

The impact of brand perception resulting from the sponsorship activities of new sponsors during the 16th season of the Indian Premier League

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Abstract

In an attempt to position brands as dominant, powerful and superior to their competitors, Sports sponsorship has become a common phenomenon in today's marketing landscape. Investors always consider sponsorship a valuable commodity because it positively impacts brand sales profitability. Given the increasing interest of numerous newer brands in sports sponsorship within the Indian Premier League (IPL). This research paper focuses on unveiling the aftermath and reverberations experienced by newly sponsored brands during the 16th season of IPL. Specifically, the impact of sponsorship activities on their brand Image has been explored, scrutinizing which sponsorship categories the audience finds more appealing. Furthermore, it also investigates the audience's perception of sponsors in the case of their favourite team underperforming. Employing a quantitative research method, data was collected through a survey questionnaire from 401 respondents aged 18-35 years old who watched the 16th IPL, primarily from Bhopal and Sagar in Madhya Pradesh. The results suggest the influence of brands sponsored for the first time in IPL on audience perceptions, attitudes and opinions.

Keywords: Sponsorship, Sports sponsorship, Indian Premier League, Brand Perception

• **Introduction**

Sports sponsorship has grown tremendously in the past few years. Being cost-effective, companies are using it as a tool to enhance their brand image, goodwill and visibility. Since there is a mass audience viewing these events, it has the potential to reach new audiences who either have yet to be exposed to the brand message or have yet to experience the product. Through sports sponsorship, brands can benefit by creating new markets, growing their customer base and boosting sales. Moreover, Sports sponsorship offers a variety of advantages for brands, enabling them to enhance their image, shape the audience's attitude, develop a positive image, influence audience opinion etc.

2.0 Statement of Problem

When companies invest in sports sponsorship, it may not be effective for a few segments of the audience as some viewers are so engrossed in the sport that they need to pay attention to the signage or sponsors during the sports events. This doesn't make it possible to effectively impact such an audience because their prime focus is on the game, and they do not take any chances to be distracted.

Sponsorship activities by newer brands during the 16th IPL have significantly grown. Thus, it is crucial to gain insight into whether these new sponsors enjoyed any benefits on their brand perception and which type of sponsorship vouches to attract the audience's attention most so that marketers are mindful about investing in this promotional tool for enhancing their brand positioning.

2.1 Research Gap

New brands sponsoring during the Indian Premier League and its impact on brand perception is a relatively new arena of study that is quite underexplored. Indian audiences are emotional about cricket while heavily engrossed during the IPL match. What type of sponsorship attracts them the most to foster a positive brand association must also be investigated.

2.2 Research Questions

- 1 Does the audience casually notice the sponsors during the IPL match, or does it create a desire in them to take some action or motivate them to buy that product?
- 2 Does sports sponsorship of new brands that sponsor during the IPL elevate their brand perception?
- 3 Which type of sponsorship activity vouches for capturing the attention of the audience?
- 4 When a team underperforms during an IPL match, does it negatively impact the audience's perception of the team sponsor?

2.3 Research Objectives

This study is designed to satisfy three primary objectives outlined below:

- ❖ To investigate the impact of sports sponsorship of new brands on brand perception during the 16th IPL;
- ❖ To analyse which type of sponsorship activity the audience finds more captivating during the 16th IPL. (Such as on-field signage and banners, sponsorship

announcements by commentators, brand logos on jerseys of players, product placement during the telecast of IPL match, title sponsor etc.);

- ❖ To examine the audience's opinion about a team sponsor if the team underperformed in the 16th IPL.

3.0 Literature Review

According to Cornwell, “Sponsorship is investing in causes or events to support overall corporate and/or marketing objectives” (Cornwell, 1995). Sponsorship is an independent marketing communication activity that promotes the interest of a brand or company and strives to enhance the brand perception by resonating them with a closely related event (Erdogan, Kitchen 1998).

Sports sponsorship fosters a dynamic relationship between the consumers and the brand. Thus, it has become an extremely pivotal and critical area of brand marketing (Santomier, 2008). Sports sponsorship elevates the sponsor's brand image and is vital for communicating with audiences at sports events to foster brand awareness and recall. (Henseler et. al. 2007).

The size of the sponsor signage plays an important role in attracting the audience. Generally, a large size is considered to maintain the audience's interest. Repeated sponsors have more recall and recognition than new sponsors because they have experience (Reiser et al., 2012). It is only sometimes possible to assess impact because viewers are so engrossed in the sport that they sometimes need to pay attention to the signage (Breuer & Rumpf 2012).

The objectives behind sponsorship are direct - the sponsor expects a spontaneous behavioral change in its existing and potential customers. Indirect objective- for increasing the brand visibility and enhancing brand image. Team sponsorship as a marketing tool is important because it allows a brand to directly communicate its message to the audience without confusion (Abiodun, 2011).

It has been found that people interested in a particular sport already have high brand recall value. There would be a positive effect on a fan's attitude if he perceives the benefits more effectively. Moreover, a positive fan attitude has increased brand loyalty and commitment. (Bauer et al., 2008).

IPL remains the most attended cricket league in the world. The team is formed through competitive bidding, including Indian and foreign cricket players. (Yakkundi et. al., 2021).

According to Pope, when a team loses a game, the audience associates this negatively,

and negative information has a greater effect on their perception and attitude. Sponsored products used by team will have favourable impact on consumer mind, if the team wins the match. **(Pope et al., 2009)**.

To measure exposure, counting the number of people attending the event could give a fair idea and calculating the number of times our logo has been given coverage in the newspaper and Television, but media coverage does not ensure brand recall or attitudinal change **(Salo, 2011)**.

When a team loses its popularity because of losing matches due to underperformance, it affects the association that an audience makes with the sponsor and the team; this affects the corporate brand image at large **(Runsbeck & Sjolín, 2011)**.

TV sponsorship is more memorable to viewers than traditional TV advertising. While advertising is direct and persuasive, audiences believe sponsorship indirectly communicates the desired brand message. Thus, they start developing a positive image towards sponsorship **(Sears, 2015)**.

Linking the brand with an event via sponsorship enables companies to reach consumers' interest and attention by associating with the events that are important to them. **(Roy & Cornwell, 2003)**.

The wide popularity of the Indian Premier League resulted in the commercialization of cricket. Cricketers being auctioned, celebrity team owners, 20-20 format were a few features that fascinated the viewers. Thus, marketers saw this as an imperative platform for brand building. **(Naik and Gupta 2012)**.

Before impulsively deciding to sponsor a team in the Indian Premier League, the brand managers must ensure that their brand resonates with the event and the target consumers. As a result, strong psychological bonds are nurtured with their target consumers. **(Gupta, 2013)**. If brands prospect to enhance their competitive advantage and brand image sponsorship alone is needed, live telecast and advertising can be more fruitful **(Mehdi, 2021)**.

Every audience perceives the sponsorship differently, depending on their involvement level in the event. Image transfer takes place with the audiences who are highly engrossed and involved during the event. On the contrary, image transfer only occurs with audiences with a lower level of involvement during the event **(Santos, 2016)**.

According to Kamath et al., "the attitude towards the team sponsor–purchase intention relationship is not moderated by gender." This implies that the purchasing intention across all

genders is uniform. (Kamath et al., 2020). There is a direct and significant relationship between purchasing intention and sponsorship awareness. Furthermore, purchasing intention has a notable relationship with the corporate image. (Pope & Voges, 2000).

The consumer interpretation of a brand is known as brand image. Marketing activities and consumer interpretation can shape this. (Dawn Dobni and George M. Zinkhan 1990). “Brand image is the brand's tangible and intangible attributes based on the association formed by consumer's mind; the meaning and intensity depends on the user's personality, his attitude towards the brand, social interaction and brand communication” (Isoraite, 2018)

The individual beliefs of consumers. Impressions and ideas of a brand are known as brand image. (Malik et. al., 2012). Lee suggested that brand image is “the sum of a customer’s perceptions about a brand generated by the interaction of the cognitive, affective, and evaluative processes in a customer’s mind” (Lee et al., 2014)

Team attachment to the audience and the sponsor’s image is crucial in driving the intention to purchase from the sponsors. Audiences who follow their favourite team closely are more likely to develop a positive image of the team sponsors (Koronios et al., 2016).

According to Grohs and Wagner, “Selecting those sponsorships for which event-sponsor fit, event involvement, and exposure are high is likely to result in increased sponsor recall.” (Grohs & Wagner, 2004). Audiences who are highly engrossed fans are more prone to be aware of the sponsoring brands during the match. However, the repeated exposure of these sponsors during the match establishes the brand recall of the sponsor. (Biscacia et al., 2013).

The individual matches do not impact the stock returns of sponsors during the Indian Premier League. Perhaps the team's overall performance throughout the entire season of the Indian Premier League does result in a commanding impact on the stock returns of the sponsors. (Sen and Kayal, 2020).

Once a positive link is established between the sponsor and the team influences the sponsor's image favorably and leads to purchasing decisions. (Rai and Singh, 2019).

The relationship between a brand name and the corporate image is significant. Enlarging the corporate image is feasible if the overall product category image and all the brands proliferate. (Pope & Voges, 1999).

The defense mechanism of the audience is low when they interact with sponsorship; on the other hand, it is higher during advertising commercials. (Mason, 2005). When the audiences

are satisfied during the event, it has been found that its impact on the brand equity of the sponsor is positive. Furthermore, brand equity has a noteworthy effect on the purchasing intentions of consumers. (Hsiao et al. 2021).

Attendees involved in the sports event perceive the sponsor positively, enhancing the sponsor's image (Singh & Singh, 2017). Speed and Thompson say that "the response to a sponsorship will be affected by the attitudes consumers hold toward the sponsor, the event, and their perception of sponsor-event fit." (Speed & Thompson, 2000).

The duration of the sponsorship is vital to register in the audience's minds; a repeated sponsorship link is essential (Cornwell et al., 2001). Relatedness and prominence are the two chief factors that significantly impact the recall value of the sponsors. (Gupta & Yousaf, 2015).

It has always been believed that to nurture brand equity; there must be a fit between the sponsor and the event. However, Marketers and brand managers believe differently. According to them, the fit doesn't matter; it can be substituted by investing in sponsorship sizeably (Henseler et al., 2007).

Compared with traditional mass media advertising, sponsorship is an edge because it is efficacious for local community events and brands with lesser budgets (Jalleh et al., 2002).

Numerous competing brands sponsoring leads to clutter, which might potentially decrease the audience's capability to recall the brand's involvement. (Goldman et al., 2022).

4.0 Research Method

This research entails the use of the Quantitative method for the study. A questionnaire survey is employed in this research for primary data collection.

4.1 Sample design:

Purposive sampling, as well as snowball sampling, is employed in this study. A total of 401 samples were selected for the study, of which 251 respondents are from Bhopal and 150 are from Sagar. Respondents are chosen based on specific characteristics, i.e., Youth who watch the IPL matches and reside in Bhopal and Sagar. According to National Youth policy people in the age group of 15-29 years are considered as youth.

4.2 Data collection process:

A survey questionnaire has been used as the data collection tool. The data collection process involved reaching out to students studying in coaching centres, universities and alums of various universities in Bhopal and Sagar. The respondents were asked to refer someone they

knew who fit into the criteria and who might participate in the survey. Six brands sponsored for the first time in IPL were identified randomly from the title and official sponsors. The Survey was conducted 2 weeks later, after the final match of IPL, to check if the audience could recall the sponsors.

5.0 Data analysis

The data collected from surveys is analysed using quantitative data analysis techniques through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A reliability test has been undergone to ensure the data collected is accurate and relevant. Correlation analysis has been done to understand the potential relationship between the variables.

A reliability test was conducted to determine the accuracy and consistency of the data. The value of Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 is considered to be acceptable. Our results fall in this range; the Cronbach alpha value is 0.756, indicating that the data used for the analysis is reliable (Table 1).

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.756	27

		Did you watch the 16th Indian Premier League?	What was the impact of sponsorship on your perception of the brand?
Did you watch the 16th Indian Premier League?	Pearson Correlation	1	.189**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	401	401
What was the impact of sponsorship on your perception of the brand?	Pearson Correlation	.189**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	401	401
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The correlation analysis explored the relationship between audiences who watched the 16th IPL and their perception of the sponsoring brands. The calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.189; this indicates a positive correlation between the variables. However, 0.189 is

a little weak association, which indicates that several other factors also have the potential to influence the audience's perception of the sponsorship.

Table 1.3 Correlation analysis between people who watched IPL 16 and their perception of brands being more credible and trustworthy

		Did you watch the 16th Indian Premier League?	Do you consider sponsoring brands to be more credible and trustworthy?
Did you watch the 16th Indian Premier League?	Pearson Correlation	1	.169**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	401	401
Do you consider sponsoring brands to be more credible and trustworthy?	Pearson Correlation	.169**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	401	401
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Another correlation analysis explored the relationship between the audience who watched the 16th Indian Premier League and whether they consider sponsoring brands more credible and trustworthy. The calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.169, indicating a positive correlation between these variables. Therefore, the audiences who watched the 16th Indian Premier League are more prone to perceive the sponsoring brands as more credible and trustworthy, resulting in a favourable perception.

Table 1.4 Correlation analysis between positive association when a team wins an IPL match and using products/services if the favourite team underperforms during IPL

		If your favourite team wins a match during the Indian Premier League, does it result in a positive association with the team sponsors?	If your favourite team underperforms in the IPL match, how likely are you going to use the products or services of the sponsor?
If your favourite team wins a match during the Indian Premier League, does it result in a positive association with the team sponsors?	Pearson Correlation	1	.297**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	401	401
If your favourite team underperforms in the IPL match, how likely are you going to use the products or services of the sponsor?	Pearson Correlation	.297**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	401	401
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

A correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the variables. If your favourite team wins a match during IPL, does it result in a positive association with the team sponsor and if your favourite team underperforms during the IPL match, how likely are you going to use the products or services of the sponsor? The calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.297, indicating a positive correlation between them. The strength of this association is moderate.

5.1 Findings:

Four hundred-one respondents filled out the survey questionnaire, of which 311 were male, and 90 were female. 45% are in the age group 18-25 years, and 55% are in the age group 25-35 years. 50% of the respondents watched the 16th Indian Premier League frequently, 27.1% watched it occasionally, and 22.9% watched it rarely. 41.5% noticed the sponsors during the 16th Indian Premier League, 40% noticed sponsors sometimes, 12.9% noticed the sponsors rarely, and 5.5% never noticed sponsors.

58.5% of respondents are aware of the team sponsor associated with the team they support in the 16th IPL, 23.1% are unaware, and 18.4% believe they may know the team sponsor. 65.9% of respondents can recall the title sponsor of the 16th IPL, 22.1% cannot recall it, and 11.9% believe that they might recall the title sponsor. 41% of respondents are more inclined to purchase a product if their favourite sports team is associated with it, 24.4% are not inclined to purchase it, and 34.6% cannot say if they will purchase the product.

Audiences rated the types of sports sponsorship activities based on how captivating they found it on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is extremely captivating, and 1 is not captivating.

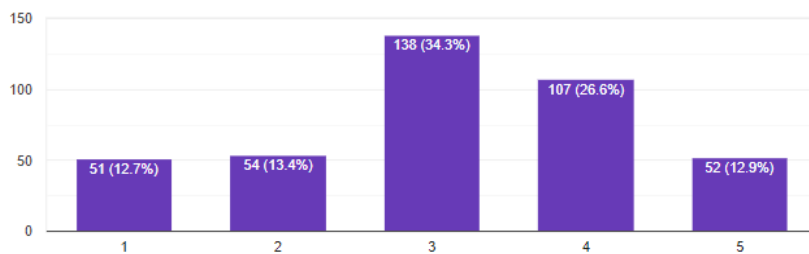


Figure 1.1: Audience rating their attraction towards on-field signage and banners

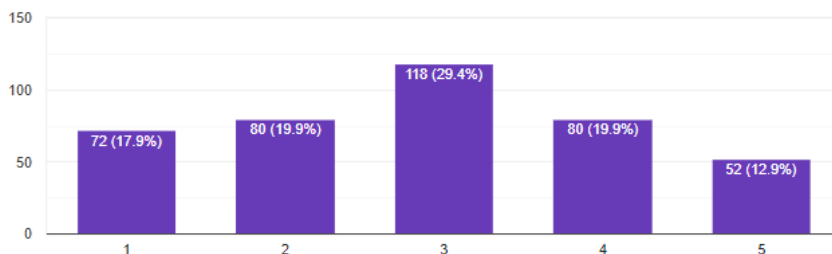


Figure 1.2: Audience rating their attraction towards sponsorship announcement by the commentators

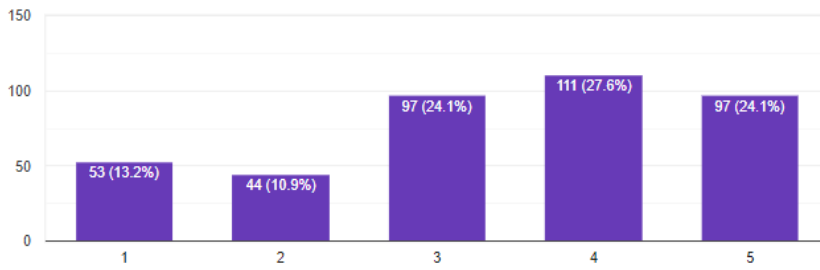


Figure 1.3: Audience rating their attraction towards Brand logos on the Jersey of players

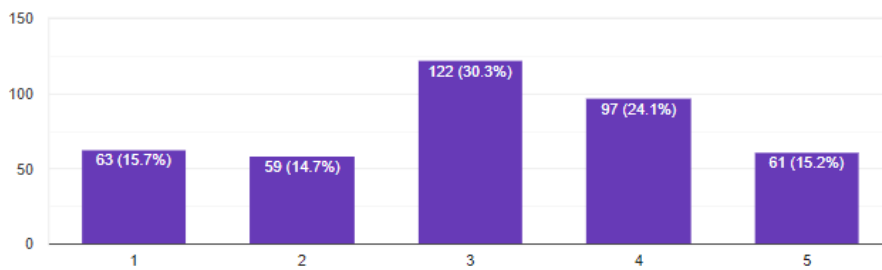


Figure 1.4: Audience rating their attraction towards product placement during the telecast of the IPL match

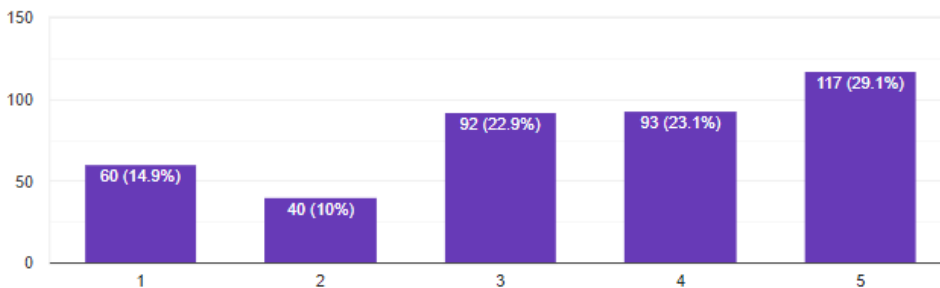


Figure 1.5: Audience rating their attraction towards title sponsor

Respondents find Title sponsorship of the IPL most captivating, followed by brand logos on players' jerseys. On-field signage and banners, product placement during the telecast of the IPL match, and sponsorship announcements by commentators follow this. 38.1% of respondents are more likely to pay attention to tournament title sponsorship, 34.6% pay attention to brand logos on player's jerseys, 18.7% pay attention to team sponsorship and 8.7% to track signage.

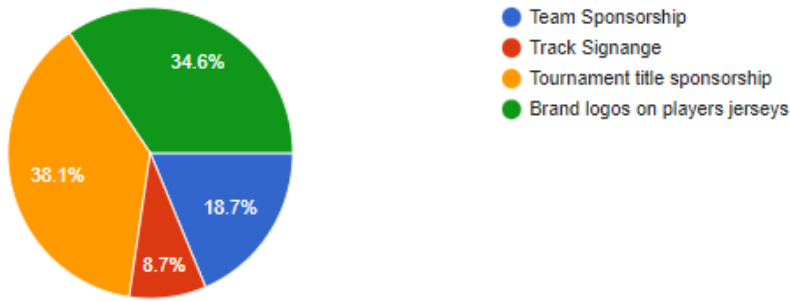


Figure 1.6: Which of these are you more likely to pay attention to?

44.5% have purchased brands that sponsor or are associated with the teams of the Indian Premier League. 29.9% have not purchased and 25.6% might have purchased from brands that sponsor during the IPL.

Table 1.4 highlights the results of the audience being asked if they could recall these new brands sponsored during the 16th Indian Premier League. Following were their response:

Sponsor	% of respondents who could recall the sponsor	% of respondents who could not recall the sponsor	% of respondents who did not pay attention to the sponsor
Swiggy Instamart	53.2%	24.9%	21.9%
RuPay	65.4%	20.4%	14.2%
CRED	68.7%	19.4%	11.9%
Dream 11	78.1%	13.4%	8.5%
TATA	81.8%	10.7%	7.5%
Upstox	54.5%	27.1%	18.4%

TATA was the most recalled sponsor by audiences during the 16th Indian Premier League, followed by Dream 11 and CRED. Upstox was the least recalled sponsor by the audience, followed by Swiggy Instamart.

59.5% of respondents believed that sponsorship during the 16th IPL positively impacted the brand's perception. 7% had a negative impact on their brand perception, and 33.6% were

neutral; they neither had a positive nor negative brand perception after interacting with new sponsors during the 16th Indian Premier League. During the match, 45% of respondents associated themselves with sponsoring brands such as CRED, Dream 11, and Swiggy Instamart. However, 33.1% did not associate themselves, and 21.9% were neutral.

15.7% strongly agree that sponsoring activities create brand loyalty in their mind, and 38.8% agree to it as well. 33.1% are neutral, 8.5% disagree with it, whereas 4% strongly disagree. 50.2% consider sponsoring brands to be more credible and trustworthy, 21.6% do not believe the same, and 28.1% do not have an opinion. 30.3% agree that if loyal customers see a competitor brand sponsoring during the IPL, they will switch from their previous brand preference. 39.6% disagree, while 30.1% are unsure about it.

12.7% strongly agree that if a team underperforms in a match, it influences their opinion of the associated brand. 22.9% agree, 28.4% have a neutral opinion, 26.4% disagree, and 9.7% strongly disagree. 51.5% believe that if their favourite team wins a match during the IPL, it results in a positive association with team sponsors. 30.3% disagree with it, and 18.2% are unsure about it. Suppose their favourite team underperforms during the IPL match. In that case, 22.4% are very likely to use the products or services of the sponsor, 21.9% are somewhat likely, 48% are neutral, 3.5% are somewhat unlikely, and 4.2% are very unlikely to use the products or services of the sponsor.

Table 1.5 Opinion of the audience if they will still support a team sponsor if they underperform during the IPL match.

Please explain why you will still support or are less likely to support the team sponsor in case of underperformance during the IPL match.
I will still support the team sponsor because the team's underperformance does not reflect the product or service quality.
I prefer reviews and ratings of products rather than choosing any product just because it sponsors any match or team.
It hardly matters about sponsors, and I watch IPL for cricket.
For me, Sponsorship has no interference with the performance of the players/team.
I will not support the sponsor if the team undergoes bad performance.
No, I will not be influenced by the sponsors because I watch IPL for my favourite players, not for the sponsors.

Since the team is underperforming, the customer does not want to associate with underperformance.
Because of the grudge I have inside for their under-performance.
If the product has good quality and is associated with a good team, there would not be any change.
Underperformance is not a criterion for me to judge or make any negative impact on brands associated with that team.
Because loyalty towards the team stands with loyalty to brands.
It will depend on my experience with that brand, not solely on brand visibility.
I find it difficult to continue supporting the team sponsor when their consistent underperformance fails to meet my expectations and diminishes my enthusiasm for their association.

6.0 Discussion:

In the case of team sponsorship, the exclusivity of sponsoring remains only with the brand; this makes it possible for the audience to believe that the team and the company support each other exclusively, increasing the company's goodwill. Therefore, sports sponsorship is an effective tool for growing the brand and creating a dominant position in the market.

Regarding the limitations, this research was confined to two cities, Bhopal and Sagar. This makes it a little challenging as it might overlook how the audiences in other locations interact with sponsorship activities during the 16th season of the Indian Premier League. Another limitation is that this research investigates the Brand perception of audiences within the age group of 15-29 years only. The perception of other age groups has yet to be studied.

7.0 Conclusion:

Title sponsorship during the 16th IPL is the most captivating for the audience as compared to other forms of sports sponsorship, this is followed by brand logos on the jerseys of players. TATA, the title sponsor of the 16th Indian Premiere League, was the highest-recalled sponsor, followed by Dream 11, one of the official sponsors. The underperformance of a team during the IPL did not negatively impact the audience's opinion, as they were most likely to continue using the products or services of the sponsor. Sponsorship played a critical role in

inculcating a positive brand perception, nurturing brand association, and elevating the credibility and trustworthiness of the brand.

8.0 Future scope:

Future research studies can incorporate a multiple-location approach, giving a more comprehensive understanding of the sports sponsorship's impact on consumer behaviour during the Indian Premier League. Furthermore, research can be done on Sports sponsorship during the Indian Premier League and its impact on Brand Equity.

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