

Accepted Version

Cricket has no boundaries with NatWest? The hyperreality of inclusion and diversity in English cricket

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Article DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2020.1789105

Cricket has no boundaries with NatWest? The hyperreality of inclusion and diversity in English cricket

In this article, we examine England and Wales Cricket Board's relationship with NatWest Bank and analyse its award-winning sponsorship campaign *Cricket Has No Boundaries* (CHNB). Drawing upon Jean Baudrillard's concepts of the hyperreal and the non-event, we explore how CHNB presents an idealised image of English cricket. At the heart of this campaign is NatWest's desire to demonstrate their commitment to inclusion and diversity through the lens of modern cricket, but what does this tell us about the 'value' of cricket in our neoliberal age? Using critical discourse analysis and semiotic analysis, we critique the campaign's mediated content – advertisements, newspaper articles and short documentaries – and examine the role of commodities, signs and media messages in shaping CHNB's hyperreal version of cricket. We also reflect upon the growth of corporate social responsibility in sport and discuss how brands exploit athletes' lived experiences for financial gain.

Keywords: cricket; sociology; hyperreality; corporate social responsibility; diversity

On a grey day in Vauxhall, London, Eoin Morgan – England Men's World Cup winning captain – takes guard. The wicket-keeper, who is standing up to stumps, bellows instructions to the bowler who then delivers the ball and Morgan takes a wild swipe. He misses the ball completely, breaks into a broad smile and removes his blindfold. The white plastic ball, which is filled with ball-bearings, is rolled back to bowler who orientates himself to the stumps and begins his delivery process again. This is no ordinary game of cricket; this is visually impaired (VI) cricket. Despite being less than a mile away from the Oval, this setting also could not be more different: a community multi-sport arena in the middle of an inner-city housing estate. Morgan is joined on the pitch by some of his male England teammates (Joe Root, Adil Rashid and Moeen Ali)

and a plethora of other England internationals (including Heather Knight, Kate Cross, Si Ledwith, Dan Field and Iain Nairn). There are also girls and boys from the local BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) community who, like the England players, are wearing clothing emblazoned with the NatWest bank logo. Surrounding the venue's perimeter are posters of a young South Asian girl playing street cricket with a slogan in bold lettering: *Cricket Has No Boundaries*. This slogan encapsulates what we have described above: people from all walks of life being brought together through a game of cricket.

While this harmonious, multicultural VI cricket game illustrates all that is good about the game, it is constructed for that very reason; the venue, the participants, the format are all purposefully selected to launch NatWest's award-winning campaign *Cricket Has No Boundaries* (CHNB). However, this campaign's promotion of cricket as an inclusive and diverse game is somewhat misleading. As Malcolm (2013) highlights, exclusionary practices – such as the maintenance of dominant power relations in the empire, between men and women and amongst social classes – have been central to the game's development. Cricket, like most modern sports, is not an inclusive environment and exclusionary practices remain ever present (Burdsey, 2011; Fletcher, 2014; Lusted and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017; Powis, 2020; Ratna, et al., 2016; Velija et al., 2014, Velija, 2015).

In this article, we critically examine the England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB) relationship with NatWest by analysing the CHNB campaign and its varied media content, including advertisements, newspaper articles and short documentaries. We discuss how CHNB constructs a hyperreal vision of modern cricket and consider the underlying motivations for representing the game in this way.

Additionally, we also explore NatWest's corporate social responsibility (CSR) and their own hyperreal image. As the ECB's principal partner, NatWest intended to use CHNB to demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity and diversity and reinforce their brand values. Despite the growth of CSR as a form of sponsorship, it has received little academic focus within the sociology of sport, thus this article offers a novel perspective. Firstly, we provide an in-depth analysis of NatWest's relationship with the ECB, with a specific focus upon the success of the CHNB campaign. Secondly, we establish our theoretical framework and explain the pertinence of the *hyperreal* and the *non-event* as our guiding theoretical concepts. Thirdly, we outline the methodological approach used in the article, including our use of critical discourse analysis and semiotic analysis. Finally, we present our analysis and discussion sections in which we critique the CHNB's mediated content and interrogate the campaign's key messages.

Cricket has no boundaries

National Westminster bank, commonly known as NatWest, has a longstanding association with English cricket. Over the past four decades, NatWest have sponsored domestic and international cup competitions, as well as supporting the development of grassroots cricket. In 2017, the commercial relationship between the ECB and NatWest was reformed as the bank was announced as the ECB's principal partner (RBS, 2017). For NatWest, the move towards an official partnership with English cricket could not have come at a better time; both England's women (2017) and men (2019) have lifted the One-Day International (ODI) World Cup trophy since the creation of this new partnership. However, despite the lucrative exposure that comes from being associated with elite sport, NatWest claim to have broader social intentions that

transcend their support of the national teams. In conjunction with the principal partnership announcement, NatWest launched *Cricket Has No Boundaries* (CHNB), a campaign to "showcase and celebrate the diversity of modern cricket in the UK, support the ECB's aim for a game for everyone and mirror the bank's own commitment to diversity and inclusion" (RBS, 2017, n.p.). Through the lens of cricket, this multi-million-pound campaign aimed to exhibit NatWest's proactive, socially responsible approach to banking (M&C Saatchi, 2020). CHNB also endeavoured to reinforce NatWest's new core brand message *We Are What We Do* in which customers were invited to hold the bank to account for its actions (The Guardian Advertising, 2020; The Sponsorship Awards, 2018).

CHNB was executed through a multidimensional advertising strategy, including billboard adverts, a strategic partnership with the *Guardian* newspaper and a *YouTube* documentary series. Additionally, #NoBoundaries wristbands were made available across NatWest branches and at England games to raise funds for Chance to Shine, a cricket charity that works in state schools and inner-city communities. As official partners with NatWest, Chance to Shine and their wide-ranging schemes featured heavily in the CHNB paid-for media content and, as part of the campaign, even staged the first game of cricket in Downing Street (The Sponsorship Awards, 2018). This campaign was celebrated as a creative and commercial success. CHNB won *Best Use of Sponsorship to Encourage Diversity and Inclusion* and *Sponsorship of the Year* at the prestigious UK Sponsorship Awards 2018. As part of NatWest's entry into the awards, they submitted a detailed report which outlined the outcomes of CNHB (The Sponsorship Awards, 2018). When evaluating the first objective of the campaign – "Build our (NatWest) association with cricket and help to foster and promote diversity

and inclusion within the sport"— NatWest cite a number of key performer indicators (KPIs) including a 13.4% uplift in viewing NatWest as an inclusive brand, a 20% uplift in spontaneous association with cricket and reaching number five in the Inclusive Top 50 UK Employers list. The second objective – "Use the ECB Principal Partnership as a platform to demonstrate our (NatWest) brand position" – was achieved through widespread exposure: a reach of 9.9 million through national out of home (OOH) advertising, 7.3 million through press advertising, 4 million through social media advertising and £7.6 million worth of television exposure. And the final objective – "Celebrate cricket with our colleagues, customers and clients" – resulted in multiple team events, 90,000 NatWest colleagues being reached by internal communications and 12,000 staff and clients receiving tickets for cricket matches.

Beyond KPIs and profit margins, this campaign had additional value for NatWest. When talking to *Marketing Week*, NatWest CMO David Wheldon identifies the internal pride that CHNB has brought to the bank's staff members: "For us [internal pride] is really important because we signed this deal when we were still in the grief of recovery. Therefore, building colleague pride and engagement is an important part" (Vizard, 2019: n.p.). Wheldon argues that CHNB has played a role in both restoring a sense of internal pride and the bank's brand image. Despite the emphasis on brand image in the multitude of articles and documents reporting the success of CHNB, there is a notable lack of reflection upon its impact upon cricket. At the heart of this campaign is the sentiment that "cricket, like NatWest, is open to everyone, regardless of your age, gender, race, physical ability, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, social or ethnic background" (The Sponsorship Awards, 2018: n.p.). However, unlike the statistic

driven analysis above, NatWest do not attempt to quantify the accuracy of this statement nor the impact of CHNB upon the wider game.

Theoretical framework

In this article, our theoretical framework is informed by the work of Jean Baudrillard (1995, 2001, 2002) and specifically draws upon the concepts of the hyperreal and the non-event to critique the CHNB campaign. Alongside the work of Baudrillard, we also engage with the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to grasp NatWest's ulterior motives for supporting English cricket. This framework has three intentions: firstly, engage with Baudrillard's postmodernist approach to analyse how, through a sustained creation of carefully developed mediated content, CHNB produces 'images' of cricket, inclusion and diversity. Secondly, apply the concept of the hyperreal to explore the role of commodities, signs and media messages in shaping CHNB's hyperreal version of cricket. Thirdly, use the non-event to examine the 'meaning' of the tagline cricket has no boundaries and consider how this campaign's messages are continually reproduced to such an extent that it loses all meaning.

Hyperreal – or hyperreality – refers to simulated and distorted meditations of the real, as well as highlighting how through simulation the real becomes 'realer than real'. Baudrillard uses the term simulacrum to conceptualise how the 'image' or a copy of an image produces a hyperreal version (Jameson, 1991). These images are continually reproduced to the extent to which they no longer reflect the original meaning or intention. This can be seen in advertising and media productions in which the real is enhanced, edited and presented in mediated ways. Baudrillard argues that two things happen: firstly, there is an intensification of the real and, secondly, that the real and the

image become blurred (Giulianotti, 2004). This results in an implosion of meaning (Baudrillard, 1994) with real events being replaced by virtual and media-saturated images/signs. For example, universally recognisable signs and symbols, such as the Nike and Apple logos, have more 'value' than the product themselves; it is the brand which is the commodity (Giulianotti, 2015). When considering the 'meaning' of CHNB, this is significant.

Baudrillard emphasises how the image(s) represented (through the continuous replication of the image) may have little bearing on the reality of the event. This is most evident in his 1991 collection of essays entitled *The Gulf War did not take place*. While a provocative title, he was not arguing that the war did not happen (Redhead, 1998); rather, he uses the war as an example of a non-event, a concept which describes something which neither lives up to its projected definition, social significance or meaning attributed to it through media representation (Atkinson and Young, 2012). In the context of the Gulf War, Baudrillard examined how the conflict was mediated through television coverage and the 'stories' were edited to limit the audiences' perception of the war (Giulianotti, 2004). For Baudrillard, there are no shared events or collective experiences, only mass-mediated events where the media prescribe meaning. Crucially, without collective experience, mega-events are meaningless, and any social or cultural connection is tentative and artificial (Baudrillard, 1993, 2001). We utilise the concept of the non-event differently from that evoked by Atkinson and Young (2012) and Redhead (1998) and consider instead how the campaign (not an actual event) may be considered as a non-event because its legacy cannot live up to its prescribed media definition or projection.

In the context of sport, Szto (2013) successfully draws upon Baudrillard and the hyperreal in her critical analysis of Nike's Red Shoelaces campaign *Lace up, Save Lives*. This initiative encouraged consumers to consider how, through the act of buying red shoelaces, they can help save someone's life. *Lace up, Save Lives* is an example of a sport development initiative which promotes the use of sport for addressing social ills. After widespread criticism of the use of child labour, the campaign also sought to reframe *Nike* as a socially conscious company. Much like our theoretical framework, Szto adopts hyperreality to critique the symbolism produced by the campaign. Using critical discourse and semiotic analysis, the author analyses the campaign's content – including video clips and images – and argues that Nike is presented as the saviour and educator of those affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa. There is little consideration given to the complexity of the crisis, including critiques of (post) colonialism, racism, geography or poverty (caused by multiple factors). Instead, the audience is provided with a hyperreal solution: just buy red shoelaces. While the CHNB campaign differs from the Nike campaign – mainly because there is no direct purchasing of a product – there are parallels that can be drawn. NatWest's involvement is not entirely philanthropic; rather it is a way to gain publicity and market their brand. Ultimately, they want to keep their existing customers while continuing to grow their customer base.

CHNB and *Lace Up and Save Lives* are examples of corporate social responsibility (CSR), albeit they represent different models of CSR. CSR refers to how business organisations are expected to provide a contribution to society through social activities. The growth of CSR is attributed to numerous factors, including an emphasis on corporate responsibility and behaviour. It has become a key management trend whereby companies are keen to demonstrate they are supporting good causes (Paramio-

Salcines et al., 2013). In the sport industry, CSR is underpinned by the functional view that sport is inherently good, therefore companies want to be seen investing and supporting sport (Guest, 2009). CSR through sport also allows companies to engage with youth markets which are otherwise difficult to access. Although CSR and its various models are discussed in sport management and sport business fields, Levermore (2013) calls for a critical lens upon CSR to consider its purpose and examine how it may ignore more deep-seated issues in sport, such as poor governance, corruption and inequalities. Our article contributes to this call by arguing that NatWest's display of CSR through CNHB obscures the 'real'; the hyperreal portrayal of its own brand and of cricket needs thorough interrogation.

Method

Due to the limited empirical research into sports-related CSR, we have drawn methodological inspiration from Szto's (2013) aforementioned article on the hyperreality of the Nike (RED) campaign. Szto successfully uses a combination of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and semiotic analysis to examine the media representations produced by the Nike (RED) website, which include blog posts, press releases, a promotional launch video and a commercial. Because of the comparable range of media products – both written and image-based – and the hyperreal theoretical framing, we are also using CDA and semiotic analysis in this article.

CDA, our first form of analysis, is a well-used tool in sport and physical activity (PA) research (see Jette, 2006; LaFrance, 2011, McGannon and Spence, 2012; Dowling, 2019). McGannon (2016: 231-3) defines three central tenets of CDA: 1) Discourse and language are constructed and constituted; 2) Self-identity is a discursive construction;

and 3) Discourses are (re)produced in social practices and institutions. While there is not space in this article for an in-depth discussion of McGannon's arguments, these tenets capture the scope of CDA. In the context of our research, the criticality of CDA is vital in interrogating taken-for-granted, ideological discourse that is maintained through advertising campaigns like CHNB. Semiotic analysis, our second approach, is the analysis of signs and involves interrogating "not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else" (Chandler, 2017: 2). These signs can take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. This approach, in a similar way to CDA, aims to deconstruct the social realities that we encounter every day. In the context of sport and PA research, semiotic analysis has been used in a range of empirical studies (see Griggs et al., 2012; Arning, 2013; Mishra, 2014) and remains a popular framework for visual analysis. When studying images, this approach makes an important distinction between what a sign denotes – "the definitional, literal, obvious or common-sense meaning of a sign." (137) – and what a sign connotes – "the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign" (138). Connotation is based upon who is interpreting the sign (the audience) and the social context. In particular, it is important to engage with how mythology and rhetoric are used to conceal the ideological functions of signs (Barthes, 1973, 1991).

Using this methodological framework, our approach allowed us to scrutinise the 'messages' that NatWest and CHNB communicate through the campaign, as well as the power relations that underpin these acts of social responsibility (Szto, 2013). There is a plethora of written content about CHNB, such as press releases and opinion pieces, however our analytical focus is upon the content explicitly produced for the campaign:

advertisements (using CDA and semiotic analysis); 'paid-for' written articles in the *Guardian* newspaper (using CDA); and a series of *YouTube* documentaries (using CDA and semiotic analysis). As joint authors, we feel it is imperative to both analyse and write collaboratively, and our methodological approach followed this principle. Once we had co-analysed the CHNB products, we organised our findings into a table which recorded the product (advert, article or documentary), the social issue/s that the product focused upon (e.g. sexuality, disability, poverty) and any discourse (e.g. specific statements, words or phrases) that we had identified. Using this table, we then generated themes across the CHNB products and organised our discussion section based upon these themes.

Analysis

CHNB advertisements

As discussed above, our initial CDA and semiotic analysis distinctly focused upon the three promotional strands of CHNB. Firstly, we analysed NatWest's use of creative advertising. This element of the campaign, which preceded the launch of CHNB in May 2017, comprised of two images featuring a disabled cricketer and a young South Asian girl playing street cricket appearing across billboards, mainstream and social media. Despite their purported inclusive and diverse approach, NatWest targeted middle and upper-class consumers with adverts in ABC1 press, OOH sites close to cricket grounds and transport hubs (The Sponsorship Awards, 2018). Their selection of demographic is also in stark contrast to images which are used to promote the campaign. The first image captures a South Asian physically disabled bowler in mid-flight after delivering the ball towards a batsman. We know he is physically disabled because under his left arm is a wooden crutch supporting his body weight. This is not a modern,

technologically advanced piece of equipment; it is an old-fashioned military style mobility aid. He is also wearing light and dark green cricket clothing which is typically used by the Pakistan national teams. In the second image, the focus is on a young South Asian girl playing street cricket. She is wearing a bright pink kurti tunic, well-worn flip-flops and has mehndi (henna decoration) across her hands and wrists. The oversized wooden bat in her hands is also well-used, as shown by the disintegrating rubber grip and layers of batting tape. The setting is a piece of waste ground in front of a breezeblock wall and, in place of wooden stumps, three rectangular bricks are the wicket. Across both images, Cricket Has No Boundaries is writ large with 'The game for all. Supported by NatWest since 1981' in a smaller font. NatWest's logo is also featured alongside their brand promise, 'We are what we do'.

While it is clear what these images denote, the connotations are less obvious. NatWest sponsor English cricket, yet both images appear to be taken outside of England. The images demonstrate that cricket can be a game for all types of people, but then why are they being used to promote a national bank? The disconnect between who is featured in these images and the intended audience is significant. This is not a campaign to encourage disabled people and South Asian girls to play cricket; the protagonists are presented as exotic 'Others' for the bank's middle and upper-class customer base to consume. The fact that NatWest had no influence upon their participation seems to matter little; it is the appearance of inclusion and diversity which takes precedence. CHNB's symbolism is further confused by an alternate version of the street cricket image. In this version, there is a verse below the picture of the young girl:

This game is different. Just like the country it comes from. Our island of individuality. Where we celebrate the eccentric, champion the plucky and defend the underdog. Not a country of small minds, but of big hearts. The home of cricket.

A team game for individuals, from up north to down south. Country estates to council estates. And, even if you're the odd one out, you can still be in. Or out. So join the club. Or a club. Cricket has no boundaries.

This sentimental, hyperbole-filled vision of English cricket is at the centre of the CHNB campaign. It speaks to a genteel notion of the game which is familiar and makes the sport a valuable commodity. Indeed, the mythology surrounding cricket (Marqusee, 1998; Malcolm, 2013; Wagg, 2018) has been frequently used to reaffirm an idealised image of England and of Englishness. For example, John Major's 1993 St. George's Day speech, which invoked 'a mythical, nostalgic and implicitly white notion of England' (Carrington, 1998: 102), presented cricket and the village green as a symbol for the British empire's 'golden age'. Yet, as conceptions of English national identity have evolved over the past three decades, so has the portrayal of cricket and its relationship to Englishness (Malcolm, 2013). In the verse quoted above, cricket and England are described as 'different' – although it is not clear what they are different from – and as institutions which both champion and protect those who are perceived to not fit in. These sentiments are in stark contrast to the outdated, mythic imagery of Major's speech and reflect how cricket in the twenty-first century has been "reinvented in such a way as to remain the quintessential English game" (Malcolm, 2013: 126). However, this is not to say that CHNB has captured an authentic 'reality'; the campaign and this series of posters is as equally mythic. As discussed earlier, the images are very unlikely to be taken in England and many of the verse's claims – especially the meritocracy of cricket – are fanciful and unsubstantiated. This is something we will return to in our discussion section.

The Guardian articles

Secondly, we analysed NatWest's strategic partnership with the *Guardian* Newspaper. Consisting of 24 written articles, live blogs and a documentary entitled *Second Innings*, this 'paid for' branded content was created by the Guardian Labs department and made available via the newspaper's website. Much like the advertising campaign above, the *Guardian* content also reinforced a sentimental image of cricket. On the Guardian Labs project webpage, the advertising team explain their vision for the CHNB and make a number of interesting points relating to their portrayal of cricket:

We wanted to help make NatWest's involvement with cricket resonate with everyone - whether they were a cricket fan or not. How could we make cricket meaningful for everyone? During a particularly divisive time for our country, we wanted to find stories that showed how cricket brings diverse communities together.

(The Guardian Advertising, n.d.)

They wanted cricket to be meaningful to everybody, even if they are not cricket fans. While cricket holds symbolic meaning for pre-existing fans, CHNB needed to engender an emotional response from a wider audience. Significantly, the advertisers recognise the wider social and political context of the campaign and the potential effect of a progressive advertising strategy. As they acknowledge later in the 'What we did' section of the webpage, emotion lay at the heart of their content. Of course, this is to be expected of any advertising campaign, however CHNB is a complex example. The campaign is not directly promoting cricket as such, it is advertising NatWest bank. It plays upon old fashioned cricketing tropes while still attempting to be contemporary and inclusive. This is exemplified by a quote from the webpage: "Cricket represents a force for civility in a world of hostility - in the way it brings a diverse group of people together from villages to inner cities, and also its genteel nature" (The Guardian

Advertising, n.d.). Cricket is portrayed as a something more than a sport; it is a social panacea to cure the ills of society. The argument that cricket aids civility has been made several times, but perhaps no more farcically than by Robert Mugabe, former dictator of Zimbabwe, who is widely quoted as saying, 'cricket civilises people and creates good gentlemen. I want everyone to play cricket in Zimbabwe; I want ours to be a nation of gentlemen' (Malcolm, 2013: 1). Yet, whether it be the clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan fans during the 2019 Men's World Cup (Lofthouse, 2019) or racist abuse directed at England player Jofra Archer during a Test match series in New Zealand (Martin, 2019), there are countless examples of cricket being anything but genteel or a force for civility.

CHNB's themes of inclusion and diversity are most evident across the written articles, some of which were especially produced for the campaign and others which were re-purposed from previously published content. Many articles feature NatWest sponsored initiatives, such as Chance to Shine and community initiative CricketForce, and end with a promotion for the campaign: "With NatWest, cricket is a game that has #NoBoundaries. It's cricket for all." The content of the articles is wide-ranging, including a photo essay featuring the world's only gay cricket club; street cricket in inner-city London and Birmingham; initiatives for young BAME women; and even bringing Catholics, Anglicans and Muslims together through an inter-faith cricket tournament. In articles entitled 'Women on the verge of a cricket shakedown' (*The Guardian*, 2019a) and 'Can cricket become the game of choice for young BME women?' (*The Guardian*, 2018), cricket is described as a vibrant, dynamic way of breaking down existing gender, race and religious barriers. As well as breaking down barriers, cricket is also seemingly central to creating a cohesive community. When reporting upon the success of the CricketForce initiative, the article's author explains

that "when a community is united around a common goal, it can achieve far more than individuals alone" (*The Guardian*, 2019b).

While the content is diverse, the articles address similar themes – which is not a surprise considering the CHNB creators' intentions for the campaign. In our critical discourse analysis, cricket as a social panacea – as discussed above – was evident in a multitude of different social settings. For example, in an article about a Chance to Shine project in North London (Newkey-Burden, 2019), Mikey Thompson, the project's organiser, argues that cricket can be 'a vehicle to steer children away from crime and anti-social behaviour and towards the right paths.' He also later says that the game is a way to 'get them (the participants) off welfare.' Following the 'right path' is also evident in a similar piece that focuses upon a crime awareness programme that uses cricket to discourage young people from gang membership and anti-social behaviour (Newkey-Burden, 2018). This rhetoric is nothing new. Inner-city, predominantly BAME communities have frequently been central to the ECB's development plans (Miller, 2005) with cricket celebrated for its 'civilising' power. Yet, this approach reproduces colonial discourse and portrays BAME people as deviant 'Others.' In their work with British Pakistani Muslim cricketers, Ratna et al. (2016) argue that community development projects often further disenfranchise minority groups by focusing upon the need for social rehabilitation. Significantly, there are no *Guardian* articles that specifically focus upon white, male cricketers; this group is the presumed norm and are in contrast with the 'Others' who need educating or even saving through cricket. These racially coded binaries (Crabbe and Wagg, 2005) between different groups – whether it be how they play the game, cultural practices or perceived norms and values – remain fundamental to the exclusionary nature of cricket (Malcolm, 2013).

YouTube documentaries

Finally, we analysed eight short *YouTube* documentaries made in conjunction with the ECB. Each documentary focuses upon an England international cricketer and recounts their story of overcoming adversity. On *YouTube*, the series is described as "a selection of wonderfully moving and extraordinary stories from our No Boundaries series, documenting how the game of cricket can change lives." Titles such as 'How Cricket Saved Si Ledwith' (ECB, 2018a), 'Mental Health Does Not Have To Define Or Control You: Kate Cross' (ECB, 2019a, 'Never Give Up: The Story of a World Cup Winner' (ECB, 2017a), reflect the series' emotive focus. Following the same narrative as both the advertising campaign and *Guardian* articles, each documentary addresses an aspect of representation or identity and examines how participation in cricket helped the individual overcome adversity, such as bullying, inclusion or mental health.

For example, 'Better than the Rest' (ECB, 2019b) charts Adil Rashid's journey to international cricket and explores issues of racism and acceptance because of his ethnicity. In the film, he discusses being a role model for other Asian players, especially young players. Moeen Ali also reflects upon being 'inspirational' in his documentary 'From Streets To Stardom' (ECB, 2017b) : 'Part of my role as a cricketer is to inspire or make people feel part of who I am, so when they watch me on T.V. they feel very happy and proud that they know me.' Both documentaries have a similar narrative arc: inner-city beginnings, the importance of family, religion and community, and their international successes. Rashid and Moeen are sharing their stories to encourage the next generation of British Asian cricketers, but are they aware that these documentaries are being used to 'sell' consumers a message that they should bank with NatWest?

Without pre-existing knowledge of NatWest's intentions for the CHNB campaign, the

selected players are perhaps unwittingly sharing their experiences for commercial gain. Clearly, this raises questions about not only how images and signs are used in the campaign but also how cricketers' lived experiences are utilised for this purpose; who is selected, how their story is told and how this relates to the viewer is not discussed. Although athletes have long been used for their 'celebrity' for philanthropic causes (Szto, 2013), the role and knowledge of cricketers to advertise NatWest, the rewards and/or contractual obligations, are not clear in the campaign.

This issue of consent is especially important in the documentaries that address sensitive themes. Kate Cross openly discusses her anxiety and taking time away from the game to manage her mental health. Both Katherine Brunt and Si Ledwith talk about their experiences of being bullied at school and Alex Hartley explains how she overcame 'boundaries' to play cricket and had to show resilience through her career. The documentaries have a different tone from the CHNB adverts and *Guardian* written articles. While NatWest had complete editorial control over the adverts and articles, this documentary series was created in partnership with the ECB, and this is evident in the nuanced content. As acknowledged earlier, cricket is still portrayed as an overtly positive influence, but it is the players' wider experiences that take precedence. Whereas the adverts and articles rely upon an uncritical, sentimental image of cricket, the documentaries engage with adversity and recognise that diversity and inclusion do not always go hand-in-hand.

Discussion

As established in our analysis, the CHNB campaign continually suggests that cricket is inclusive and accessible for all by reproducing the message that there are no boundaries

to playing cricket. Through the campaign, viewers are sold an illusion of a shared love of cricket, a commitment to inclusion and diversity and an 'image' of NatWest as a caring inclusive bank. NatWest's version of cricket is hyperreal; it becomes 'realer than real'. In contrast to this image, it appears that playing cricket does have boundaries. In a recent strategy document, *Inspiring Generations 2020-2024*, the ECB themselves outline how, 'we (the ECB) must do more to encourage a broader cross-section of people to engage with cricket and make it more accessible for those who already do' (ECB, 2019c: 9). To achieve these goals, the ECB establish six priorities: grow and nurture the core; inspire through elite teams; make cricket accessible; engage children and young people; transform women's and girl's cricket; and support our communities. The strategy also discusses investment in the game and claims that there will be £450 million of direct funding over the next five years. These figures highlight the amount of money invested by the ECB, as well as emphasising where the money is going to be spent.

While outlining ambition for the growth of the game, there is also a recognition that the number of people playing cricket is declining. This is further evidenced in other data which captures UK participation figures. Sport England's Active Lives Survey shows a decline in adults (16+) playing cricket twice a week: in 2016 this number was 364,600 and by 2019 this had declined further to 292,200 (Sport England, 2020a). This data suggests a pattern of decline that counters the idea that cricket has no boundaries, if this intends to mean that everyone can play. Of the 292,220 players, there is a significant gender gap with only 32,100 representing women and girls. While the strategy argues that interest in the women's professional game has grown, the ECB also recognise that more needs to be done, which is reinforced by the statistic that '35% of women say there is no cricket available for them' (ECB, 2019c: 23). For women and

girls, it clear that there several boundaries to playing cricket (see Velija 2015, 2018). However, despite these low participation figures, female cricketers are featured heavily in CHNB with five out of the ten *YouTube* documentaries focusing upon female protagonists. This coverage reflects the ECB's approach to women's cricket with attention focused upon elite players rather than the grassroots or women's involvement in the organisation of the game (Velija, 2019). In the two documentaries that feature female coaches, there is no discussion of the low number of coaches or the lack of female representation at board and governance level (Velija, 2019). Initiatives to merge the women's game with the men's game have not challenged the structural arrangements of recreational and international cricket, which continue to protect and prioritise male interests (Lusted and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017). These documentaries falsely represent the development of the women's game and ignore the broader power relations that continue to impact on gender equity in cricket.

The representation of BAME participants in CHNB is also significant. In contrast to the campaign's idealism, Sport England's (2020b) *Sport for All: Why Ethnicity and Culture Matter in Sport and Physical Activity* report indicates that black young people are significantly underrepresented in cricket. Yet, the black community is conspicuously absent from recent ECB initiatives, including the Inspiring Generations strategy. This contrasts with the ECB's earlier attempts to improve racial equality through the *Clean Bowl Racism* (1999) strategy and to attract a black audience to the game. Their 1999 World Cup *carnival of cricket* campaign heavily featured black people in the publicity material and used the connotations of carnival to portray ethnic diversity (Crabbe and Wagg, 2005). Currently, there is no national strategy for this demographic with counties having to develop their own initiatives, such as Surrey

County Cricket Club's *African-Caribbean Engagement (ACE)* programme (Brinton, 2020).

In comparison, the South Asian community (particularly men) is a clear target group for the ECB, which is evidenced in the 2018 *Making Cricket a Game for Everyone: Engaging South Asian Communities* report. It is noted that South Asians make up 1/3 of the ECB's recreational playing base with 79% playing once a week – compared to 50% of white British. This 'overrepresentation' continues with 18% of 'cricketing economy' being contributed by fans of South Asian origin (ECB, 2018b: 25). In CHNB, South Asian participants feature heavily, which suggests that the campaign is more interested in reflecting some groups than others. Nonetheless, a renewed focus upon engagement and an increase in exposure does not equate with inclusion; as Ratna et al. (2016: 3) argue, "tokenistic and re-active policies that aim to 'get more Asians into cricket', are not likely to succeed unless the cultural, religious and ethnic heterogeneity of British South Asian communities are understood and translated into policy and practice."

Despite issues of gender inequality (Velija, 2015, 2018), racism (Burdsey, 2011; Fletcher, 2014; Ratna, et al., 2016) and ableism (Powis, 2020), CHNB does not thoroughly engage with the 'boundaries' that many people encounter through cricket. When minorities are represented in the campaign, the stories and images are selected uncritically as 'proof' that cricket can be played anywhere by anyone at any time. In direct contrast to these images, the ECB recognise that the demographic for playing and watching cricket is still dominated by white, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied men. However, the governing body support the images of cricket developed by campaign to represent their sport, promoting *one* version of cricket which just is not true. The mirroring message that NatWest is an inclusive bank that cares about cricket

and diversity is equally hyperreal. Banks are by their very definition not inclusive: customers need money to 'join', they need credit scores to 'borrow' and the more money you have, the more you are rewarded.

The fact that CHNB won an award for encouraging diversity and inclusion is precisely because it successfully creates, through a multidimensional advertising strategy, a hyperreal version of cricket. This reflects a carefully designed and marketed campaign that targets the audience with the continuous message that cricket has no boundaries. In our analysis, this message was most overt in the 'paid for' *Guardian* newspaper content, which was created by the Guardian Labs department. The newspaper make a clear distinction between their 'paid for' and 'supported by' content: 'paid for' is used to describe features which are paid for and controlled by the advertiser rather than the publisher and 'supported by' describes content which is editorially independent and written by the newspaper's journalists (*The Guardian*, 2017). When considering the concept of hyperreality, this distinction is noteworthy. Unlike 'supported by' content, which is written to exacting journalistic standards, 'paid for' content is subject to regulation by the UK Advertising Standards Authority thus blurring the line between journalism and advertising. While it is made clear that each article is paid for by NatWest, the audience is not explicitly told about the degree of advertiser's influence upon the content. Significantly, the *Guardian* online platform also gives the impression of a legitimate mainstream news source; 'paid for' content is at odds with this assumption. By selecting stories that support CHNB and not reporting on content which would challenge or contradict this message, the campaign's mediated image of cricket is both reproduced and given legitimacy. It reinforces certain signs and discourses at the expense of the 'real'. People buy the message because of the desire for social meaning

(Szto, 2013); those watching who play cricket want to believe and reproduce the idea that cricket is accessible to all if they ‘choose’ to play.

We also argue that CHNB can also be considered a non-event. As discussed in our theoretical framework, Baudrillard uses this term to describe something that does not live up to its projected media definition. It emphasises how there are no shared events or collective experiences; instead there are only mass mediated events, where the media prescribe a meaning to the point in which the ‘real’ event implodes. The term ‘cricket has no boundaries’ consistently appears across all mediated content, but what does it mean? It cannot mean that everyone has the opportunity to be involved. Or that cricket (and cricketers) welcomes diversity. While it could intend to ‘mean’ all these things, in the end what it means is falsely created. Throughout all the mediated platform, the term becomes both all-encompassing – a catchy phrase, a glossy image, some emotive stories – yet at the same time, because it is a hyperreal image of cricket created by mediated versions of itself, it is meaningless. CHNB is a copy of a copy. The hyperreal image portrayed by the campaign’s signs, discourses and images are a non-event precisely because, other than awards and more customers, there is no legacy or shared inclusive experience, what the campaign promises cannot be delivered.

Conclusion

In this article, our critical analysis of NatWest’s CHNB campaign has produced a number of significant insights that can be applied to the analysis of similar campaigns internationally. Using Baudrillard’s concepts of the hyperreal and the non-event, we have demonstrated how this campaign’s award-winning, multi-platform approach has produced a hyperreal vision of English cricket as inclusive and diverse. In direct

contrast to the messages of CHNB, we have also established that there are a multitude of boundaries to participating in cricket, but these are glossed over by the campaign in favour of mediated signs and images which support the notion that cricket has no boundaries. Significantly, the hyperreality of cricket having no boundaries cannot be separated from hyperreal image of NatWest as “a modern, proactive bank” (M&C Saatchi, 2020). Post-banking crash, NatWest has recreated itself as a bank that cares about inclusivity and diversity, and English cricket is the platform to demonstrate this commitment to their customers. NatWest are not passive beneficiaries though. The KPIs associated with CHNB show how they use this platform to advertise their brand with the aim of increasing their customer base and reinforcing their brand message, ‘We Are What We Do’. Yet, this example of CSR is different from previous sporting examples; the relationship between NatWest and the game is complicated. It is not a simple CSR model or an advertising/sponsorship campaign, rather it is a multi-million pound campaign that promotes idealistic messages about modern cricket. The complexity of this form of CSR was most evident in our analysis of the ‘paid-for’ *Guardian* articles. Although the reader is made aware that the articles are funded by NatWest, its association with a well-respected, left leaning newspaper is misleading and blurs the boundaries between trustworthy journalism and funded advertising. As discussed throughout this article, the meaning of CHNB implodes to mean, at the same time, everything and nothing.

What are the implications of this analysis cricket in the long twenty-first century? At the heart of CHNB are contradictory messages: it wants cricket to represent traditional and contemporary values; it celebrates inclusion and diversity in a sport that is dominated by white, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied men; it reinforces an

outdated and inaccurate image of cricket as a genteel force for civility and England as a country of big hearts that defend the underdog, while overlooking the real ‘boundaries’ in English cricket. This ideological tension between tradition and modernity perfectly reflects the milieu of the global game. It is evident from the campaign that cricket has value in our neoliberal society, however the precise value is largely determined by the highest bidder. For the right price, the ECB are willing to let cricket be whatever the advertiser wants it to be – even if this hyperreal vision directly contradicts its own admission that cricket needs to attract a broader-cross section of participants.

These criticisms of cricket administrators could also be applied to sociologists; there is a need to offer greater critical analysis of CSR in twenty-first century sport more broadly. By utilising the concepts of the hyperreal and non-event, mediated narratives about sport can be critiqued and deconstructed. Beyond these glossy campaigns, we should consider who benefits from CSR and examine how marketing and advertising remain power-ridden practices. Also, the ethics of such campaigns need to be interrogated. Both those taking part and consumers have been misled, but there is no accountability. Who is responsible? The governing body, the corporation or the advertiser? As more corporations and sponsors shape how cricket (and other sports) in the twenty-first century are imagined, played and consumed, this critical lens is of vital importance.

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