

# **Personal Construct Theory and Spectator Emotions: Using the Repertory Grid to Understand the Emotional Experience of Cricket Spectators in England**

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## **Abstract**

Psychology is comprised of a group of systems developed to explain human behaviour. Within this broad definition, many psychologists have propagated various approaches to explaining human behaviour such as, psychoanalytic, trait, behaviouristic and cognitive theories.

In their attempts to understand consumers, many consumer behaviourists have turned to the cognitive theories as their preferred choice.

This is because the cognitive approach helps describe consumer behaviour and decision making in logical linear models [2].

There are however, others who argue that human behaviour cannot be totally logical, and consumers experience products and services and thus experiential consumption involves emotions [8, 9].

Holbrook and Hirschman [3] argued that consumption is an experience involving fantasies, feelings and fun, and this experiential view of consumption highlights the pleasure principle of consuming a service or product. This is especially true for sport spectating which is a hedonic consumption, and thus it can be argued that when considering the overall game experience of sport spectators, emotions need to be given greater emphasis.

In sport marketing, emotions have been mainly investigated with relevance to team performance and game outcome [6]. Different stimuli elicit different emotions [7] and when attending a sporting event, spectators not only view the athletic contest but are also exposed to various other stimuli (e.g. off-field entertainment). Thus, considering only the game outcome as the main source of emotional responses limit our understanding of sport spectator consumption emotions.

This research aims to understand the role of emotions in spectators' overall game experience with relevance to cricket spectators.

Specifically, working within the framework of personal construct theory, the research aims to identify the various emotions experienced by spectators and how these emotions impact on their overall game experience.

Personal construct theory (PCT) was developed by George Kelly who described it as 'a theory of man's personal inquiry – a psychology of the human quest' [5: p. 1]. Kelly believed in what he termed 'constructive alternativism' where all knowledge is subject to alternative constructions. People themselves place their own construction or meaning on events they experience in life [5]. Kelly proposed that you only

understand the person and his world by understanding how he construes the world around him.

This research uses PCT primarily because the theory provides a bridge between cognition and emotion. This was seen as important in providing an alternative to the current partition of approaches (cognition v emotions) among consumer behaviourists. By adopting this alternative a more comprehensive understanding of consumption experiences can be gained. Kelly felt that psychologists should not worry too much about the differences between cognition and emotion [1]. He in fact seemed to have viewed it as a process in which cognitive elements of an experience leads onto higher order constructs of emotions.

PCT also approaches the study of human behaviour in a more humanistic manner. As Kelly explained, most theories of psychology view man as a passive organism whose actions can be controlled through using certain procedures or conditioning. Man however, is an active scientist who tests his hypotheses through continuous life experiences [4].

Kelly felt that in order to understand man we need to abandon our perceptions of being an 'expert' (be it a researcher or psychologist) and hand over the role of the expert to man himself. Man, in other words, is the only expert on his own self [4]. However, man is not always aware of all the constructs he holds and uses to understand his world and in order to help elicit the constructs that are relevant to him, Kelly proposed the use of Repertory Grid [10]. Repertory grid has been found to be particularly useful for exploratory research in fields that are not well defined [10] and as such, is suitable for the current research.

Cricket spectators viewing a live one-day game are interviewed for this research using the repertory grid technique.

The preliminary interviews showed that using the construct elicitation procedure of repertory grid helps participants to delve deeper into their minds and bring out the varied range of emotions.

Further interviews will be carried out and analysed to identify specific emotions experienced by cricket spectators and how these emotions impact on their overall game experience.

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