

AN IN-DEPTH STUDY ON THE ROLE OF MARKETING STRATEGY IN HARNESSING THE PASSION FOR FOOTBALL INTO A PROFITABLE BUSINESS VENTURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper analysed the growth of Football over the last few decades, and how it has become one of the most popular sports in the world. Its viewership has increased manifold resulting in a lot of money entering this arena. The impact of marketing strategy concerning to the sport was analyzed in great depth. It has now become an extremely profitable business venture. Large numbers of football clubs have mushroomed all over the world including India. But not all are successful ventures. Analysis of the reasons for the above was attempted in the course of the paper.

Keywords: Cricket, Football, IPL, Sports industry, Linkage Effect, Nepotism, Stake-holders, Red-Tape.

Research Question: The paper will attempt to analyse the passion of a sport into a profit-making venture. How far has it been successful for Cricket in India? If so what is the business model? Can it be replicated in other sports? What are the reasons for football not being a business model in India? These and other related questions will be attempted in the course of this paper.

1. Introduction

The popularity of sports around the world is the basis of the economic worth of the sport industry. This industry is based on the degree to which people are identified with and committed to a sport, a team or even an athlete. The increasing cash flow in the sector combined with leisure time and purchasing power has resulted in the emergence of a new economic industry. Sports which was originally played during leisure hours has been harnessed into an industry where the audience still does so during their free time, but the stakeholders involved including the players are a part of a larger picture, that of it being an industry. It is a leisure industry, involving the

organization of professional sports leagues, economic viability of sport events, financing of sports infrastructure, innovation in the sports industry, public funding of sports, social impact of sports, etc.

In India, cricket has evolved to be a national sport. At one time it might have been Hockey, but today it is definitely 'cricket'. This can be seen in the type of adulation that the sport commands all over India, as well as amongst Indians settled abroad. This is the same scenario that is witnessed with sports like football and golf in other countries. It depends on the popularity of the sport as well as the way it is managed in a country which eventually leads it to becoming an industry.

2. Literature Review on how Sports and especially Cricket became an Industry

1926 is the year when cricket from just being a pastime sport, started converging to be a nationalist assertion. The main reason was that India as a country started asserting itself in attaining full independence from the British. The Indian National Congress passed the resolution of *Purna Swaraj*. This was more national than the earlier movements of 1905 and 1921. For the first time the peasantry, constituted an overwhelming majority of the Indian population, that participated in the nationalist struggle under the guidance of a single party. The assertion of a single party was preceded by the formation of an 'all-India' cricket team which took to the field against the MCC in Bombay on 16th December 1926. The stories of the Indian Nation and the cricket team were moving hand-in-hand.

Cricket was a good medium for socializing with British officials. Englishmen posted in India during the 19th century preferred cricket over other games like football and hockey.

Figure 1: India's First Cricket Team



Source: studytab

By the turn of the twentieth century, Indians had already started enjoying cricket along with football and hockey like other indigenous spectacles or ‘tamashas’, and the involvement of the rulers that are so important in traditional societies like the Indian subcontinent.

During this time though cricket was not the only sporting spokesman, there were other athletic challengers like hockey and football. Hockey became an extremely popular sport, being enhanced by the performance of the Indian team in the Olympics. Before India achieved Independence, the hockey team had won two gold medals in 1932 and 1936.

Figure 2: Indian Hockey Team Under Babu’s captaincy in 1932



Source: sportskeeda.com

Another game that competed with cricket for public attention was soccer. This sport became popular among the Indians of Calcutta around 1865 due to the efforts of Nagendraprasad Sarbadhikary. Calcutta was the capital of the Indian Empire as well as the nursery of Indian Nationalism, and any incident on the soccer field could have wider ramifications. Soccer was a genuine competitor to cricket for being the agent of Indians’ general nationalist feeling. As a team, neither cricket nor football won many accolades. There was individual excellence in both spheres that were spoken about.

Figure 3: The Indian Soccer team scripted history in 1948



Source: thenewsmill

As India did not have any indigenous outdoor amusement that could appeal to the masses cutting across class and region, to both the sophisticated urban as well as the rustic rural audience, cricket, football and hockey survived as public recreations. These imperial sports continued in democratic India and were harnessed to bolster the profile of the newly independent nation. More than cricket it was hockey and football that were more popular as they won medals at various international arenas.

Indian hockey reigned supreme in Olympic hockey till the mid-1960's, the football team made its debut on the international scene in the 1948 London Olympics. It was in March 1951, that an emotional triumph was achieved when the soccer side won a gold medal in the inaugural Asian Games. India by 1962, had achieved a genuine constellation of talented footballers with unmatched ability in India's football history. Till this period, the cricket team failed to achieve any of these standards.

3. Growth of Cricket as a Major Sports Industry in India

Cricket is more than just a sport in India and on many occasions, cricket is beyond religion as well. It is a way of life and a multibillion-dollar industry. It has grown from being a mere pastime to a major economic force.

Vijay Hazare helped establish India's reputation in international cricket. India achieved its first-ever Test series victory on foreign soil by defeating England in the 1952 series.

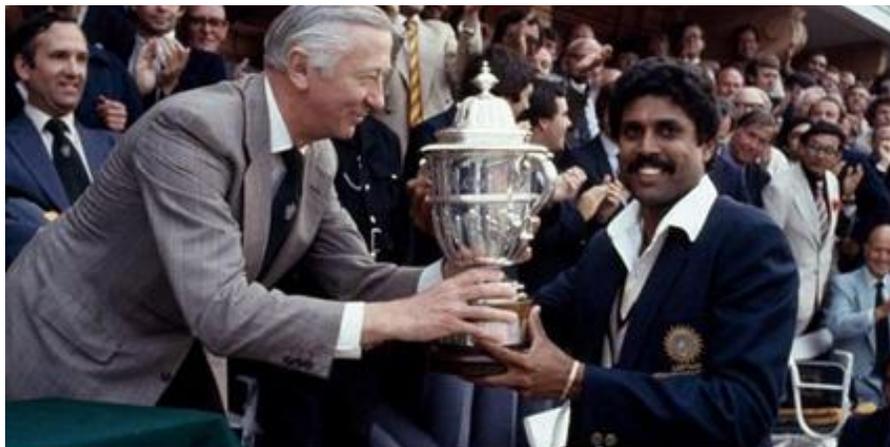
Figure 4: Vijay Hazare in 1952(Old Trafford)



Source: espncricinfo

The real turning point was in 1983 when Kapil Dev pulled off a stunning upset by winning the 1983 Cricket World Cup. Later players like Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Anil Kumble, M.S. Dhoni, and Virat Kohli among a lot of other players changed the course of cricket for India and its people by setting numerous records across different formats. India won its second Cricket World Cup in 2011, under the captaincy of M.S. Dhoni.

Figure 5: Image of Kapil Dev in 1983



Source: Bcci

Figure 7: M.S.Dhoni lifting the World Cup in 2011



Source: Bcci

Indian cricket today has come a long way, evolving into a powerhouse with a massive fan following, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and a rich pool of talent. The main factor behind this was The Indian Premier League (IPL). It reinvented the nation's cricket league by transforming a long-winded 'gentlemen's game' into a thrilling three-hour sports drama. It created a new market space known as 'cricketainment' whereby cricket is played and enjoyed in a completely different way from all other cricket games. It attracted audiences that may have been oblivious to the traditional form of the game. The IPL was launched in 2008, led by Lalit Modi. He envisaged that IPL is about business first, and then cricket. It is a lucrative format of business in which all participants wish to participate.

Figure 8: IPL LOGO



Source: espncricinfo

The majority of India's sports revenue comes from streaming and sponsorship, contributing 65% and 30%, respectively. Besides the players, who are the direct participants of the game, there are myriad ways that businesses and entrepreneurs make money from the game. Celebrities get paid for appearances, cheerleaders, media managers, marketing companies, stadiums and other infrastructure companies, airlines, travel, hotels, and related hospitality industries have benefitted immensely from the hosting of IPL matches.

The parent body BCCI (Board of Cricket Control in India), has earned an annual revenue of \$771 million in 2021-22 and is the world's richest organization. According to Duff & Phelps, the brand value of the IPL was US\$5.9 Billion.

The impact of this tournament on the Indian economy has been estimated to have contributed INR 11.5 Billion (US\$182 million) to the Indian economy in 2021. This format has added value to the Indian economy in the following ways:

- The IPL creates employment opportunities for all direct and indirect stakeholders that are involved in the game. The linkage effect of the game is phenomenal. Employment opportunities have opened up for high-paying sports-related professions, such as physiotherapy and coaching staff, to stadium-related employment, such as stewarding.
- The market for sports equipment and gadgets has witnessed considerable growth as a result of the growth of the game since the start of the IPL format.
- The league has raised the international profile of India and its cities. As there is a sizeable international TV audience and thousands of foreign visitors, the competition provides the country and its regions with an opportunity to showcase its beauty. This adds to the tourist potential of the economy.
- It has opened up an avenue for youngsters to excel in their sports potential. If they manage to achieve their best then opportunity will come knocking their way as the number of teams playing in the tournament has increased. The format limits the number of foreign players; the rest of the team has to be made up of Indian cricketers.
- The game has opened up opportunities for coaching centers to come up in Tier-2, and Tier-3 cities, further increasing the potential linkage impact of the game.
- The game has a huge impact on the demand for merchandise, helping the growth of this industry which is primarily labour intensive, helping the employment potential of the Indian Economy.

Cricket became a sports industry when it started earning accolades in the international arena, by winning the 1983 World Cup. The second and most important impetus was the advent of the IPL. The league took off in an unprecedented manner. It caught the imagination of the public despite of just finishing its 16th season.

IPL is to India what soccer and its various clubs are to Europe.

4. Football in India

Football as a sport in India was as important as cricket when it started, but for some reason it has not taken the same trajectory as cricket has. Football has a huge global presence. Few sports in the world play a central role in many societies as has football. The game is said to have become a release of pent-up emotions, as it is independent of the highly regulated ethics of work. Football pitches and stadiums became ‘enclaves of autonomy’ where people could engage in “socially approved arousal of moderate excitement behaviour in public.”(Elias and Dunning, “Quest for Excitement,” cited in Frank and Steets, “Stadium Worlds,”3.)

Despite the sport’s popularity all over the world it has not achieved the iconic status that cricket has in India. FIFA Global Football Development Chief Arsene Wenger has said,” While this country of 1.4 billion people has deservedly [produced a world-beating cricket team, it has failed to produce a decent football team.” This is a reality and all Indians know it. There has been no attempt to nurture the sport from the grassroots level. Whatever attempts that have been made have been half-baked and mired in red tape.

There is loads of talent in this country as far as this sport is concerned. Three states Goa, Kerala, and Bengal are the powerhouse of football. Unlike cricket Bengalis, never felt the need to go beyond the shores to pit their skills against overseas opposition. The football clubs and the players were satisfied to stay within the ‘comfort zone’ of their country, specifically Bengal. Being restricted to one’s comfort zone meant that players and officials had limited idea of how the game was evolving around the world. These states alone have so much talent that they are waiting to be picked up.

Analysing the problems that are associated with the game, the following are the main areas of concern:

- It is important to know the game, its technicalities, and skills as well as preserving one’s endurance for 90 minutes of kicking and running.
- Players should be knowledgeable about the technical aspects and the energies that have to be released when the ball is kicked.

- Indian players are weak in keeping the ball glued to the ground.
- Coaches would have to be hired to address the above-stated specific issues.
- The right talent has to be nurtured between the ages of 12-16 and not at the age of 26 years. A player reaches his prime at the age of 26; at this age he has already developed the skills and temperament to be a good player.

India is home to some of the oldest clubs in the world, but despite of that, the game has not advanced as Cricket has. The reasons for this are many, and they are intertwined with historical decisions, lack of international triumphs, and the overwhelming presence of cricket.

While India did have some success in the past ie winning the Asian Games in 1951 and gold in the 1962 Asian Games, there has not been much to celebrate. On the other hand, cricket has achieved recent triumphs, and so has Badminton. The popularity of a game is directly related to the triumphs it receives. These moments inspire fans and the younger generations.

The other issue with this game is that it did not have a national league till 1996. Besides this, there is a lack of investment and infrastructure. Many stadiums and training facilities are in poor condition, and there is a shortage of properly trained coaches and trainers. This is extremely crucial for nurturing young talent and ensuring their proper development.

Grassroots Development: The foundation for India to become a successful footballing nation requires grassroots development programs. It has been limited, resulting in shortage of talent identification as well as nurturing young sportsmen and women at the grass roots level.

The development of skilled coaches and technical expertise is extremely vital for the growth of the game. Football in India has witnessed a shortage of well- qualified coaches, who could impart their knowledge and experience to young players.

Competition structure: The structure of domestic competitions plays a significant role in shaping the quality of football. In India the domestic league system has experienced inconsistencies and a lack of long- term planning, hindering the growth of the sport at the professional level.

India's passion for cricket has often overshadowed the popularity of football. The cultural dominance of cricket, coupled with limited media coverage and sponsorship opportunities for football, has hampered the sport's growth and popularity among the masses.

There has been the establishment of the Indian Super League (ISL) in 2014 which has injected new energy and investment into the sport. There has to be a sustained effort from various

stakeholders, including government bodies, football associations, clubs, and fans that will help this game to reach heights.

Figure 9: Image of ISL



Source: reddit.com

Issues lie in the governing bodies of Indian Football, including Football Sports Development (FSDL), which has hindered the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) efforts to assemble the best possible squad for various tournaments. The AIFF has received flak for its highly centralized approach, in the country's bidding process as well as how the body makes decisions. Besides administrative issues, Indian football has also been plagued by corruption, nepotism, and unfair team selection

5. Conclusion and the Way Forward

To achieve iconic status in Football the way cricket has achieved is to face the problems that Indian Football is plagued with namely corruption, nepotism and interference by politicians and other non-playing high-ranking officials. Unless Indian football wins accolades it would be difficult to attract private investors towards the game. Till the time that the Central Government and State governments have to pitch in, just the way the Orissa Government has done so for both the Indian Men's and Women's Hockey teams.

The game is extremely popular sports at the school level both in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities, but despite this trend the game, has not made an impact in the world arena as yet. World football is extremely popular in India with audiences siding with various football clubs and buying their expensive merchandise. A Football World Cup is beamed, watched, and attracts several sponsors in India, but when it comes to the rise of football in India it needs to travel a long way to achieve some ranking in the World.

This is an important step as only when world accolades are achieved can the linkage impact of the football industry be felt in India. India has a homegrown example to follow in terms of the success of cricket. It would be prudent to follow a similar path if this sport wants to achieve the same impact in terms of income and employment as cricket.

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