators and deciding factors of purchase (Lowrie et al., 2020). We begin our discussion with the engagement study of (Lowrie et al., 2020). Digital engagement facilities buyers to express their thoughts; similarly, it represents a group of need and finally, through interactions, a buyer applies a decision for purchase.

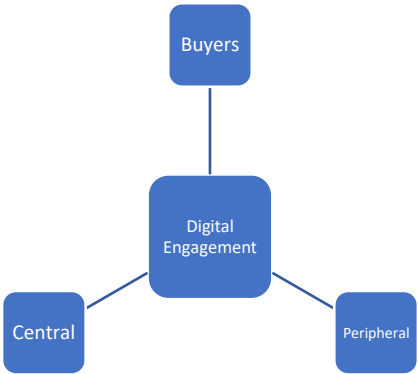


Figure 1.

**Elaboration likelihood model and improving the importance of action**

We started our discussion by explaining cricket buyers. Simultaneously now, we have discussed digital interactions. Our understanding through ELM is crucial. ELM provides two routes with a) Central route b) peripheral route (O’Keefe, 2008). The central route requires a more robust understanding of products; apart from our past instincts, we analyse product attributes (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). The peripheral route touches our cues and impulses.

We see implications of the central route for professional cricket bat buyers. Professional cricketers regularly indulge in cricket; they play the game for earning and growth (Allison et al., 2017). The central route of ELM is essential for a professional cricketer. A player needs to evaluate the thick edges of a cricket bat, strokes and grip length, examining inherent attributes (Cyr et al., 2018). We see a prominent role of digital engagement; a professional buyer, after checking product attributes through a website, seeks advice and opinion for greater clarity (shi et al., 2018). Marketers need to rationalise greater engagement and interaction, which can convince a buyer. After product evaluation, a professional player buys the bat; the digital interactions should continue (Gu et al., 2017). Professional players demand frequent purchase, with known specifications, a buyer buys the same product through digital interactions between the buyers and sellers (Legong et al., 2019).

Although, a professional player requires a more outstanding evaluation of a product. Typically cricket fans possess cricket bats for entertainment. Regular buyers require lesser technicalities, more outstanding quality (chang et al., 2020). Digital interactions for a regular buyer should focus on communicating the brand value and assured quality. The peripheral route of ELM will target impulses and cues (Zhou, 2017). Through the peripheral route, a buyer reacts through impulses and make a purchase decision. Digital interactions enable a buyer to constantly update upcoming products and adequate product usage (Tenny et al., 2017).

Our conceptual framework defines the type of buyers of cricket bats. Digital interactions initiate the purchasing journey; simultaneously, ute, a professional cricketer improvises his buying deci through central routes. Regular buyers, through their impulses and cues, decide a product through digital interactions.



## Discussion

Cricket bats are not new; the history of cricket bats are enriched with emotion and evolution. Unlike other sports, the popularity and acceptance of cricket bats have come gradually. Earlier in the British rulers' era, cricket use was understood by developed nations; gradually, cricket got accepted as an intelligent sport. We as a researcher, seek to understand newer insights and aim to contribute significantly. Being a cricket lover, understanding of cricket was inherent. In the past couple of years, cricket has seen a transition. Several nations are now actively playing cricket; the twenty eras have given birth to newer cricket bats.

Traditionally, the purchase of a cricket bat has been limited to retailers and sports coaches. The gradual acceptance of cricket bats has created a strong fanbase. Buyers were confused repeatedly before making a purchase. Lack of information has been a disadvantage and required greater emphasis.

Internet and its usage in the sports market. The requirement of cricket bats has been Segmenting specific. Nowadays, a professional buyer understands his requirement through information search. We have seen the presence of two types of cricket bat buyers. The first group is known as the professional buyer; cricket bats and their technicalities are essential for them. Whereas the second group of buyers are not professional cricketers, they play the game to enjoy. The Internet has differentiated the buying group. Brands are now keeping segments and differentiating the buying groups. We have seen a prominent application of the Elaboration likelihood model. Our proposed model, we have argued that the central stage of the ELM model is highly recommended for professional buyers. Professional buyers require more fantastic information, greater technicalities and a thick description of the product. One brand should target professional buyers by giving more significant pieces of information and applications.

Non-professional buyers demand minimum information. Impulses and cues are essential for them. A brand should target non-professional buyers through influencers and social media campaign. Attracting through product features are not necessary. A non-professional buyer seeks a brand value from the purchase.

Our model will help understand the sports marketers about the segment of consumers and required tactics to handle them efficiently. As an area of research, our paper is entirely new and requires further research. We suggest that future scholars endeavour qualitative research and validate our proposed model.

## Conclusion

Consumption of sports goods are not new. Sports goods have a history of negotiations and relying on external opinions. Over the years, several buyers had trust issues with retailers. Although advent technologies have created segments differently, practices are limited. We suggested a gateway to the cricket bat manufacturers regarding the buyers and their appropriate target approach through this paper.

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