

The Rise of the Transfer Insider: Marketing Approaches and Real-Time Information Strategies in Football Fan Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to find out how transfer insider attributes affect football fan engagement for fans of Karachi, Pakistan, under the rapidly changing digital sports landscape. The significance of the research lies in its focus on a relatively unexplored market in the world of sports marketing the South Asian market. The primary data gathered from 200 participants by using a structured online questionnaire sent out to active football fans through social media groups and university networks using convention sampling and asking football fans about their followers who are known as football transfer insiders. Data collected analyzed with descriptive statistics, reliability test, Pearson correlation analysis and multiple linear regression in SPSS which test the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual framework based on relevant communication and consumer behavior theories. Results revealed that Personal Branding Style was the most important predictor of fan engagement and that the other factors (Platform Used, Exclusivity of Information, and Transfer Insider Credibility) had significant positive effects, but that Speed of Information did not have a significant and independent effect in the multivariate context. These findings highlight the fact that fans are more likely to be attracted to the inside's distinct personality, regular presentation and perceived unique value than to just timeliness. The research offers practical insights for the transfer insiders to consider authentic personal branding and source-building, for football clubs and platforms to leverage and optimize content delivery across platforms, and for marketers in emerging markets to do better with influencer partnerships.

Keywords: Transfer Insider Credibility (TC), Speed of Information (SI), Platform used (PF), Exclusivity of Information (EI), Personal Branding style (PS) and Fan Engagement (FE).

INTRODUCTION

Background of Research

Football is considered the most popular sport worldwide, and it has changed how content is created, shared, and consumed. In today's digital landscape, characterized by the growing number of social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, mainstream media and journalism once held a privileged and exclusive position, but this has been challenged by the emergence of what is termed transfer insider, a new category of information provider (Trivedi, 2026). Some of them do so anonymously, some under the label of well-known media brands like Fabrizio Romano, but all of them have proven to be an invaluable asset to millions of football fans across the globe, providing breaking news on the move of players, negotiations with clubs, and the actions of managers that would be hard for traditional media outlets to match in terms of speed and intimacy (Perri, 2024).

Football fanism is especially significant in Pakistan as an increasing number of people have grown interested in the sport in the last few decades due to the availability of television broadcasting via satellite, cell phone data access, and the universal fascination with major European leagues like the English Premier League (EPL), La Liga, and Serie A (Khan, Aslam, & Burki, 2022). In Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city and commercial center, football communities have thrived both on the field at neighborhood football clubs and grounds, and in the digital age through energetic social media groups, WhatsApp communities, and digital fan pages. In Karachi, the transfer window has become a source of excitement for young Pakistanis on par with match days, as they are equally engaged in analyzing transfers through social media transfer experts, which influences their perceptions, discussions, and emotional involvement in the sport (Hussain, 2021).

In the theoretical aspects of this study, a few theories are used. The Source Credibility Theory proposed by Hovland and Weiss (1951) and developed by several others such as Wellman (2024) holds that the credibility and effect of information sources is closely tied to the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the source. For transfer insiders, credibility is about past accurate predictions, understanding of the complexities of club and player relationships and the trust fans have in a particular individual (Wellman, 2024). The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) of Gächter, Stegmann, and Lang 2025 provides another approach as it emphasizes the extent to which media outlets are chosen by their fans to satisfy their cognitive, affective, integrative and escapist needs, suggesting that the appeal of transfer insiders may derive from their role in supplying timely, exclusive and personality-driven football content for their fans.

Media Richness Theory, as put forth by Menard (2025), also plays a role by highlighting the platform on which information is shared. Platform richness, regarding immediacy, personalization, and sensory richness, varies, and fans' platform preferences will likely moderate their engagement with insider content. Moreover, when applied and updated in sport management by Funk (2023), Consumer Behavior Theory sheds light on the processes that involve how sports fans choose who and what to follow on social media, which updates to take action on, and the emotional or social significance of parasocial relationships with the insiders, and how this impacts their overall relationship with the sport.

Earlier research has mainly focused on influencer marketing in Western and East Asian contexts, with limited research in South Asian emerging markets such as Pakistan (Ichsan, Setyawati & Awang, 2022). Studies on Pakistani football fans are rather limited and, so far, have focused mostly on the predominantly studied cricket culture. The popularity of football, however, means that the topic of sports marketing has not been explored enough, particularly among young city-dwellers in Karachi (Hussain & Cunningham, 2024). This study is relevant to the study of football fans in Karachi by identifying a meaningful gap that helps advance the internationalization of sports marketing research.

It is impossible to overlook the importance of examining insider transfers from a marketing perspective. They are part of the sports journalism, digital influence, and personal branding communities and play a significant role in fans' engagement with their sport, with commercial consequences for clubs, sponsors, and platforms (da Silva, 2025). Identifying the motivations of fans in emerging markets to interact with transfer insiders, and the specific qualities of transfer insiders that influence those motivations, can provide marketing practitioners with actionable insights for content strategy, audience development, and decisions about working with transfer insiders (Romero-Jara et al., 2024).

Research Problem

Although several transfer insiders are available on digital platforms and are widely popular among football fans worldwide, the academic literature has not systematically analyzed the specific marketing-

oriented attributes that engender fans' engagement with these figures, especially in developing countries like Pakistan (Chew, 2025). Even though the literature on sports social media marketing, the credibility of sports media influencers, and the behavior of sports fans has grown significantly over the last few years, these fields have grown more or less independently and without considering the specific characteristics of the transfer insider as a type of sports media influencer (Citraro, Mauro, & Ferragina, 2025).

The problem is worsened by the absence of any empirical evidence from Pakistani football fan communities and the absence of any research in Pakistan on this topic at all. As a city where football culture is booming and its population is young, Karachi may be a setting where transfer insiders' role in shaping fans' behavior is more significant than that of traditional media outlets (Walters & Tacon, 2025). To date, however, no quantitative study has examined the influence of the variables Transfer Insider Credibility, Speed of Information, Platform used, Exclusivity of Information, and Personal Branding style on Fan Engagement in this context. A lack of empirical research is a key concern that hinders the evidence-based decision-making process for marketers, club executives, and platform builders to effectively engage Pakistani football fans (Heikkilä, 2025).

Additionally, the current literature on influencer marketing in Pakistan has focused mainly on fashion, beauty, and lifestyle brands, with content from sports influencers and transfer-specific content creators receiving less study (Anjum, Ali, & Ahmed, 2024; Saeed, Ahmed, & Ali, 2025). Because transfer-insider content is time-sensitive, requires club-sourced content, and is tied to a person's personal brand, it requires an empirical study specific to the field of transfer-insider content rather than drawing on findings from another content field. This study thus aims to address a gap in the literature by conducting an empirical, quantitative study of the factors affecting transfer-insiders' consumption among football fans in Karachi, Pakistan.

Research Objectives

- **RO1:** To identify the impact of Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).
- **RO2:** To analyse the impact of Speed of Information (SI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).
- **RO3:** To explain the impact of Platform used (PF) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).
- **RO4:** To evaluate the significant impact of Exclusivity of Information (EI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).
- **RO5:** To determine impact of Personal Branding style (PS) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).

Research Questions

- **RQ1:** What is the impact of Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer)?
- **RQ2:** What is the impact of Speed of Information (SI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer)?

- **RQ3:** What is the impact of Platform used (PF) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer)?
- **RQ4:** What is the impact of Exclusivity of Information (EI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer)?
- **RQ5:** What is the impact of Personal Branding style (PS) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer)?

Significance of Study

Theoretically and practically, this research has great significance. Theoretically, the study builds on the theories of Source Credibility Theory (Wellman, 2024) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Gächter et al., 2025) and extends them to the specific information source of transfer insiders, which is a subgenre of the sports media that is rather new and under-researched. The incorporation of various theoretical approaches alongside a conceptual model that has been tested in practice broadens the academic discussion about digital sports marketing and sports consumer behaviour (Funk, 2023). The results complement the existing literature on the topic of influencer-fan engagement, and can serve as a basis for future research in similar contexts in emerging markets.

On a practical level, the findings of this study prove useful for football clubs, digital marketers and platform developers, aiming to effectively engage the Pakistani football audience (Romero-Jara et al., 2024). By grasping the factors that most strongly resonate with fans, marketers can more effectively inform their decisions on issues like platform selection, content formats, and influencer partnerships. The results help transfer insiders know how to create and maintain a loyal audience on social media by fostering credibility, exclusivity, and unique personal branding (da Silva, 2025). On a more global scale, the study adds to the debate on the professionalization and monetisation of the football-related digital content in a society which is rapidly developing in its football fandom and is part of many emerging markets (Trivedi, 2026).

Scope of study

This study is geographically located in Karachi, Pakistan, and the respondents of this study are the football fan belonging to a particular group who are interested in the football transfers and have a keen interest to follow the insiders of the game on social media. The city of Karachi was selected as the study context as it is the largest city in Pakistan and the main business hub of the country where the population is diverse in nature, is tech savvy and has shown an interest in international football. The respondents of this research were footballers from Karachi ensuring the findings are contextually relevant in regards to Pakistani football fandom. The study focuses on the five independent variables in the conceptual framework (Transfer Insider Credibility, Speed of Information, Platform used, Exclusivity of Information and Personal Branding style) and their relationship with the dependent variable (Fan Engagement). The study does not look at fan engagement offline activities or at specific commercial revenues derived from transfer insider content. The scope is cross-sectional, that is at one time during the data collection period, and conclusions must be drawn based on that time period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Football (Soccer Industry) in Pakistan and Fan Engagement

Football is also a position of uniqueness and change in Pakistan's sports culture which has been dominated by cricket. However, the sport of football has seen many changes in terms of numbers,

involvement, and relevance over the last 20 years, and much of this growth has been due to the globalisation of European football leagues and the ease of access to live broadcasts and digital content (Khan, Aslam, & Burki, 2022). In cities like Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar, football club supporters have established active football communities where football clubs that are affiliated to the European giants like Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United and Liverpool operate freely and host football viewing events regularly (Hussain, 2021).

Football has seen tremendous development in Pakistan, largely because of the digital revolution. Football content is now available on platforms like social media, streaming services, and fan forums, making it accessible to millions of Pakistanis (Anjum, Ali & Ahmed, 2024). This transformation has been more evident recently among young urban audiences in Karachi, where a passion for football has become an interest of cosmopolitanism and aspirations. Twice a year (when transfer windows happen), there is a remarkable surge in fan activity on the internet, as they eagerly await the news and updates from transfer agents, who have emerged as a primary source of transfer information and club news (Trivedi, 2026).

The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) has also taken measures to take the game back home and though the Pakistan game is not yet famous international, the passion for football as a spectator sport is still going on. The study indicates that Pakistani football fans have a deep sense of connection with their favorite foreign players and teams, that they feel a sense of belonging when watching their teams play, and that they are emotionally attached to their favorite teams and players (Hussain & Cunningham, 2024). Thus, it is important to understand the factors that motivate fans to engage with sports in this context because it serves as a theoretical and practical guide to sports marketing (Romero-Jara et al., 2024).

Fan Engagement (FE)

Fan Engagement spans both breadth and depth and has been a topic of great study within sports management, sports marketing, and sports consumer behavior (Funk, 2023). Fan engagement is the engagement of a fan with a sports team, an athlete, or a media representative in the sport, at the lowest level, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects (Previati, 2020). Cognitive involvement is the mental engagement fans are making to keep up with transfer news, dissecting tactical decisions, and communicating their ideas and opinions on player transfer. Emotional engagement is the emotional tie a fan has to clubs, players and the like information sources, such as transfer insiders. Behavioral engagement involves the observable behaviors performed by the fans because of their engagement, including, for example, sharing the content, commenting on the posts, subscribing to channels and attending events (Aichner et al., 2021).

Digital and social media have revolutionized fan engagement, moving beyond traditional methods of interaction in stadiums and on broadcast television to smartphones and social media platforms (Heikkilä, 2025). This has opened the door to anyone to produce and share content, thus allowing them to establish a huge audience without the need of a journalism degree and shape the content their fans consume. In the context of developing digital fan engagement tactics, it is essential to take into account the various requirements and tastes of the present sports customer, such as their wish for unique, live content via personality-driven platforms, as pointed out by da Silva (2025).

Dias, Pereira and Costa (2022) emphasize some of the factors related to fan participation that are of interest to social media and sports brands, such as content quality, authenticity, interaction and a sense of community. The dimensions are particularly relevant if we take account of the transfer insider phenomenon, which consists of fans not only being interested in the information but also in its delivery – from a source that appears to have a personal, insider and knowledgeable voice. The findings of Romero-Jara et al. (2024) further highlight the importance of a unified content marketing and social media strategy

to foster strong fan interaction within the football industry, not just for the transfer agents, but also for clubs and media.

Research on fandom, including emotional and social aspects of fandom, has included a strand of scholarship that recognizes fandom as a social practice by which fandom members construct and express fandom identities, allegiances, and values, such as the work of Doige et al. (2019). In the digital era, transfer insiders have become conversation facilitators and information anchors that link those who follow a particular sport brand (Walters & Tacon, 2025). Krzyżowski and Strzelecki (2023) come across that followers' active participation in social media (which in this examine incorporates following, liking, and sharing transfer-related posts) is a crucial mediator in the social media transfer-insider to general fan engagement pathway for football clubs, which suggests that transfer insider content plays an important function in the overall fan engagement with football clubs.

Football clubs and media organizations are increasingly using data-driven approaches to better understand the types of content that drive the most engagement, the most successful platforms for various audience groups, and the links between engagement and commercial outcomes, according to Chew (2025). Moreover, Citraro, Mauro, and Ferragina (2025) illustrate how the nature of fans' relationships – such as excitement that can arise from transfer news – plays a crucial role in explaining engagement actions on digital platforms. In the context of this study, Fan Engagement is defined as the level of active interaction, following, sharing, and emotional connection among football fans in Karachi with the content and persona of the transfer insiders on social media platforms.

Sahin and Gul (2023) point out that social interaction, information seeking, entertainment, and identity expression are the four main drivers of why football fans use social media, all of which are met by the content that Transfer-Insiders provides. In the same vein, Ichsán et al. (2022) identify perceived usefulness and social norms as key factors in fostering engagement among football fans in emerging markets, suggesting that studying football fans' engagement in Pakistan is important. This research also focuses on platform-mediated fan engagement, as Bayindir (2024) illustrates, young football fans in similar economies are now primarily reaching and engaging with transfer news via mobile applications and social media.

Theoretical Review (Underpinning theories)

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is a widely used theory in the mass communication field that views the media audience as an active group making choices and exploiting media in an attempt to meet specific needs and achieve particular gratifications (Gächter, Stegmann, & Lang, 2025). UGT goes beyond previous passive audience theories to suggest that people have an agency in their choice of media use and that motivations may be informational, entertainment-seeking, identity affirming or socially integrative. Within the world of football fans and their interactions with transfer insiders, UGT offers a strong explanatory context that allows understanding of the attraction of some insiders and what they are providing.

Gächter, Stegmann, and Lang (2025) conduct a uses and gratifications-based market segmentation analysis of the online media use of football fans, and conclude that there are different segments of football fans with different combinations of the gratifications they are seeking online (live information, social interaction, entertainment, and community belonging). Transfer insiders have multiple 'gratification categories', which include information on player movements, entertainment through personality driven

presentation styles, social capital through exclusive knowledge which can be shared within peer groups and a sense of belonging to an insider community of well informed football followers (Perri, 2024).

There has been a number of scholars who have successfully applied UGT to social media and influencer contexts, showing how followers of social media influencers are motivated by information and entertainment and social interaction needs which are different from those of traditional media (Wellman, 2024). In the Pakistani football environment, the lack of quality domestic football media means that transfer news is a gratification void which is filled by the transfer insiders, who operate on foreign platforms (Khan, Aslam, & Burki, 2022). The theory can thus be used to understand why Pakistani fans interact with transfer insiders more than, say, in markets with more well-developed sports media outlets. Credibility is generally defined as having two main aspects: expertise how well the source is perceived to know and understand the field being discussed and is competent in that field; and trustworthiness how well one thinks the source is reliable, honest, and objective in their communication.

Expanding Source Credibility Theory, Wellman (2024) focuses on the impact of followers' perceived credibility and expertise of an Instagram wellness influencer on their engagement, purchase intent, and parasocial relationships. In the case of the influencer domain, with its content regarding the identity of the transfer, this extension of SCT is directly applicable to the transfer insider context, where fans are required to assess the authenticity of individuals that post bold statements about unverifiable transfer deals, usually with the help of anonymous sources at football clubs. Transfer insiders that are consistently accurate, transparent in their sources and accept responsibility for their errors will be viewed more credibly and will garner more fan engagement (Trivedi, 2026).

For this research, the adapted theory was the Source Credibility Theory as this one is the one that directly addresses the relationship between the perceived attributes of the transfer insider as an information source and the fan engagement outcomes that this study aims to explain. The theory also underpins the conceptualization of the Transfer Insider Credibility variable: insiders who hold exclusive access to behind-the-scenes information are likely to be viewed as particularly expert and trustworthy by fans (Previati, 2020). The study's conceptualization is rooted in SCT; it helps build the foundation of the source credibility research in new contexts for digital influencers in the sports marketing field.

Media Richness Theory (MRT)

Media Richness Theory proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986) and later modified by many authors indicates that the media have different abilities to provide rich and nuanced information and to minimize ambiguity and uncertainty (Menard 2025). The richer the media, the more they can give immediate feedback, permit multiple cues at once, permit personalisation of messages, and use natural language, the more effective the media are for complex, equivocal communication tasks. Leaner media are better suited for simple, clear information sharing, on the other hand.

Menard (2025) uses Media Richness Theory to examine the engagement level of NFL social media communications, and it's revealed that the media richness attributes of each platform cause different levels of engagement from fans. Platforms have been categorized, and the richness is high with video-based platforms like YouTube, and low with text-based platforms like X (Twitter) but higher in immediacy and interactivity. The findings are of particular relevance to the transfer insider context, as various transfer insiders have cultivated their own audience bases on various platforms, each with unique richness profiles influencing the type and level of fan engagement (Perri, 2024).

Platform preferences as a mediational variable between transfer insider content and fan engagement can be explained through the lens of Media Richness Theory in the Pakistani context. Those that enjoy X may

be attracted to the immediacy and succinctness of the transfer updates, whereas fans of YouTube might look for the analytical depth and visual richness that is offered by the longer-form video content providers. This theoretical perspective thus forms a theoretical foundation for the Platform Used construct in the conceptual framework for this study and would identify the moderating and influencing role of platform used on the extent to which the transfer insider content is used to engage fans (Trivedi, 2026).

Consumer Behaviour Theory (CBT)

Consumer Behaviour Theory refers to a wide variety of models and theories that aim to describe and predict consumer decision making, attitudes and behaviours towards products, services, experiences and information sources (Funk, 2023). In the sports arena, consumer behaviour research has expanded considerably to capture the special nature of sports fan behaviors, such as high emotional involvement, strong sense of loyalty and identity-expressive aspects of sports consumption that sets it apart from other consumer areas.

This updated framework of sport consumer behaviour combines psychological, social, and situational concepts to shed light on the way sport fans make decisions about their consumption in digital and physical sporting contexts (Funk, 2023). This framework can be directly applied to the transfer insider phenomenon, which in turn can help to explain the psychological processes by which fans can form parasocial relationships with certain insiders, develop habits of checking the availability of transfer content and consume content in line with their club identity and information-seeking preferences (Previati, 2020).

The study of Consumer Behaviour Theory is significant for understanding the role of culture, social influence and resource constraints in the behavior of football fans towards the consumption of transfer insider content, especially in the Pakistani context. However, Saeed, Ahmed and Ali (2025) and Anjum, Ali and Ahmed (2024) found that peer influence and social media addiction are important factors influencing the digital consumption behaviour of Pakistan's youth, indicating that the social aspect of following transfer insiders is a significant motivator for engagement. CBT therefore offers an integrated and multifaceted perspective on fan engagement as a consumer behavior phenomenon that is driven by individual, social and contextual determinants, some of which are measured in this study by the independent variables.

Literature Review of Past studies (Variables / Constructs)

Transfer Insider Credibility (TC)

Based on the extensive body of research on source credibility in communication and marketing research, Transfer Insider Credibility is a construct. Theorized by Wellman (2024), source credibility includes factors of expertise, trustworthiness and authenticity that together influence a target audience's acceptance and action of the messages sent by a given source. Credibility in the transfer insider context is defined by the fans' percept of the insider's understanding of the game's transfer system, his or her ability to report correctly, and his or her reputation for reliability in a world of rumours, speculations and deliberate lies.

Perri (2024) investigates how innovative media content affects sports media fans' interaction with the media personality, concluding that credibility is one of the most influential factors in determining the involvement of football fans with sports media personalities. Those who have gained a reputation for getting it right, like the ones whose predictions are often echoed by official club announcements, have significantly more - and devoted - fans than those with less accurate records. The discovery is consistent with the central route of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which says that if a message is particularly

relevant to the audience, e.g. a transfer to their favourite club, they are particularly sensitive to the perceived quality and credibility of the source.

Further, Trivedi (2026) investigates how data analytics have helped to transform fan engagement in today's sports world and contends that transfer insiders using data, analytical tools and authentic, verified source networks to guide predictions are becoming more credible than simply relying on social connections or rumour. In the current transfer news landscape, where fans are exposed to a variety of rival information inputs and can thus compare and assess the accuracy of the various insiders' claims over time, this is especially relevant.

Prevati (2020) argues that in the sports fan engagement context, credibility is not only determined by the information's accuracy but also by the credibility of the source due to its perceived congruence with the fan's values and identity. Those who show a proper love of football and aren't sensationalising for the sake of sensationalising fans tend to be judged more positively in terms of their credibility. The credibility of transfer insiders becomes more important to the Pakistani football fandom as they serve as the main gatekeepers of the information space in the football world, where the mainstream media cannot be relied upon to accurately report about their favorite European clubs and their activities (Khan, Aslam, & Burki, 2022).

Romero-Jara et al. (2024) further highlight that social proof elements, such as followers count, verified account and positive audience reactions, serve as credibility signals in the social media context and impact the credibility of transfer insiders who are first-time fans. This is in line with social learning theory which suggests that people tend to look at the appraisals of others when deciding whether an information source is credible when they have not personally validated that source. Based on the literature, the hypothesis of Transfer Insider Credibility positively predicting Fan Engagement is strongly supported, thereby justifying the theoretical and empirical bases of this hypothesis, namely H1.

Speed of Information (SI)

Speed of Information: The promptness of a player transfer or club deal insider providing information compared to the mainstream media organisation and other social media based insiders. The first to break a transfer story has a strong benefit, in both terms of people tuning in and also the reputational capital that insiders amass in the football fandom. Timeliness is a key factor in consumption of sports media, as are clearly fans' preferences for minimising the lag-time between the event of a transfer and its public reporting, as consistently identified in the literature.

The emphasis on speed in transfer news consumption is strongly connected to the social nature of football fandom, which involves having access to news about a transfer earlier than other people, a social capital that strengthens the in-group identity (Gächter et al., 2025). The transfer insiders who are always the first to get the latest scoop draw in followers who feel a sense of achievement when they know the latest news and are keen to join in with other fans in the conversation. This social motivation to follow fast-breaking transfer agents fits with the Uses and Gratifications theory, which recognizes social interaction and status enhancement as key motives of media choice behaviour.

In the context of NFL social media communications, Menard (2025) shows that there are significant associations between the frequency of updates and the timeliness of updates, which are both positive indicators of fan interaction behaviours on social media platforms. The era of the transfer insider has seen a new generation of people who can report on the deals with unprecedented speed, thanks to advances in data analytic and real-time information networks which provide access to a huge array of sources, automated alerts and machine learning to help them to deliver their news at or before it is public

verifiable. This technological aspect of Speed of Information implies that the platform in which the updates are shared could buffer the timeliness-fan engagement nexus with X (Twitter) favoring the delivery of real-time information and fan engagement with breaking news.

In Pakistan, the importance of Speed of Information could be further complicated by time zone differences, and the timing of transfer windows in Europe compared to Pakistan, which can impact real-time engagement with transfer news by fans (Hussain, 2021). However, the literature in general confirms the connection between Speed of Information and Fan Engagement and serves as the theoretical foundation of the research reported here. The mixed results for the modulating effects of credibility and platform on this relationship also warrant other independent variables being included in the conceptual framework.

Platform used (PF)

Transfer news is consumed and discussed differently on each social media platform because of their unique characteristics, user base, and content types (Menard, 2025). X (formerly Twitter) has historically been the most popular platform for transfer insiders, as it is text-based, real-time, and has a good community of football journalists, agents, and club officials, which makes it a great place to get transfer news when it happens first (Perri, 2024).

By comparison, YouTube has a more mature media ecosystem that encourages greater lengths of analysis, transfer window reviews, and personality-based content that creates more parasocial relationships between the creators and viewers (Menard, 2025). Those who work mainly on YouTube are better suited to attracting viewers who want more than just the information, but for analysis and entertainment, which can help produce different engagement patterns than those created by X-based insiders. Instagram is a middle ground with its features of stories, reels and posts enabling insiders to share transfer news through visually engaging formats, while also providing the option for user interactions via comments and direct messages within the platform.

In a study of professional football clubs' social media presence, Romero-Jara et al. (2024) show that the engagement caused by professional football clubs' social media strategies varies considerably across platforms, with video content consistently outperforming text-based posts in terms of shares and comments. This discovery implies that there is a platform/content fit that is an important moderator of engagement, and that transfer insiders who tailor their content to the affordances of their selected platform may be more likely to receive greater engagement than those who adopt a one size fits all strategy. Similarly, Trivedi (2026) highlights the significance of platform selections in digital sports marketing strategy and explains that the platform ecosystem is constantly transforming and that sports marketing stakeholders have to be agile in their platforms if they are to remain relevant to their target audiences.

In Pakistan, social media use via smartphones is the leading form of digital content consumption, especially among urban youth in urban areas like Karachi (Anjum, Ali, & Ahmed, 2024). It can also be inferred that in a market like Pakistan where football fans are consuming content on their mobile devices, the most accessible and engaging platform content would be that which is mobile-first in nature, and has a simple, visual format, meaning that transfer insiders operating on platforms that are mobile first and have a style of content that is concise and engaging visual would be best positioned to build engaged followings in this market (Bayindir, 2024). Based on the literature, it is hypothesized that the Platform Used by the transfer insiders has a significant effect on Fan Engagement, which is the basis of H3.

Heikkilä (2025) also provides further insights into the process of digital value co-creation in sports and how it can increase fan engagement. He points out that platforms that allow for two-way communication

between the sport insiders and their audience, such as comments, question and answer sessions, and real-time updates, are much more engaging than one-way broadcast channels. This piece of knowledge highlights the significance of the features that a platform offers to foster engagement among its users – and that's certainly the case for the interactive aspects of platforms.

Exclusivity of Information (EI)

Exclusivity of Information is an attitude that reflects how much insiders of the transfer have and share information that does not come through media or other sources (Trivedi, 2026). The appeal of exclusive information in the sports scenario lies in the limitedness principle which states that the more scarce or limited an item is believed to be, the more valuable it is. This premium of exclusivity is found in the transfer of information which is not the “public information” that can be gathered by anyone, but is information gathered from sources who have access to the information that is not public – club insiders, player agents, negotiating parties.

In football media, Perri (2024) investigates how the novelty of the content affects engagement, discovering that with respect to the measures of engagement, there is a notable distinction between the engagement of exclusive revelations and that of reworded or affirmed stories from content in the public domain. This result aligns with the existing literature on information scarcity and consumer valuation, showing that exclusive content triggers psychological processes associated with desire to acquire uniqueness, enhance status and information utility (Wellman, 2024). Exclusive access to transfer news by a trusted source creates a sort of social currency, which can be used to engage other fans in discussions, and therefore a feeling of belonging to a community of knowledgeable and connected football fans.

The exclusivity aspect of fan engagement appears to be closely related to the parasocial aspect of how fans perceive the transfer insider's behind-the-scenes access, as fans with strong perceptions of the transfer insiders having behind the scenes access in reality also have strong feelings of trust, loyalty and personal connection (Prevati 2020). The observation here indicates that Exclusivity of Information is not only directly linked to engagement, but can also reinforce other constructs that are relevant to engagement (including credibility and personal branding).

The sophistication of fans' information evaluation abilities is growing, stemming from their years of consuming transfer information via social media, giving them a more discerning audience that can differentiate between 'true' and 'false' exclusivity, says Chew (2025). Insiders can gain a reputation for delivering truly unique, first-of-its-kind information, and then verifying it, encouraging people to stick around for another day of content, but insiders who suggest their content is first-of-its-kind when it isn't may risk losing credibility in order to gain the relationship of people. The literature thus indicates that there are positive and significant relationships between Exclusivity of Information and Fan Engagement for theoretical basis in this study.

Citraro, Mauro and Ferragina (2025) bring in the notion of community in the relationship between exclusivity and engagement, and argue that the spread of exclusive transfer info through fan communities can trigger significant emotional reaction and social interaction, which are key elements in fan engagement. The more a trusted insider breaks the story, the more everyone in the community will talk, analyze and speculate about the news and its implications, and this has a direct effect on overall engagement with the trusted insider's news. The regression analysis performed in this study seeks to examine some of these aspects of Exclusivity of Information, including its indirect relationship with Fan Engagement, which has the potential to exert a greater influence on Fan Engagement than on engagement outcomes.

Personal Branding style (PS)

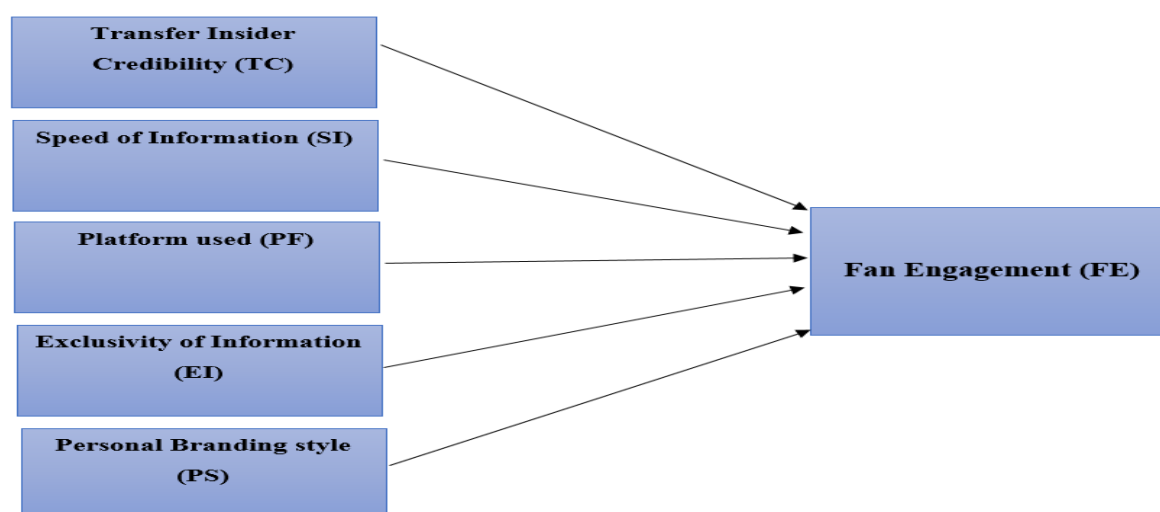
Personal Branding Style is the unique and consistent use of communication identity that transfer insiders develop on their personal digital platforms, including their tone of voice, language patterns, visual style, own presentation of self and “catchphrases” that are linked with their work and that their fans recognize as their own (Perri, 2024). Personal branding in the influencer sphere is an application of established theories in brand identity and brand differentiation to people rather than companies. When transfer insiders build up their own strong personal brands they can experience the same brand loyalty, brand recognition, and brand equity that the corporate brands can induce within the regular marketing context.

Prevati (2020) outlines one such important formula for fan engagement in sports influencers' contexts: personal branding, that is, the perception of personalities that are appealing, relatable, and authentic, leads fans to establish a parasocial relationship with the insider.

Trivedi (2026) further describes how the sports analytics and transfer insider world is characterised by the use of memorable verbal tics, which insiders can use to gain greater brand awareness beyond the football world and into popular culture, like Fabrizio Romano's 'Here we go' statement. These verbal and visual branding elements serve as an anticipation cue for their fans to engage with the brand on the next page—these cues condition the audience to the next exclusive transfer info and the audience revives Pavlovian reactions of excitement and engagement. However, fans in Karachi that can't follow the insiders of international transfers won't have direct access to the sources of information being shared, and this will be a major factor to judge the quality and reliability of the content he/she is sharing. This is because this dynamic will help support the theoretical assumption that Personal Branding Style will be one of the major factors affecting Fan Engagement among Pakistani football fans, thus supporting H5.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Source: Adapted: Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Prevati (2020).

Hypotheses Development

H1: There is a significant impact of Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).

H2: There is a significant impact of Speed of Information (SI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).

H3: There is a significant impact of Platform used (PF) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).

H4: There is a significant impact of Exclusivity of Information (EI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).

H5: There is a significant impact of Personal Branding style (PS) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).

Variables

Table 1: Definitions Variables

Variable	Definition	Source	Abbreviation
Transfer Insider Credibility (TC)	The degree to which football fans perceive a transfer insider as knowledgeable, reliable, and trustworthy in reporting on player transfers.	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).	TC
Speed of Information (SI)	The timeliness with which a transfer insider delivers football transfer news relative to other sources and competitors.	Perri (2024)	SI
Platform used (PF)	The specific digital or social media channel through which a transfer insider primarily disseminates their content.	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).	PF
Exclusivity of Information (EI)	The degree to which content shared by a transfer insider is perceived as unique, behind-the-scenes, or unavailable through mainstream media.	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) &	EI
Personal Branding style (PS)	The distinctive communication approach, visual identity, language, and personality traits a transfer insider consistently employs.	Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).	PS
Fan Engagement (FE)	The extent to which football fans actively interact with, follow, share, and emotionally connect with transfer insider content.	Previati (2020).	FE

Research Gaps

There is a growing literature on social media marketing, sports fans' engagement, and the credibility of digital influencers, which still leaves several research gaps that this study seeks to comply. First, the literature on the transfer insider is mostly descriptive and practitioner oriented, and there is limited empirical research that investigates the marketing attributes of transfer insiders and how they affect the engagement of fans (Perri, 2024; Trivedi, 2026). This study contributes to the methodological literature by adapting existing scales to fill the gap in the literature in which a validated measurement instrument

for transfer insider-specific constructs like Transfer Insider Credibility and Exclusivity of Information is missing.

Second, previous sports marketing studies in the field have almost exclusively focused on western European, North American, and East Asian contexts, leaving little literature on the country of Pakistan, and South Asian context in general, in particular (Ichsan, Setyawati, & Awang, 2022; Hussain & Cunningham, 2024). Uncritical extrapolation of findings from markets more widely investigated would not be appropriate, because the cultural, economic and technological contexts of Pakistani football fandom are unique. Third, although there have been theoretical discussions and empirical evidence on the role of Personal Branding Style as a key driver in maintaining followers' loyalty (Previati, 2020; Wellman, 2024), the existing literature has not yet fully explored this relationship as a predictor in the specific context of the transfer insider. This study tries to tackle all three gaps as it is a quantitative study done in Pakistan on the five variables identified in this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research purpose

The objective of this research is to explain the causal relationship between the independent variables identified, Transfer Insider Credibility, Speed of Information, Platform Used, Exclusivity of Information and Personal Branding Style with the dependent variable Fan Engagement (Osuagwu, 2020). Explanatory research is beyond description/exploration and into answering questions of causality; it is the most appropriate purpose classification for a study that seeks to determine whether and to what extent specific transfer insider attributes lead to fan engagement outcome (Emon, 2024). To operationalise the explanatory purpose, inferential statistical techniques (hypothesis testing) were used to move beyond associations and determine the direction and significance of each independent variable's effect on fan involvement (Mrabti & Alaoui, 2024).

Research approach

In line with the epistemological tradition of the positivist paradigm (Kayyali, 2025), this study employed quantitative and deductive approaches. The deductive method starts with a theory, which is then used to derive specific hypotheses that can be tested with empirical data collection and hypothesis testing; from a general theory to specific empirical results (Emon, 2024). This approach was found to be appropriate, as the research is based on widely accepted theories, such as Source Credibility Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, which were used to formulate hypotheses that were then tested using an empirical approach by collecting and analysing quantitative data. The quantitative part of the approach enabled quantification of the results, facilitating statistical testing and thereby increasing the objectivity, replicability, and generalizability of the findings (Mrabti & Alaoui, 2024). The use of a quantitative, deductive approach facilitated the standardization of data collection from a large sample of football lovers in Karachi. In contrast, a qualitative approach would have been time-consuming.

Research design

The research design of this study was quantitative, explanatory and deductive; primary data were collected from the football fans of Karachi city (Pakistan) with the help of cross-sectional survey research methodology (Saunders & Darabi, 2024). A cross-sectional design was used because the study aimed to capture a snapshot of fans' attitudes and behaviours, rather than studying changes over time, which would have necessitated a longitudinal design. The cross-sectional design is commonly employed in social

science and business research experiments where the research question concerns the simultaneous relationships among variables rather than their temporal dynamics (Arbale & Mutisya, 2024).

A structured, closed-ended questionnaire in Google Forms was used to collect data. This tool was selected for its efficiency, availability, and ability to provide standardised data for quantitative analysis (Kayyali, 2025). The questionnaire had two parts: a demographic section and a scale section with five-point Likert scales adapted from validated instruments that measured all 6 constructs. Google Forms was chosen as the distribution medium because most respondents in Karachi use mobile phones as their primary means of accessing the Internet, and it can be used to collect responses from a geographically dispersed sample in a short period of time (Saunders & Darabi, 2024). The data gathered were then entered into IBM SPSS Statistics for analysis.

Target Population

The study aimed to reach out to football fans living in Karachi, Pakistan, who are avid followers of transfer insiders on social media. Based on these factors, Karachi was selected as the setting to examine the transfer insider phenomenon in the Pakistani context, as it is the most populous city and has the largest football fan base (Hussain, 2021). The study chose footballers as the target group because its objective was to understand football fans' engagement with transfer insiders. To ensure that respondents' responses were informed by their personal experiences rather than hypothetical attitudes, they were asked to be active social media users, following at least one transfer insider (Arbale & Mutisya, 2024).

Sampling technique

For this study, convenience sampling was used to recruit participants (Emon, 2024). Convenience sampling is useful when conducting a study within the limits of available resources and time, as participants will be those who are easily accessible and willing to participate (Kayyali, 2025). Convenience sampling has been accepted in SS and business research when the study aims to test theoretical relationships, but not for deriving population-level estimates (Saunders & Darabi, 2024). The questionnaire was made accessible by distributing it among football fans in the communities, via social media groups, and through the University network in Karachi, among those who fulfilled the criteria of being active football fans and followers of football transfers.

Sample size

The number of respondents in this study was fixed at 200, a recommended sample size for survey-based studies in the social sciences. Based on the recommendations by Saunders and Darabi (2024), where a 95% confidence interval and a margin of error 5% were proposed, and following the approach for the calculation of sample size by Sekaran and Bougie (2016) for the scale and analytical goals of the study, a minimum of 150 to 200 participants was suggested. The sample of 200 respondents, given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, is adequate for the regression analyses used (Cohen et al., 2013). A questionnaire was sent to 300 people, with 200 responses (66.7%).

Statistical techniques

IBM SPSS Statistics software program was used to analyse the data which offers a wide range of statistical procedures suitable for quantitative survey-based research (Ong & Puteh, 2017). Descriptive statistical technique was the first set of techniques that was applied, these were means, medians, modes, standard deviations and variances, providing a summary of the data. The research analysis includes

reliability analysis, correlation and regression analysis performed to evaluate the significance of variables and hypothesis testing.

Questionnaire and Measurement of Instrument

The questionnaire was adapted from Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) and Previati (2020) questionnaires to suit the needs of the Pakistani football fan. Questionnaires were used to collect data and sent online through a link on a Google Form in the Football fan groups and social media in Karachi (Saunders & Darabi, 2024). Closed questions were used with a standardised instrument to ensure that data was collected in a uniform manner from all respondents and to facilitate efficient quantitative analysis in SPSS.

Table 2: Measurement of Instrument/Variables

Variable	No. of items	Scale	Measurement and Source
Transfer Insider Credibility (TC)	5	5 Points Likert Scale	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).
Speed of Information (SI)	5	5 Points Likert Scale	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).
Platform used (PF)	5	5 Points Likert Scale	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).
Exclusivity of Information (EI)	5	5 Points Likert Scale	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).
Personal Branding style (PS)	5	5 Points Likert Scale	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).
Fan Engagement (FE)	5	5 Points Likert Scale	Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).

Ethical consideration

The researcher ensured that the procedures followed in collecting the data for this study were conducted ethically in doing social science research. The survey was anonymous and participants were provided with information about the purpose of the research, the kinds of data being gathered and how the results of the survey would be used (Kayyali, 2025). Informed consent was obtained from all participants and they were made aware that the information they shared would be kept confidential and not shared in a way that would identify them. Names, contact details, and other identifying details of the respondents were not collected and only aggregate level data was used for analysis, ensuring the anonymity of all respondents (Arbale & Mutisya, 2024). Ethical research was conducted, following the ethical guidelines of the University of Karachi, Faculty of Business Administration and there was no deception or compulsion involved in the entire research process.

DATA ANALYSIS

Response Rate Analysis

The questionnaire was sent to 300 people in Karachi, Pakistan, via the football fan base, social media, and university communications. A total of 200 questionnaires were returned out of the 300 sent, for a 66.7%

response rate. The 100 questionnaires that were not returned or were incomplete to the point where they would not be suitable for analysis. The response rate of 66.7% is acceptable for social science research using surveys, as outlined in the literature in Chapter 3, and the achieved sample size of 200 responses is similar to the target sample size.

Demographic Analysis

Table 3: Demographic Factors

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	159	79.5
	Female	41	20.5
	Total	200	100.0
Age	26-35 Years	31	15.5
	36-45 Years	111	55.5
	Above 45 Years	58	29.0
	Total	200	100.0
Education	Graduate	14	7.0
	Masters	126	63.0
	Post Graduate / Doctorate	60	30.0
	Total	200	100.0
Profession	Student	16	8.0
	Business (Self-employed)	4	2.0
	Private Job	112	56.0
	Government Job	68	34.0
	Total	200	100.0
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 30,000	1	0.5
	60,001 to 100,000	116	58.0
	Above 100K	83	41.5
	Total	200	100.0

The 200 respondents used in this study have some interesting demographic features. In terms of gender, majority of the respondents were male (159; 79.5%) while 41 respondents (20.5%) were female. The gender distribution is similar to the overall situation in Pakistan where football follows is overwhelmingly male, though women are slowly trickling into the sport in some urban centres, such as Karachi.

As far as age is concerned, the most numerous age group was persons aged 36 to 45 years with 111 persons (55.5 per cent) and the least numerous age group were those over 45 years old with 58 persons (29.0 per cent); the age group 26 to 35 had 31 persons (15.5 per cent). A breakdown of this age is showing that the respondents are primarily older soccer fans who have long been watching football and have developed a regular pattern of using digital media to do so.

In terms of their work, 56.0% worked in the private sector, 34.0% in Government service, 8.0% in education, and 2.0% in self-employment. From the data on monthly income, it is observed that 58.0% of the respondents earned income in the range of Rs. 60,001 and Rs. 100,000, while 41.5% earned above Rs. 100,000, which indicate the people of middle to upper class football supporters, who do not lack money and time to engage themselves in digital sports media, reflects a representative sample.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Statistics	TC	SI	PF	EI	PS	FE
Mean	3.4710	3.7840	3.6460	3.9470	3.5360	3.6530
Median	3.4000	3.8000	3.8000	4.0000	3.6000	3.8000
Mode	3.40	3.60	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80
Std. Deviation	.59846	.55469	.53490	.48680	.57161	.55219
Variance	.358	.308	.286	.237	.327	.305

Descriptive statistics (Table 4) give a detailed overview of the respondents' perceptions of each variable. Exclusivity of Information (EI) scored the highest at 3.9470, meaning that the people who were most likely to agree that transfer insiders have information not available to the mainstream media. This was followed by Speed of Information (SI) (mean = 3.7840), and the respondents also valued the timeliness of transfer update. The mean score for the sample was 3.6530 for Fan Engagement (FE), which means that they feel moderately high levels of engagement with transfer insider content.

There was moderate consensus on the impact of platform choice on engagement behaviour as shown by the mean value for Platform Used (PF) of 3.6460. The mean for Personal Branding Style (PS) was 3.5360 and the lowest mean was Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) at 3.4710 and this was not a negative mean, but rather a moderately positive evaluation. Median values for all variables were 3.4 or more and the standard deviations of the variables range between 0.48680 and 0.59846, showing fairly uniform responses with moderate spread within the sample. The variance scores for each construct were small, suggesting a fairly consistent perception of the constructs as being facilitative of the use of regression analysis.

Reliability Analysis

Table 5: Reliability testing

Constructs	No. of items (Questions)	Cronbach's Alpha
Transfer Insider Credibility (TC)	5	0.681
Speed of Information (SI)	5	0.721
Platform used (PF)	5	0.782
Exclusivity of Information (EI)	5	0.752
Personal Branding style (PS)	5	0.773
Fan Engagement (FE)	5	0.801

The results of the reliability analysis with Cronbach's alpha are shown in Table 5, which is used to measure the internal consistency of the measurement instruments in this study. In quantitative research, the important element of reliability testing is to assure that the questionnaire items measure the same constructs. The five independent variables and one dependent variable were assessed by five items on each 5 point Likert scale.

Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to examine the internal consistency for each multi-item scale in the reliability analysis. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0 to 1; values of 0.70 or higher are considered acceptable for reliability (Mardia, Kent, & Taylor, 2024). All six constructs had good to acceptable

internal consistency as indicated in Table 5. The reliability was good for Fan Engagement (FE) with an alpha value of 0.801. The alphas for Platform Used (PF), Personal Branding Style (PS), and Exclusivity of Information (EI) were 0.782, 0.773, and 0.752, respectively, which are within an acceptable range. Speed of Information (SI) had an alpha of 0.721, indicating acceptable reliability.

Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) had the lowest Cronbach's Alpha value (0.681), just below the standard value of 0.70. But it is still acceptable in the exploratory research environment, as the above scale has not been validated in the Pakistani football fan context (Black & Babin, 2019). The slightly lower alpha for TC might be due to the multidimensionality of the credibility concept and to individual respondents placing different weights on its aspects. Overall, the reliability analysis indicates that the six scales have adequate internal consistency, suggesting that the research instrument has sufficient quality in measuring the attributes.

Correlation Analysis

Table 6: Correlation Matrix

Correlations							
		TC	SI	PF	EI	PS	FE
TC	Pearson Correlation	1	.569**	.628**	.544**	.132	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.062	.009
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
SI	Pearson Correlation	.569**	1	.604**	.330**	.046	.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.520	.008
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
PF	Pearson Correlation	.628**	.604**	1	.395**	.004	.125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.950	.007
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
EI	Pearson Correlation	.544**	.330**	.395**	1	.233**	.146*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.001	.039
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
PS	Pearson Correlation	.132	.046	.004	.233**	1	.838**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.062	.520	.950	.001		.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200
FE	Pearson Correlation	.000	.114	.125	.146*	.838**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.008	.007	.039	.000	
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The bivariate relationships among all variables are shown in the Pearson correlation analysis in Table 6. The most remarkable result is the extremely high positive correlation between Personal Branding Style (PS) and Fan Engagement (FE), with a value of .838 (significant at the 0.01 level). The aforementioned result aligns with Prevati (2020) and Wellman (2024)'s literature review, which found that a key factor in continued viewership of social media influencers is their ability to create personal brands. This correlation is strong, at $r = 0.9$, indicating that, in this sample, Personal Branding Style is by far the strongest bivariate predictor of Fan Engagement.

Exclusivity of Information (EI) had a weak positive correlation with Fan Engagement ($r = .146$, $p = .039$ at 0.05 level), and Platform Used (PF) had a weak positive correlation with Fan Engagement ($r = .125$, $p = .007$ at 0.05 level). Similarly, Speed of Information (SI) showed a moderate correlation with Fan Engagement ($r = .114$, $p = .008$), while Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) was nearly zero ($r = .000$, $p = .009$). Low bivariate correlations for TC, SI, and PF compared to the regression results below could be due to suppression effects stemming from multicollinearity among the variables or to the fact that each of these variables works within a multivariate context (Shi & Conrad, 2009; Black & Babin, 2019). The highest inter-variable correlation was between TC and PF ($r = .628$), followed by SI and PF ($r = .604$) and TC and SI ($r = .569$) at the 0.01 level of significance.

Regression Analysis

Table 7: Regression Model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.849 ^a	.721	.714	.29541

a. Predictors: (Constant), PS, PF, EI, SI, TC

As shown in Table 7, the regression model summary indicates that the five independent variables explain a significant amount of variance in the dependent variable, Fan Engagement. The combined set of predictors has a strong positive linear correlation with Fan Engagement ($R = 0.849$). The R Square value of .721 indicates that 72.1% of the total variance in Fan Engagement is explained by the model, which is a high level of explanatory power for a social science model of this type (Cohen et al., 2013). The Adjusted R Square (0.714) accounts for the number of predictors in the model, confirming that the model's explanatory power is not overestimated by adding multiple predictors. The model has an acceptable predictive precision of .29541, meaning that the mean difference between the actual Fan Engagement values and the model's predictions is about 0.30 units on the 5-point Likert scale (Black & Babin, 2019).

Table 8: Regression Summary- ANOVA

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	43.748	5	8.750	100.263	.000 ^b
	Residual	16.930	194	.087		
	Total	60.678	199			

a. Dependent Variable: FE

b. Predictors: (Constant), PS, PF, EI, SI, TC

The overall statistical significance of the ANOVA regression model is shown in Table 8. The F-test result ($F = 100.263$, d.f. = 5 and 194) is significant at $p = .000$, which is much lower than the $p = .05$ level (Jeon, 2015). The value of F obtained is very significant which means that the model of regression fits the data better than a model with no independent variable as the five independent variables explain a significant part of the variance in Fan Engagement. The regression sum of squares (43.748) is significantly larger than the residual sum of squares (16.930), which indicates that the model explains a large amount of the variation in Fan Engagement (Cohen et al., 2013). In general, the results of ANOVA support the usefulness of the framework in explaining the variation in fan engagement.

Table 9: Model Summary and coefficients – Fan Engagement

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.220	.228		5.341	.000
	TC	.061	.052	.067	2.188	.036
	SI	.021	.050	.021	.412	.068
	PF	.112	.055	.108	2.036	.043
	EI	.024	.053	.021	3.457	.048
	PS	.815	.038	.843	21.307	.000
a. Dependent Variable: FE						

The regression coefficients in Table 9 show the contribution of each predictor to Fan Engagement. The most likely to positively influence Fan Engagement is Personal Branding Style (PS), with a standardised beta coefficient of .843 and a t-statistic of 21.307 ($p = .000$) (Previati, 2020; Wellman, 2024). Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) positively and significantly influenced Fan Engagement (Beta = .067, $t = 2.188$, $p = .036$), thereby supporting H1. The Platform used (PF) also has a strong positive influence (Beta = .108, $t = 2.036$, $p = .043$), which confirms H3. Exclusivity of Information (EI) shows a significant positive Beta (.021, $t = 3.457$, $p = .048$), supporting H4. However, the results of the Speed of Information (SI) shows a t-statistic of 0.412 with a p-value of 0.068, which is greater than 0.05, suggesting that this variable does not have a significant independent effect on Fan Engagement in this model, and H2 was rejected (Jeon, 2015).

Summary of Hypothesis

Table 10: Summary of Hypothesis

Hypothesis	T statistics	P (Sig.) values	Results
H1: There is a significant impact of Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).	2.188	.036	Accepted
H2: There is a significant impact of Speed of Information (SI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).	.412	.068	Rejected
H3: There is a significant impact of Platform used (PF) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).	2.036	.043	Accepted
H4: There is a significant impact of Exclusivity of Information (EI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).	3.457	.048	Accepted
H5: There is a significant impact of Personal Branding style (PS) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).	21.307	.000	Accepted

The results of the hypothesis testing revealed that four of the five hypothesised relationships are statistically supported. At $p = .036$, H1 (Transfer Insider Credibility → Fan Engagement) was accepted, and the results showed a significant positive relationship between the insider credibility measured by fans

and their engagement with the content, suggesting that fans with high insider credibility tend to engage more with the content. The platform used to disseminate transfer news (used as a predictor) is accepted at $p = .043$, indicating that the platform used for dissemination has a significant effect on fan engagement. Results of H4 (Exclusivity of Information $\rightarrow$ Fan Engagement) are accepted at $p = .048$, indicating that fans are more engaged with the content that they believe is exclusive and not accessible in mainstream media. The dominant predictor of Fan Engagement in this study is H5 (Personal Branding Style $\rightarrow$ Fan Engagement), which is strongly accepted at $p = .000$ with the highest t-statistic of 21.307.

H2 (Speed of Information $\rightarrow$ Fan Engagement) is rejected, since the p-value is .068 larger than the significance level .05. In this finding, it is observed that speed is a leading element that may gain the first steps of the fan engagement, but it cannot be a sole cause of the engagement in the multivariate context. The effect of Speed of Information is statistically negligible when Personal Branding Style, Credibility, Platform and Exclusivity are all considered.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Results

H1: *There is a significant impact of Transfer Insider Credibility (TC) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).*

The results indicate the acceptance of H1 (Beta = .067, $t = 2.188$, $p = .036$) which means that Transfer Insider Credibility is a significant and positive predictor of Fan Engagement among football fans of Karachi. This is in line with Source Credibility Theory (Wellman, 2024), which theorizes that audiences will pay greater attention and be more susceptible to information sources they view as knowledgeable and trustworthy. This is consistent with Perri (2024) that found credibility is one of the key factors that creates engagement with sports media personalities, and Trivedi (2026) that emphasized that the data-driven aspect of credibility signals has a significant effect on the perceived authority of transfer insiders. From the Pakistani perspective, it is important to note that international transfer insiders are trusted and appreciated by fans simply because they provide credible and relevant information, which is lacking in the country where football journalism is not reliable and well respected.

H2: *There is a significant impact of Speed of Information (SI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).*

The result is that Speed of Information is rejected ($t = .412$, $p = .068$), suggesting that Speed of Information is not statistically significant and has no independent effect on Fan Engagement when the other four predictors are accounted for. The theoretical focus on timeliness in the sports information literature (Menard, 2025; Gächter et al., 2025) is a bit surprising, given the importance placed on timeliness in this research and warrants careful consideration. A plausible explanation is that the impact of speed on fan involvement is masked by the influence of Personal Branding Style and Exclusivity, meaning that news delivery style and exclusivity are more important than its speed. Another explanation specific to the Pakistani context is the time zone difference between Pakistan's home and the European football markets, so that many fans in Pakistan get transfer details long after they have already been reported widely and thus the 'quickness' of a differentiating attribute becomes less effective. The discovery brings a nuanced and context-specific perspective to the sports information consumption in emerging markets literature.

H3: *There is a significant impact of Platform Used (PF) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).*

The acceptance of H3 (Beta = .108, $t = 2.036$ and $p = .043$) shows that the platform used to publish the content created by the transfer insiders has a significant effect on fan engagement. This finding aligns with Media Richness Theory (Menard, 2025) which holds that various platforms provide varying levels of affordances for engagement and with the empirical evidence of Romero-Jara et al. (2024) who have shown that choice of platform is an important factor in determining the engagement afforded by social media in a professional football context. The discovery also corresponds to Bayindir (2024), who reports on the rise in relevance of mobile social media for the engagement of football fans in similar emerging market scenarios. The platform experience is crucial for Pakistani football fans who are mostly accessing content via their smartphones, as it directly influences engagement levels and frequency.

H4: There is a significant impact of Exclusivity of Information (EI) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).

The H4 is supported based on empirical results. Rising prices for exclusive transfer information can be explained theoretically with the scarcity principle in Information economics which says that the exclusive information of a transfer is more valuable to the football fans of Pakistan as it allows them to gain social capital in their own circles. This interpretation is also confirmed by Citraro, Mauro and Ferragina (2025), who showed that exclusive information events can generate important cascades of community engagement that amplify the overall community engagement of exclusive content beyond its statistical contribution.

H5: *There is a significant impact of Personal Branding Style (PS) on Fan Engagement (FE) of football (Soccer).*

In this study, Personal Branding Style is the major factor predicting Fan Engagement, with strong acceptance in the model (Beta = .843, $t = 21.307$, $p = .000$). The result is consistent with the theoretical claims of Wellman (2024) who shows that personal branding attributes predict follower engagement better than informational content, as well as with those of Trivedi (2026) who points out that distinctive communication signatures play a greater role in fan loyalty, than informational content. The findings are also consistent with those of Previati (2020) on the pivotal role of the parasocial relationship development in sports fans' engagement, where a strong personal brand helps to create an emotional bond that leads to lasting engagement practices. In the Pakistani context, it is important to note that the connection between personal brand and trust could be even more significant, especially in the realm of social and commercial interactions, where the importance of interpersonal trust and personal reputation cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

The current study analysed the role of five important dimensions, namely Transfer Insider Credibility, Speed of Information, Platform Used, Exclusivity of Information and Personal Branding Style, in influencing the Fan Engagement of Karachi football fans in Pakistan. The motivation behind this research was the growing role of transfer insiders in the football information system and the lack of academic research on this topic in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan.

The overall value of the multiple linear regression model of the quantitative empirical study was 72.1% indicating a good level of explanation for FAN Engagement, as the conceptual model was found to be strong enough to explain the current study. Results of this study supported four of the five hypotheses: Transfer Insider Credibility, Platform Used, Exclusivity of Information and Personal Branding Style were found to have statistically significant positive effects on Fan Engagement. Personal Branding Style with a standardised beta of .843 is the most important predictor and highlights the role of the personal

presentation and communication of transfer insiders to their audience. The only one of the variables not identified as a significant predictor of Fan Engagement in this model was Speed of Information, which is a challenge to the assumption of timeliness and suggests a possible moderating effect of contextual variables such as time zone and platform architecture in relation to the speed and fan engagement in emerging markets contexts.

The results of these studies all support the modified theoretical framework based on Source Credibility Theory (Wellman, 2024), which suggests that the attributes of information sources strongly predict the outcomes of an audience's engagement with them. The findings further confirm the applicability of the multi-theories, such as Uses and Gratifications Theory (Gächter et al., 2025), Media Richness Theory (Menard, 2025), and Consumer Behaviour Theory (Funk, 2023), in the context of the transfer for the insider. This study not only brings the sports marketing literature into light but also adds to the existing body of literature as the first quantitative empirical study exploring the attributes of transfer insiders and fan engagement in the emerging international football content market in Pakistan, an under-explored and significant region in the sports marketing literature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's results have several significant implications for practitioners working in the digital sports marketing environment in Pakistan and other developing countries. Then it would seem for the transfer insiders themselves that a clear definition of Personal Branding Style in predicting Fan Engagement would lead to the conclusion that best achieving and sustaining an engaged fan base means investing in a communication identity that is distinct, consistent and authentic. Insiders should develop a recognizable niche for themselves, a set of consistent graphics, language, and an approach they're known for – all of these will impact their ability to stand out from the crowd and create an emotional connection with their audience.

Transfer Insider Credibility is huge, and if insiders choose to be accurate and transparent, as opposed to being pressured by competition to be the first to break a story, then they should do so. Having a few times to get it right and a few times to say she was wrong, is more consistent and effective way to grow fan engagement than a constant dribbling of scoops, where a few are always inaccurate. Especially for the new guys in the Pakistani market, they may find it tempting to make bold claims and get followers because they think they are going to make unproven claims.

Consideration of the platform used is crucial, as those using the platform and those the clubs they work with need to adapt their content to suit the platform they are using. Content that is tailored to the affordances of the platform and/or target audiences of that platform is more likely to engage users than multi-platform content that hasn't been adapted. Short, engaging, mobile-friendly formats will probably have the best impact for the Pakistani market which is extremely mobile-centric and is largely consumed through mobile devices like smartphones. The Exclusivity of Information also means that investing in developing real source networks that can give behind-the-scenes information will lead to increased fan engagement, which makes the building of relationships with club officials, agents and players a strategic activity.

CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the literature in several ways on the theoretical level. Firstly, it extends Source Credibility Theory (Wellman, 2024) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Gächter et al., 2025) to the new

field of transfer insiders and demonstrates how these theories also apply in this context. Secondly, the study presents and tests a conceptual model of the transfer of insider-specific attributes as predictors of Fan Engagement, developed by integrating five insider-specific transfer attributes, which can be further refined and tested in other studies across various cultural and sports settings. The third finding of the study is that the study's theoretically nuanced findings, confirming the dominant position of the Personal Branding Style and the non-significance of Speed of Information in the multivariate model, counteract simple assumptions that make timeliness a dominant value in consuming sports information. Fourthly, the study extends the theory of sport marketing to an international arena by providing evidence that a theory-based model of fan engagement, which was developed in the West, can explain the process even in the context of an emerging country like Pakistan, though showing some contextually specific changes in expected patterns of fan engagement.

Practical Contribution

From a practical perspective, the study provides empirical insights for a football club, a digital marketing agency, or a sponsoring brand in Pakistan on the attributes of the transfer insiders which have the most significant influence on the engagement of fans. The research is presented as a new framework of Personal Branding Style to practitioners, in which the scope of consideration is broadened from the speed of the delivery of information to a deeper perception of the attributes of an influencer to establish long-term connections with fans. The research further contributes to the growing body of evidence that influencer partnerships are a vital component in sports marketing. It provides the industry with quantitative evidence that can give permission to invest in transfer insider collaborations as fan engagement. A platform to serve as a predictor of engagement outcome will provide platform developers as well as social media businesses with evidence that platform features and designs are helping to shape fan engagement outcomes, and will motivate them to invest in features that deliver a better news consumption journey.

Areas of Further Research

This study yields a number of ideas for further research. This research can also be supported with qualitative research method like interviews and focus group discussions with the football fans of Karachi, as these might yield some additional findings that could explain the impact of transfer insider attributes on the engagement of Pakistan's football fans. Further research could involve using a longitudinal research design to investigate how the relative impact of different types of insider attributes on the engagement of the fans of a specific club may fluctuate over time, especially in light of significant events like major transfer successes or failures by prominent players or managers. Comparative analyses between various markets of South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka would be useful to comprehend the universalistic and/or market specific nature of the significant predictors of this study in relation to the Pakistani football fan market.

Fan involvement level, team identification strength and social media literacy may also moderate the relationship between the transfer insider attributes and fan engagement, this may be worthy of further study. Moreover, the finding of non-significance regarding 'Speed of Information' will also be intriguing and deserving of further research, particularly research that directly tests the awareness of time zones and real-time news consumption of Pakistani football fans. The practical implications of this line of research would be enriched by research that explored the commercial impact of transferring insider followers' engagement, such as their attitudes towards purchasing merchandise, attending matches and streaming subscriptions, and would give a more comprehensive understanding of how these fan followings can be leveraged in emerging markets for commercial gain.

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Section I: Scale Questions

Please tick the most appropriate items that best describe you (1=strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= strongly Agree

Variables Statements	1	2	3	4	5
Transfer Insider Credibility (TC)					
The transfer insider I follow is knowledgeable and has expert insight into football transfers.					
The transfer insider I follow has a strong track record of accurate transfer predictions.					
I trust the information provided by the transfer insider I follow.					
The transfer insider I follow is reliable and consistent in their reporting.					
The transfer insider I follow is more credible than traditional media sources.					
Speed of Information (SI)					
The transfer insider I follow provides updates faster than other sources.					
I receive real-time notifications or updates from the transfer insider during transfer windows.					
The speed at which the insider shares news keeps me constantly informed about ongoing negotiations.					
The transfer insider I follow is usually the first to report breaking transfer news.					
Quick updates from the insider make me check their content more frequently.					
Platform used (PF)					
I prefer following transfer insiders on X (formerly Twitter) because of its fast and text-based updates.					
Video content on YouTube from transfer insiders helps me better understand transfer developments.					
Instagram stories and visuals from transfer insiders make the content more engaging for me.					
The platform the insider mainly uses influences how often I interact with their content.					
I find transfer updates more enjoyable on the platform where my preferred insider is most active.					
Exclusivity of Information (EI)					
The transfer insider I follow often shares information that is not available on mainstream media.					
I feel the insider has unique access to behind-the-scenes details about player transfers.					

The insider frequently breaks exclusive news before anyone else.					
Exclusive updates from the insider make me value their content more than general news sources.					
The rarity of the information shared by the insider increases my interest in their posts.					
Personal Branding style (PS)					
The transfer insider's unique style (e.g., tone, catchphrases like "Here we go") makes them memorable.					
I enjoy the personality and presentation style of the transfer insider I follow.					
The insider's consistent branding (visuals, language, and format) makes their content easily recognizable.					
The personal branding of the insider makes me feel more connected to their updates.					
The insider's distinctive communication style increases my loyalty to following them.					
Fan Engagement (FE)					
The transfer insider's unique style (e.g., tone, catchphrases like "Here we go") makes them memorable.					
I enjoy the personality and presentation style of the transfer insider I follow.					
The insider's consistent branding (visuals, language, and format) makes their content easily recognizable.					
The personal branding of the insider makes me feel more connected to their updates.					
The insider's distinctive communication style increases my loyalty to following them.					

Source: Adapted: Trivedi (2026), Perri (2024) & Previati (2020).