



IPL THE MOST VALUABLE FRANCHISE BRAND BUILDING GAME, BRANDING CRICKET – THE IPL WAY

Dr. Joe Lopez* **Prof. Maheshkumar Shankar Kedar****

**Head of Department, Matrix School of Management Studies Research supervisor.*

***Research Student SIOM Research Center, Wadgaon, Pune & Assistant Professor, Siddhant Institute of Business Management.*

Abstract

121 Cr. of Indian Population thrillingly waiting the gentleman game “cricket”. India has undergone a drastic change in last decade. The new format in the world of cricket i.e. 20-20 / T 20 has brought extensive changes in the game bringing in the constituent of provincial teams with a provision for international players bringing in the constituent of globalization in cricket. The provincial teams have emerged as distinct brands using the various elements of branding i.e. specially sensory one and giving each team a distinct identity, ownership, promoting it a unique manner. This is a useful analogy as only a small proportion of an iceberg is visible above the surface. IPLs from 2008 to 2015, the franchises appear to have comprehended the gamut of the auction business and appear to have made smart bids, with a few exceptions. This paper attempts to explore the many creeds of franchising brand building and branding cricket in the Indian Premier League teams.

Keywords: Branding, IPL, Brand Experience, provincial Teams, Promotion.

INTRODUCTION

Sport is a significant sector in economic, social, and management terms. Globally, the market alone is estimated to be around \$ 12billion per annum (Ozanian2005) The Indian Premier League (IPL) is a professional Twenty20 league cricket competition in India, initiated by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). It began in 2008 and is controlled by the IPL Governing Body. Today, IPL is the second highest paying league in the world, next only to NBA. USD 3.84 million is the average per annum salary of a player in the IPL. The IPL has successfully combined sports and entertainment and created a new niche market segment called sport entertainment. Today, IPL occupies the top spot in the advertising strategies of all companies across the spectrum. Large corporate houses like Reliance Industries Ltd, United Breweries and India Cements have floated their own teams.

Brand IPL

Branding is considered to be one of the most important assets of any institution. Corporate brand management plays a critical role in forming positive attitudes towards the institution (Bickerton, 2000). Therefore, in conveying the corporate brand values it is important to develop a framework for consistent communication that ensures the continuity of the brand The Indian Premier League (IPL) a cricket spotting event in its fifth season has become a mega brand write from its inception with its picture perfect start with an absolute mix of content, stars, players national & International making it global and a fabulous marketing. The other major factor is the advertisement expenditure associated with the game that is made on the brand. Reach of IPL over the years is again phenomenal. On average, each IPL team spends between \$1 million and \$1.5 million on promotions and brand building. There are three kinds of brand connect in IPL. One is on air, which is depending on the viewership per se. Second one is on-ground sponsorship and the third is sponsorship for the teams

Brand Benefits

Brand benefits are the ‘personal values consumers attach to the product attributes’ (Keller 1993, p. 4), and manifest as functional, symbolic and experiential benefits (Park et al. 1986). Functional benefits focus on the function of the product, symbolic benefits that relate to self enhancement and experiential benefits refer to emotional responses (Gladden & Funk 2002; Park et al. 1986). Sport consumers supporting their favourite sport celebrity typically seek to meet their symbolic and experiential needs rather than their functional needs, because sports spectatorship is not related to consumption-related needs (Bauer et al 2008). Prior research shows that symbolic and experiential benefits lead the sport consumer to experience positive affective attitudes (Funk & James 2001)

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study how the new format of cricket has been branded IPL 20:20.
- To study the Brand Experience frame work of IPL.
- To study the promotions associated with sub brands of IPL.
- To study franchise brand building in cricket game.



Understanding brand value in IPL

Great sporting brands across the world have been built over several decades of fan following, successful performances, the ability of a team to attract great talent, and continued association from large companies, partners and sponsors. Teams like the New York Yankees, Dallas Cowboys, Manchester United, Chelsea, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Los Angeles Lakers and the like have become highly sought after brands by advertisers and represent brand values in the billions of dollars range. In the IPL, brand value is derived from a wider variety of reasons keeping in mind the Indian viewer's vernacular proclivities, cricketing knowledge and celebrity influence. Accordingly, drivers of brand value in the IPL can be categorised under the following broad heads.

Management Strength and On-Field Performance

For an advertiser / sponsor, being associated with a team that is consistently performing at the top of the table is a key factor in assessing brand potential. A look at the largest deals in the sponsorship space not only in the IPL, but also internationally will reveal that teams that are better on-field performers garner higher sponsorship values relative to other teams in their leagues. In the IPL, the estimated lead sponsorships (lead chest and limited player promotions) were valued at a 100% premium for a top ranked team over its lower-rung peer. Of course, a team that consistently performs at the top of the table is not the result of a pre-fixed formula. Team management plays an important role in squad selection, talent acquisition, performance management and administrative support. Clearly, a winning team is the result of a winning combination of several factors including the strength of the management team.

Marketing Strategy

Based on our analysis, it is estimated that on average, franchises spend anywhere between 15% and 25% of their revenues towards marketing and promotion. Some teams, like Kolkata Knight Riders, who invested significantly towards brand building in the early part of their IPL existence, have seen fantastic support from sponsors and partners despite being lower down on the performance ranking.

IPL events, television advertisements, merchandising, in-stadium freebies and other such promotional activities driven by the franchise go a long way in garnering exposure and support translating into brand gains. It goes without saying that an active social media presence is critical in keeping fans engaged outside of the IPL season.

Merchandising in the IPL is presently in a nascent stage and most franchises are still coming to terms with the best possible way to monetize different streams. We believe that merchandising will be a game-changer for franchises that are able to crack this difficult market and identify new monetization streams by tapping into their existing fan base. We discuss the potential of IPL merchandising in greater detail as part of this report.

Celebrity Influence and Marquee Players

The presence of key marquee players and celebrity owners in a franchise garners additional popularity to the individual team brands. However, it may be added that cricket is a team game and no one person can change the fortunes of a badly performing franchise. In addition, while franchise brands may be able to ride on the brand equity of a celebrity owner or a marquee player, they are also open to the risk of damage in cases where the said individual is embroiled in a controversy outside of the IPL.

Geographical Location

The geographical location of the franchise determines the population of its support base and is an important factor in assessing the strength of an individual team brand. In general, it is likely that a higher density of teams in a particular region of the country will split the fan base and impact the ability of a team to garner support outside of its immediate location. While the intention of the IPL was never to split support on the basis of vernacular lines, this does seem to be the current situation with every team in the current season belonging to a different state of the country. While this makes support for each team more intense, it remains to be seen how this support would be impacted once more franchises are added to the current format.

THE IPL BRAND EXPERIENCE

IPL is all about experiencing the mega brand. One of the rising areas of branding and services marketing is experiential marketing. Brand or service experiences are those that engage customers in memorable ways and coordinate the marketing offer to "perform" a marketing experience. Instead of something being marketed "at" or "to" its target customer, experiential marketing aims to involve the customer in the experience by studying the "touch points," the times and places in which the customer comes into contact with the brand and looking at ways in which the brand can interact and create engagement with



its customers The concept of brand experiences was proposed in 1999 by Pine and Gilmore, who argue that experiential offerings have grown more rapidly than have either commodities, products or services over a comparable period of time. Customers are also viewed as being active participants in the consumption of the brand, rather than passive recipients of information about the brand. The framework of Pine and Gilmore is made up of two dimensions on which brand experiences can vary.

These are: **Passive to active:** Does the customer interact with the brand or experience or sit back and receive information about it?.

Sensory intensity: The customer may experience the service close up (immersion) or at a greater distance (absorption). The richness of the experience, then, is a function of building in all four of the dimensions. Pine and Gilmore refer to a “sweet spot” which lies at the center of the four realms of experience. This does not mean that every experience should be between each of the dimensions, but that the overall experience might offer a balance of all of the four realms to achieve maximum effect.

The IPL brand has all the four realms of experience i.e. **Entertainment** The IPL has successfully combined sports and entertainment and created a new niche market segment called sport entertainment where the team owners are celebrities and Bollywood actors & actresses complementing and completing the entertainment realm a perfect mix of game & glamour, celeb cricket league. From the initial promos to after match parties – everything they did shined out as a new piece, a page 3 article and even breaking news. **Aesthetic.** The cricket fan i.e. customer is immersed and experience closer and more intense stimulation of the senses than in pure cricket with vibrant colours of team apparel, entertainment, major merchandising of each team but is still passive rather than active. **Education & LEARNING** The customer actively participates in this process by acquiring or increasing skills and knowledge The international partnership with Google-YouTube was a game changer when it comes to Broadcasting. After the introduction of 3G technology in India, New media rights such as live streaming on mobiles, mobile Internet, mobile scorecards and smart phone applications have exploded the education and learning.

Escapist. The customer is immersed in the experience and actively participates in the experience. Cricket and IPL is today a vehicle to escape for the consumer, to escape from his mundane life with its usual problems. Cricket-escapism. Thus it is an experience and a sensory pleasure treasured by the cricket fan and has various elements of Pine and Gilmore’s brand experience framework elements judiciously integrated in it.

The IPL franchise and their teams have become distinct brands each having its own celebrity ownership, brand spends, Sponsors and Partners, Licensee Sponsors and Partners, International players. Websites, fan zone, club, blog spot. Team apparel, accessories cheer leaders and their attire and other paraphernalia associated with teams making it complete brand by itself.

PROMOTIONS

The IPL franchises also spend a lot on their branding and marketing plans. Chennai Super Kings has launched a new participative cheer video titled in Tamil ‘Chennai Super Kings ku Raise Your Hands’. The concept of the ‘Mexican wave’ has been used in the video, with fans forming a city-long Mexican wave in Chennai. The aim was to build a fan base for the team and enhance fan participation. Along with merchandising, promotions through contests in print, online and radio have also been undertaken by CSK. Kolkata Knight Riders launched its new marketing campaign called ‘New Dawn New Knights’. KKR’s new and refreshed logo mirrors the major changes in the team. As part of its marketing campaign, KKR has tied up with cell phone maker Nokia to launch a new campaign, which revolves around Nokia making applications and content available to its smartphone users. KKR has also hired 22feet, a Bangalore-based digital agency to manage its social media activity and it has even integrated blogs and gallery in its portal KKR. Kings XI Punjab also has released a new logo. Besides, the franchise has tied up with Indraprastha All India Sports Foundation to launch India’s first ever cricket based reality show ‘Cricket Champs’ on UTV Bindass. The show provides a platform for budding young cricketers to showcase their talent in front of millions of television viewers. The Mumbai Indians is the most followed team in the IPL and boasts of a fan page with the largest number of fans (25, 71,722) among the IPL teams. The Mumbai Indians marketing campaign is called ‘Players become Friends’ and is aimed at increasing the interaction between the players and the fans. MI players post their personalized videos on Facebook for all the fans to watch and enjoy. In the videos, players address the fans by their names to make it a dialogue between the players and fans. Like the various festivals of India be it Diwali or Pongal, In IPL season also many companies have come up with offers, some regular and unrelated ones and some innovative ones that really connects to the IPL brand. IPL season has now become a major event. This clearly demonstrates the power of IPL Branding.



MERCHANDISING

IPL related merchandising itself is a huge industry. There are two types of merchandising, one IPL level and team level. One of the IPL level merchandising was Swiss watch brand Banelier which launched its IPL collection. When it comes to team level merchandising, major merchandising includes Backpack, Bags, Bandana, Banner, Bat, Bottle Chiller, Bracelet, Cap, Flag, Gym Bags, Horns, Keychain, Key rings Magnet, Mug, Playing Cards, Slide, Sport Bottle, T-Shirt, Trumpet, Wallet, Water bottles and Wrist Band. One can search all these products by based on Teams, colours, Brands, price range and category (Men, Women and Kid) Mumbai Indians had almost 31 different pieces of merchandise. Chennai Super Kings (CSK) came up with T-shirts bearing Captain M.S. Dhoni's name and his number seven team number. CSK had 28 branded items. Rajasthan Royals launched special turbans for their fans.

BUSINESS PROPOSITION

All along the franchises have made no secret of the fact that IPL is a business proposition with its revenue model offering opportunities to make it profitable over a period of time. In a nutshell, the name of the game for the franchises is intense brand-building followed by good performance in the league. So, it's with this ultimate objective of brand-building that the franchises approached the auction. With a consolidated salary cap of \$9 million for each of the 2011 to 2015 seasons.

SUMMARY

IPL has come a long way and has emerged as one of the top sports brands in the world. The very essence of the game of Cricket is glorified as an experience in mega brand IPL and has hybrid mix of Cricket and Bollywood fulfilling the compete equation in terms of sport, celebrity and entertainment. Way ahead of men in white as in pure cricket. Within the corporate brand IPL are the sub brands i.e. provincial teams as sub brands each using the various tenets of branding to the hilt. With a distinct logo, promotional merchandise, colourful cheerleaders, a riot of colours, promotional videos and songs making it a carnival of a sport. A new way of experiencing cricket with a provincial, national and international flavour.

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