

The dissertation proposal

On

“An impact of sports sponsorship on brand image: an analysis of sponsorship strategies in Indian premier league (IPL)”

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

Sports sponsorship has become one of the most powerful tools for marketing communication, enabling brands to connect with audiences through shared emotions and loyalty toward teams and players. In India, cricket holds a unique cultural and commercial position, and the Indian Premier League (IPL) has transformed the sport into a global business platform. Since its launch in 2008, the IPL has evolved into a multi-billion-dollar ecosystem that blends sport, entertainment, and digital engagement (Subramanian, 2015; Sinha et al., 2022). Industry analysts estimate the league's total brand value at over INR 92,500 crore, with continuous growth in sponsorship investment and media rights (Kroll, 2019; D&P Advisory, 2023; KPMG, 2024). This rapid commercialisation makes the IPL an ideal environment to study the relationship between sponsorship strategies and brand image.

The competitive and media-driven nature of the IPL has led companies to experiment with varied sponsorship approaches, including title sponsorships, team partnerships, jersey branding, and digital activations (Singh et al., 2018; Blakey et al., 2011). For instance, brands such as Tata, Dream11, and Jio have used IPL sponsorship to enhance brand recall, connect emotionally with audiences, and position themselves as innovative and youth-oriented (Mazumdar, 2024; Afaqs, 2024). These sponsorships not only provide visibility but also aim to build emotional associations that improve consumer perception and long-term brand equity (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Cornwell & Kwon, 2021).

However, despite the growing investment in sports sponsorship, questions remain about how effectively these strategies influence brand image. Some brands gain strong consumer affinity, while others fail to translate visibility into positive perception or loyalty. Therefore, understanding which sponsorship practices work best in a dynamic and entertainment-focused environment like the IPL is an important question for both scholars and marketing practitioners (Donlan, 2014; Kamath et al., 2020).

1.2 Research Aim and Question

The main aim of this study is to examine how sports sponsorship in the IPL influences brand image and to analyse the effectiveness of sponsorship strategies used by major IPL sponsors. The research will focus on both brand-driven strategies and consumer perception to gain a balanced understanding of sponsorship effectiveness.

Objectives:

1. To evaluate the role of sports sponsorship in shaping brand image within the IPL context.
2. To analyse sponsorship strategies adopted by leading IPL sponsors.

Research Question:

1. How does sports sponsorship influence brand image in the Indian Premier League (IPL)?

2. literature review

2.1 Understanding Sports Sponsorship and Brand Image

Sports sponsorship has become a widely used marketing strategy that helps brands communicate their values and personality through emotional and cultural connections with audiences. According to Gwinner and Eaton (1999), sponsorship allows companies to transfer the positive image of a sports team or event to their own brand, a process known as image transfer. This helps in building trust, awareness, and brand equity among consumers. Similarly, Cornwell and Kwon (2021) explain that sponsorship goes beyond logo exposure; it involves emotional engagement, storytelling, and creating shared experiences between the brand and its audience.

In the context of the Indian Premier League (IPL), sponsorship has become an essential tool for brands aiming to reach diverse consumer segments. The IPL's large fan base and entertainment-driven structure offer opportunities for sponsors to create strong brand associations through celebrity endorsement, fan engagement campaigns, and digital media. Singh et al. (2018) and Biscaia et al. (2013) highlight that when fans feel emotionally connected to a team, they are more likely to develop positive feelings toward its sponsors. This emotional link can enhance the sponsor's credibility and influence consumer purchase intentions.

However, sponsorship effectiveness depends on several factors such as brand–team fit, sponsorship activation, and fan involvement. Kamath et al. (2020) found that when a sponsor's image aligns well with the team's values, it results in stronger brand recall and favourability. Similarly, Lee et al. (2019) noted that fan loyalty and identification significantly strengthen the impact of sponsorship on consumer attitudes. These studies suggest that effective sponsorship requires not only financial investment but also a strategic understanding of consumer emotions and cultural context.

2.2 Sponsorship in the Indian Premier League (IPL)

The IPL represents a unique blend of sport, entertainment, and business, creating a competitive environment for brand promotion. According to Subramanian (2015), the IPL revolutionised sports marketing in India by merging cricket with entertainment and digital engagement. The league's structure—featuring franchises, celebrity ownership, and star players—has attracted both Indian and global brands eager to connect with the league's massive fan base. Reports by Kroll (2019) and D&P Advisory (2023) show that the IPL ecosystem is valued at more than INR 92,500 crore, with sponsorship and media rights being major revenue drivers.

Brands such as Tata, Dream11, Jio, and Swiggy have used IPL sponsorships to enhance visibility and brand loyalty (Mazumdar, 2024; Afaqs, 2024). These companies use a mix of traditional and digital marketing tactics, including social media campaigns, influencer collaborations, and cause-related promotions. Melovic et al. (2019) argue that such activations help transform sponsorship from simple advertising into relationship marketing, where emotional engagement plays a key role.

Despite its success, the IPL sponsorship model also faces challenges. High costs, audience fragmentation, and competition for attention mean that not all sponsorships deliver strong brand outcomes. Donlan (2014) and Rai et al. (2022) found that some brands gain visibility without meaningful improvement in consumer perception, showing that sponsorship effectiveness depends heavily on message clarity and activation strategy. This issue becomes more complex in digital environments, where engagement is fast and short-lived.

2.3 Identified Research Gap

While there is substantial research on sports sponsorship and its impact on brand equity, most studies have focused on Western sports such as football, basketball, or the Olympics (Kunkel et al., 2020; Trail et al., 2024). The Indian Premier League, although commercially powerful, remains underexplored from an academic perspective. Sinha et al. (2022) and Trivedi (2020) highlight that little empirical research exists on how sponsorship influences consumer perceptions in India's entertainment-driven sports environment.

Moreover, recent changes in digital marketing—such as the use of social media and influencer campaigns—have altered how brands communicate sponsorship messages. Yet, these new forms of digital activation are still not fully examined in IPL studies (Kunkel et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a need for updated research that combines traditional sponsorship theory with insights from modern fan engagement and digital branding.

This dissertation aims to address this gap by analysing how sponsorship strategies in the IPL influence brand image using secondary data from reliable business and academic sources. The study will help clarify which sponsorship elements—such as team fit, emotional connection, or digital engagement—have the strongest impact on how consumers perceive a brand.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study will adopt a qualitative secondary data approach. The focus is to analyse how sports sponsorship in the Indian Premier League (IPL) influences brand image by examining existing information, rather than collecting new primary data. This approach is suitable because the research explores how and why sponsorship strategies affect brand perception — topics that require interpretation and comparison of existing knowledge rather than statistical testing.

A qualitative method allows the researcher to explore real-world business cases, industry insights, and sponsorship trends from reliable sources. As explained by Saunders et al. (2019), qualitative secondary research is effective when the objective is to interpret patterns, relationships, and meanings within existing data. Since the IPL operates in a well-documented commercial environment, secondary sources such as market reports, brand valuations, and previous academic studies provide rich and credible material for analysis.

This study will rely entirely on secondary data drawn from both academic and business sources. The key academic materials include journal articles, books, and conference papers focused on sports marketing, sponsorship, and brand image. In addition, industry reports and publications will be used to provide up-to-date insights on IPL sponsorship trends. Academic sources like research related to brand image and consumer perception, Research from journals such as *Journal of Sport Management*, *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, and other peer-reviewed studies (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013; Cornwell & Kwon, 2021; Singh et al., 2018). Industry and business reports such as Kroll IPL Brand Valuation Reports (2019–2024), Deloitte and KPMG sports industry outlooks, GroupM ESP sponsorship reviews, PwC Sports Business reports, and market analyses from Afaqs (2024) and The Hindu Business Line (2024) and I can use credible media reports of sports journalists.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process involves identifying, reviewing, and synthesising secondary materials relevant to IPL sponsorship and brand image. Each source will be evaluated for its reliability, relevance, and credibility. The focus will be on extracting

themes and insights related to sponsorship effectiveness, brand–team fit, emotional engagement, and digital activation strategies.

A thematic analysis approach will be applied to interpret the data. This involves grouping findings under key themes, such as sponsorship strategy, consumer perception, digital engagement, and brand image outcomes. The aim is to identify recurring patterns and differences across cases. For example, comparing how Tata and Dream11 use sponsorship to enhance brand visibility and emotional appeal will help understand which strategies are most effective. This interpretive process allows for deeper insights into how sponsorship influences brand image in the IPL, without requiring primary data collection. It also enables integration of academic theory with real-world business practices, bridging the gap between conceptual understanding and practical application (Yin, 2018).

4. Expected Findings

It is expected that the research will find a positive link between IPL sponsorship and brand image. Since the IPL is one of the biggest sporting events in India with a massive audience, brands that sponsor teams, tournaments, or categories are likely to gain high visibility and recognition. The findings will probably show that sponsorship helps brands appear more trustworthy and credible, as being associated with such a large and respected sports event increases prestige. For example, brands like Tata, Dream11, and Jio have strengthened their public presence through repeated IPL sponsorships, and it is expected that similar patterns will be seen in other companies.

Another expected outcome is that IPL sponsorship improves consumer engagement through social media and advertising. Many brands run campaigns during the IPL season, and the research will likely show that these campaigns help increase customer interest and excitement. It is also expected that brands benefit from fan loyalty, where audiences support the companies that support their favourite teams. In addition, findings may indicate that sponsorship helps new or growing brands enter the market faster, as the IPL provides a large platform to reach people across different regions.

However, the study also expects to find that the impact of sponsorship may vary depending on how well the brand uses the opportunity. Some brands might benefit more than others due to stronger marketing strategies or better customer connection. The findings may also suggest that sponsorship alone is not enough and needs to be supported by good advertising, customer engagement, and product quality. Overall, the expected outcome is that IPL sponsorship contributes positively to brand image and market perception, but the strength of the impact depends on how effectively brands use the sponsorship.

5. Limitations

This research will be based only on secondary data, which means the study depends on information already published by organisations, media, and researchers. Because of this, the findings may be limited by what data is currently available and how accurate it is. The study will not include primary data such as surveys or interviews, so it cannot directly measure customers' real-time opinions or personal experiences regarding IPL-sponsored brands. This limits the ability to gather fresh insights from consumers.

Another limitation is that most available information focuses on big brands like Tata, Dream11, or Jio. Smaller brands that sponsor the IPL may not have the same level of data available, which could restrict how comprehensive the analysis is. In addition, media articles and commercial reports might sometimes be biased toward promoting brands, so the research will rely on multiple sources to reduce this risk, but some level of bias may still exist.

The study is also limited to the IPL context, which means the conclusions may not apply to other sports leagues or markets outside India. Since the IPL audience is unique and highly cricket-focused, sponsorship effects in this case might be different from other events. Time constraints also act as a limitation, as the research timeline may not allow for deeper investigation into long-term effects. Despite these limitations, the research still aims to provide valuable insight by analysing credible information from multiple sources and identifying clear patterns related to sports sponsorship and brand image.

6. Timeframe

The dissertation will be completed over a 12-week period. Key stages and timelines are shown below:

Task / Activity	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7	week 8	week 9	week 10	week 11	week 12
Planning & Topic Finalisation												
Literature Review												
Data Collection												
Data Analysis												
Writing Findings & Discussion												
Final Editing & Submission Preparation												

7. Conclusion

This proposal has outlined the plan for studying how sports sponsorship in the Indian Premier League (IPL) influences brand image, with a focus on major sponsors. The study aims to understand how companies use sponsorship to build stronger brand awareness, trust, and customer perception. The research will use secondary data and a qualitative case-study approach, which is suitable for analysing real sponsorship examples and brand performance indicators.

The expected outcome of the study is to identify key sponsorship strategies that help brands improve their image and gain customer attention. This research is relevant for both academics and business professionals, especially as sports sponsorship continues to grow in India and has become a major marketing tool. Although the project will face limitations such as restricted primary data and time constraints, careful planning and credible secondary sources will help ensure reliable results.

Overall, this research will provide useful insights into how IPL sponsorship supports brand image and what strategies may help companies achieve the most value from their sponsorship investments.

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