

Allegiance to New Sports : Sports Marketing in the Indian Perspective

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Abstract

Marketing of sports is very different from marketing through sports. While one takes care of marketing of sports-related goods, equipments, and merchandise, marketing through sports deals with promotion of any product through sports. Sports and events which form a part of the service industry today are sources of big money for the nation. In India, where cricket is a religion, and Sachin Tendulkar is God, it is important to understand how and why other new and upcoming sports such as F1 car racing, football, tennis, and so forth can be brought to the same marketable and fan following stage. This paper explored the concept of consumer behavior to understand why some sports are better followed than others.

Keywords: sports marketing, consumer behavior, event marketing, services

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Marketing, the tool to connect with customers, has been used across various fields to successfully understand the customers' needs and satisfy them. Sports marketing, on the other hand, as elaborated by Smith (2008), is focused on meeting the needs of sports customers or consumers, including people involved in playing a sport, watching or listening to sports programs, buying merchandise, collecting memorabilia, buying sporting goods like clothing and shoes, or even surfing a sports-related website to find out the latest about their favorite team, player, or event. The whole concept of sports marketing came to light as early as 1858, when a baseball game required its fans to pay for admission - just 50 cents (Ceresi & McMains, n.d.). This incident only highlights the willingness of people to pay to watch and be part of sporting events and since then, sports are no more treated like a fun based healthy competition, but a commercial activity.

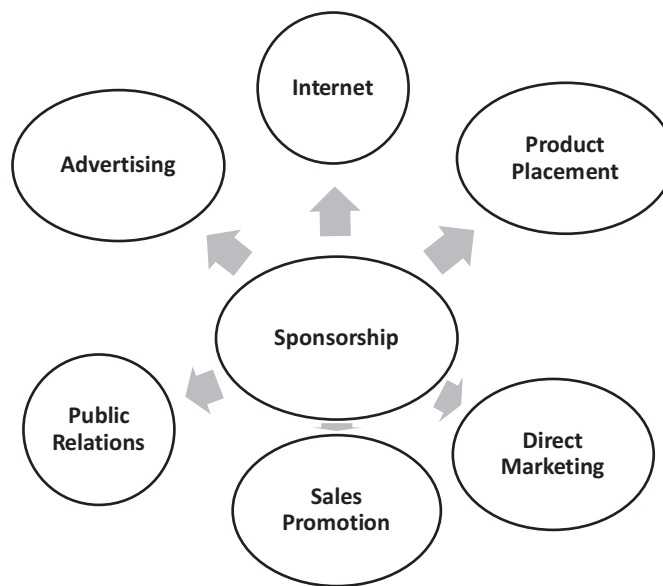
Fullerton and Merz (2008) highlighted the concept of marketing of sports which primarily deals with marketing of sport related goods and services to the consumers of sports in the form of spectators and players. On the other hand, *marketing through sports* deals with the concept of using sports as a promotional tool or a sponsorship platform for various goods and services that may or may not be related to sports. The importance of marketing through sports can be noted through various instances in the recent past where organizations have heavily spent in order to gain the eyeballs and footfalls, which can only be provided by marketing through sports.

IPL (Indian Premier League) is a simple game of cricket, where players are not clustered into teams based on regions/nationalities, but are sold and bought by team owners like commodities. Several incidents of IPL bring to light the concept of marketing through sports. The year 2009, which was right in the middle of the global economic recession, the venue for IPL was moved from India to South Africa (Brown & Shankar, 2009) due to the non-cooperative atmosphere which was created. Huge investments were already made on the players of this season of IPL, which questioned the basic premise of the global economic recession. How were these huge organizations

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Figure 1 : Linking Sponsorship with Other Promotional Tools



Source : Reproduced from Buhler, A., & Nufer, G. (2012). *Relationship marketing in sports*. Oxford : UK: Routledge.

finding enough liquidity to spend on marketing through a contemporary medium of sports and entertainment? And if this kind of money really existed, why was there a recession? Overcoming all global economic conditions, by 2010, IPL managed to build a brand value of \$4.13 billion ("IPL brand value doubles to \$4.13 billion: Study," 2010) and the title sponsorship for the latest season of IPL was won by Pepsi Co for a whopping ₹ 396.8 crore (Jain, 2012). Likewise, in Europe, one of the favorite sports - football creates big business with almost 20% of the revenues covered through T-shirt sponsorship worth \$649mn ("European football club shirt sponsorship deals break record mark," 2012). These incidents only highlight the fact that the organizers of these sports not only see the hope and scope of recovering and multiplying their investments by marketing through sports, but also see an opportunity to improve and enhance their global presence. Various modules and techniques help in promulgating marketing of brands and products through sports, some of which have been highlighted below.

Sports Tourism

On the lull side, the last moment shifting of the venue of IPL in 2009 led to huge losses for a large number of Indian hospitality and event management firms. Contrary to the above situation, this scenario brings to light how the presence of a sport also goes a long way to build a culture and global presence in a city (Herstein & Berger, 2013). The culture, tourism, and hospitality of a country/city get a big push through sports. Economic activities, which are in the form of tourism, where a traveler travels with the objective of being a part of sport in the form of a spectator or player is coined as sports tourism (Pigeassou, 2004). In fact, sports tourism is further classified into sports event tourism, nostalgia sport tourism, and active sport tourism (Gibson, 1998). This only further promotes the fact that sports have a huge impact other than pure entertainment, enjoyment, and competition. Indeed, it is not wrong to say that sports are one of the world's most popular leisure experience (Ritchie & Adair, 2004) and even the biggest social phenomenon (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 1997), which bring people of different castes, classes, religions, and even countries to come together to enjoy it beyond all possible barriers.

E - Sponsorships

Sponsorship is a tool which can be linked through various other promotional tools as is shown in the Figure 1. Of all the above mentioned channels, the Internet/ world wide web (www) is now becoming famous. The concept of E-sponsorship is fast catching up. The usual product based organizations which sponsor sporting events are undergoing a slump thanks to the global economic recession. Under such a situation, E-sponsorships or sponsorships from e-commerce firms are starting to catch up. A common channel for E-sponsorships is e-newspapers (Eckler, Heim, & Rodgers, 2009). E-sponsorship creates a connect with the content which has to be aligned with the marketing objectives of the organizations (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). In fact, just like traditional sponsorships, E-sponsorships are also largely dependent on the congruency of the sponsors with the overall theme of the product in concern (Becker-Olsen & Simmons, 2002 ; Rodgers, 2007). Keeping the above in mind, India is increasingly looked upon as a huge market and opportunity for sports sponsors. Large international brands invest into Indian sports marketing trends for primarily the following reasons (Thwaites, 1999) :

- (1) High disposable income in greater section of the middle class,
- (2) Growing economy,
- (3) Congenial political environment,
- (4) Presence of suitable infrastructure,
- (5) Large segment of Indians below the age of 30 years,
- (6) Strong inclination of youth towards sports as a leisure activity,
- (7) Religion like fervor towards sports, particularly cricket.

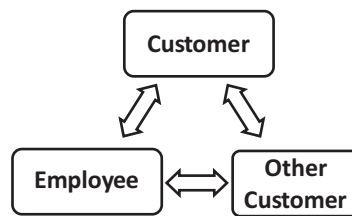
India has traditionally seen a huge craze for cricket as a sport, even though it is not its national game. Every boy grows up with a dream of being a cricketer because of the success, name, and fame associated with the game. Several research studies (Baade & Tiehen, 1990 ; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989 ; Pan, Gabert, McGaugh, & Branvold, 1997 ; Zhang, Pease, Smith, Lee, Lam, & Jambor, 1997) have suggested that the absence of team success is one of the biggest de-motivators for the audience in being a part of a sport. And correspondingly, success of Indian players at international platforms in sports other than cricket raised the interest and fan following of a large section of youth in sports such as tennis and badminton.

In fact, for any and every game, there are a large number of internal and external motivators, which build an interest and participation for the sport (Kim & Trail, 2010). The internal motivators deal with attributes which are related to the person himself/herself such as needs, beliefs, goals, values ; whereas, the external motivators deal with the social and environmental aspects such as promotions, media coverage, market demand, and so forth. With the opening up of the Indian markets, a large number of European brands such as Vodafone, Adidas, and so forth entered the markets. These brands were already internationally associated with certain sports and their sponsorships. Slowly and steadily, the sports associated with these brands have also entered the minds of the Indian youth. Sports such as football and formula one car racing got a kick into Indian markets by their European promoters. Thus, these sports entered with a large amount of external motivators to push their image in the minds of the unaware Indian customers.

When Vijay Mallya bought the Force India team in 2007 for a huge 88 million euros (Sahara Force India, n.d.), a large amount of media coverage, promotion, and publicity took place, which gave the necessary push to the game of F1 racing. Furthermore, the launch of the Indian Grand Prix in 2011 added fuel to the fire and built a large fervor for the game.

In such a high-potential market, the reaction of consumers towards various events is a concept which needs to be analyzed. Through this paper, we attempt to understand the marketing of consumers' preferences and attitudes which compel them to spend money towards this leisure based activity.

Figure 2: Model Representing Discussing the People Mix of a Service



Source : Adapted from Gronroos, C. (2007). *Service management and marketing: Customer management in service competition* (3 ed.). New Delhi: John Wiley & Sons.

Sports: A Service

At various instances of history, marketers have tried to unfold the mystery of consumer's behavior towards various aspects to understand how and why one product does better than the other in the same market. Sports are an intangible experience which the consumer takes home. And this intangibility characteristic makes sports marketing further complicated and difficult to evaluate. How or why the experience of one sporting event is better than the other is a difficult task to interpret with a large number of factors affecting and impacting the outcomes.

The quality of sports tourism is governed by four major factors: accommodation quality, access quality, venue quality, and contest quality. These factors not only ensure that the experience of the sport is pleasurable, but also lead to an intent to return to the event (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). The marketing mix of any service is characterized by the “people” factor or the “human factor”. This people /human factor (Donavan, n.d.) in case of sports is especially important and can be traced under the following three heads as shown in the Figure 2.

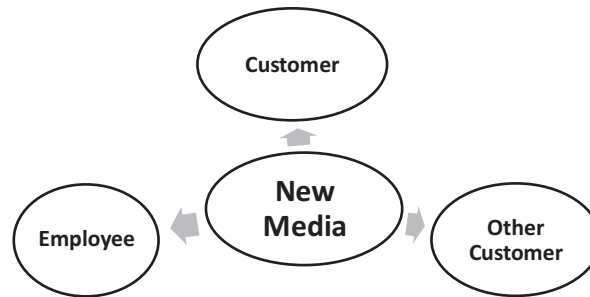
(1) Employee : The employees in case of sports deal with the management and behavior of sports officials, trainers, coaches, referees, and so forth. A team's coach is always looked upon when they win or even loose a match. The employees play an integral role in making the experience of the customers delightful. Each time a customer directly interacts with these employees, these occasions become moments of truth for the customer where the customer experiences augmented services related to the sport.

(2) Customer : The customer here, as previously discussed, can be the one watching the match at the stadium or even at home. Their understanding of the game and fanatic craze for the game can make or break the experience. The live customers who watch the match in person also play a major role in motivating the performance of the players, which can be in the form of hooting, shouting slogans, carrying flags, facing painting, and many other attention drawing and motivating tactics.

(3) Other Customer : The other customer here is any and everyone who is enjoying the sporting experience along with the customer. While the “other” customer may not have an active contribution to the experience, there is a large amount of influence which is created by even the unknowns present in the stadium. The mere presence or absence of the other customer itself can cause a huge impact on the experience of the service. A stadium full of people will be a joy to sit in, while an empty stadium only creates an impression that it is probably not an important or sought-after type of event. The other customers in terms of friends or family who sit with the customer to enjoy the game also influence the choice of the game and sometimes, even the duration of time in which a customer is in a position to invest in that game.

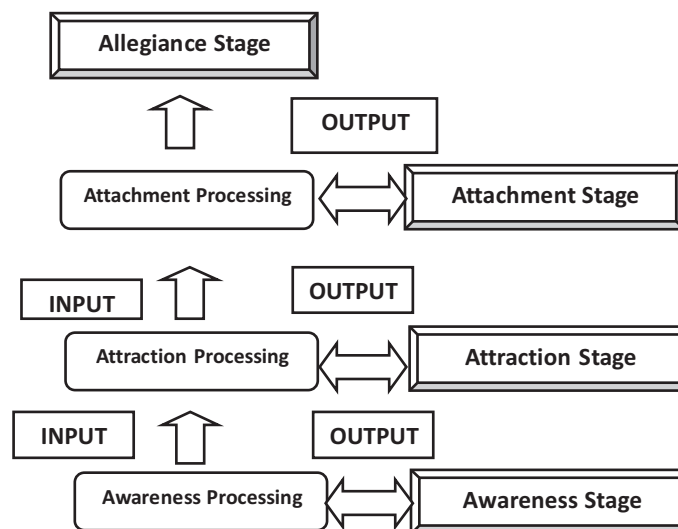
The advent of New Media has brought in a fourth dimension to the above behavioral model. New media is characterized by personalization of interpersonal media and volume of mass media (Crosbie, 2002). It helps

Figure 3. Model Representing Media Involvement in the People Mix of Sports Service



Source : Adapted from Gronroos, C. (2007). *Service management and marketing: Customer management in service competition* (3 ed.). New Delhi: John Wiley & Sons.

Figure 4. The Psychological Continuum Model

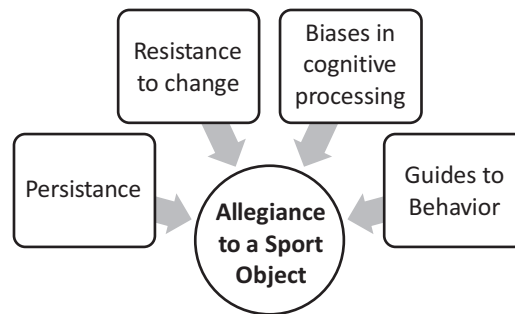


Source : Reproduced from Funk, D. C., & James, J. (2001). The psychological continuum model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's psychological connection to sport. *Sport Management Review*, 4 (2), 119-150. DOI:10.1016/S1441-3523(01)70072-1

communicate personal messages and views on large social platforms. Common examples of new media carriers are social networking sites, blogs, computer games, digital art, and many more (Pascoe, 2012). The youth is largely affected by new media communication and even finds communication over the Internet more interesting and even reliable than other forms of communication (Mackay, 2005).

This attribute helps to build a craze for whatever is “In,” whatever is being “liked” by reference groups, peers, role models, and so forth. With the advent of newer, younger, and more successful sports persons and sports in India, the generation Y is fast turning to different sporting events for pleasure. This is not just motivated by personal beliefs or attitudes, but also a hype generated by peers. Thus, the fourth dimension which can be added to the above model is the heightened presence of new media as represented in the Figure 3. Sportspersons' interviews,

Figure 5. Components of Allegiance Stage of the Psychological Continuum Model



Source : Reproduced from Funk, D. C., & James, J. (2001). The psychological continuum model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's psychological connection to sport. *Sport Management Review*, 4 (2), 119-150. DOI:10.1016/S1441-3523(01)70072-1

game analysis, post-game celebrations - all these factors generate more than the required amount of hype into the game. Several studies predict that even the process of reading reviews, reports, and feedbacks of various sporting events on online discussion forums builds the customers' interests and that too, irrespective of the viewers' gender (Tanga & Cooper, 2012).

Customer and Other Customer Behaviour

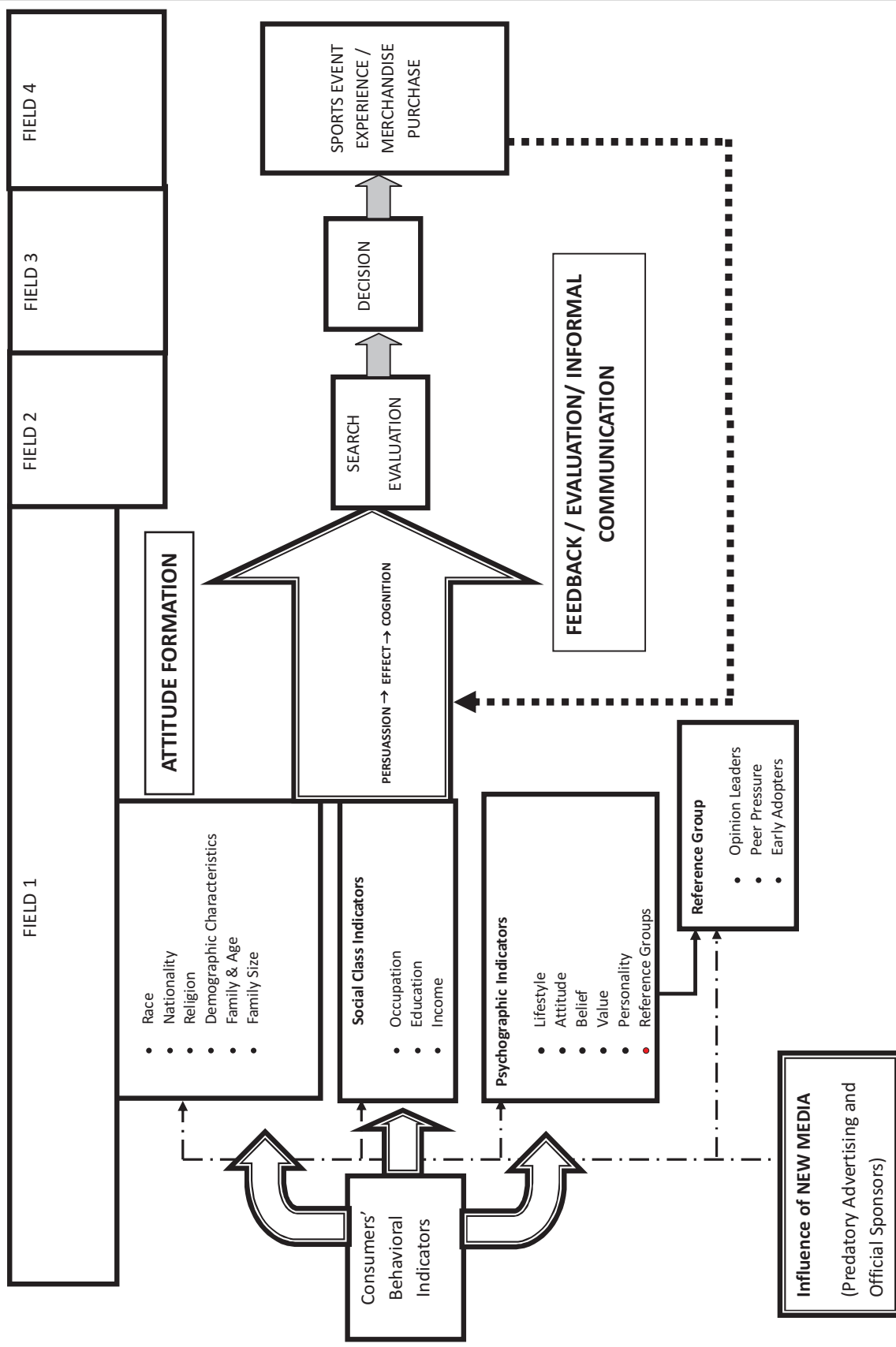
“Customer” behavior, as represented in Figure 3, can be described in further detail through the psychological continuum model, which highlights the four stages of involvement of a consumer towards sports or events. This model has been depicted in the Figure 4.

From the Figure 4, it is clear that the sports which have high viewership and fan following would be on a higher level than those which have less of a fan following. If we consider the example of Formula One racing, the *awareness stage* would be amongst the youth when they are just aware about the name of the sport and are vaguely aware about what all are its details/ key players, and so forth. Slowly, after the launch of the Force India team in India, European organizations such as Vodafone took the initiative and brought the F1 players to India and had the crowds meet these players, bring in their cars, and display them. This created the next stage of attraction. With the launch of the first racing track for F1 in India, the craze and attachment was created in India. Everyone from ministers to Bollywood stars wanted to go and watch the first Grand Prix in India. This is where the public is able to attach themselves with a sport and hence brings them down to the *attachment stage*. The last and final *allegiance stage* of this model is yet to be achieved in India for F1 racing. While there is a large number of youth, especially college going students, who find this sport attractive, but their allegiance is still towards cricket.

Allegiance to New Sports in India

Allegiance is a supreme stage which is attained by sports which not only have high viewership and fan following, these are the sports which also largely generate revenues through the sale of official sports merchandise. There is a huge customer base which passionately looks to associate with the sport and collect memorabilia of the sports teams and hence, these huge benefits are drawn from the impulse buyers. These buyers buy and collect sports merchandise because their purchases make them feel a connect with the sports team and the sport itself (Chen, Lin, & Chang, 2013). Here, the success and failure of the sports team and the fame of its players (End, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, & Jacquemotte, 2002) becomes a large input which takes the sport from its attachment to the allegiance

Figure 6. : Model Representing Consumers' Attitude Formation for the Sport Purchase Decision Process



Source : Adapted from Nicosia, F. (1966). *Consumer decision processes: Marketing and advertising implications*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

stage. Keeping this in mind, it is clear that the attachment stage is not the only input for the allegiance stage and there have to be other factors, which promote a consumer at the attachment stage to a consumer at the allegiance stage.

The Figure 5 highlights the various factors which influence the allegiance of a fan to a sport object. Persistence refers to the attitude which persists over time towards the given sport. This is influenced by the number of times an individual thinks about the sport (frequency) and consistent evaluative responses elicited by the sport over an extended period of time. Resistance to change is an indication of the tendency to resist any major change in previously ingrained notions and creating a balance between prior attitudes and new information being received by the sport. Biases in cognitive processing refers to the complex information processing which is individualistic attitude towards a particular sport object. Guides to behavior relate to the probability of the consumer indulging into some sort of behavior related to the sport in the form of reading, watching, listening, or even purchasing.

What Makes One Sport Sell More Than Another?

In India, so far, the allegiance stage has only been reached for cricket as a sport. One needs to understand why the customers and consumers of other sports have not been able to achieve the allegiance stage in sports such as formula one racing. To understand the same, various factors are understood and interpreted in the Figure 6.

(1) Field One : As is clearly visible from the Figure 6, the consumers' attitude towards any sport is formed based on various inherent characteristics of the consumers such as cultural indicators, social class of the customers, and various psychographic indicators. Amongst these psychographic indicators, reference groups form a substantial influence, and hence, are represented separately. In fact, many a times, the youth highly relate with a reference group to an extent that they feel that the success or failure of the team is similar to their own success or failure respectively (Kagan, 1958). It is even observed that the degree to which a social group membership or affiliation affects self-definition can be defined directly related to the strength of the individual's affinity and identification with the group (Fisher, 1998). These reference groups include inputs from opinion leaders, peers, sports teams, sports personalities, and consumers who are early adopters of the sport. These along with the inputs from new media (which includes media that is not only outdoor, print, and electronic, but also Internet, blogs, games, and word of mouth) (Manovich, 2001) are the main factors which contribute to the attitude formation of the customer. One can notice here that new and upcoming sports build up the first levels of awareness and attachment at this stage primarily because of the influence of the reference groups. When our society's opinion leaders, such as Bollywood stars, youth icons, and so forth show their interest in a new sport such as F1 car racing or football premier league, there is a tendency to build a positive attitude towards these sports and creates attention and attractiveness towards them. This is further strengthened by the hype created by the new media through social networks, blogs, chats, online games, and so forth. This together forms the first field of the model which acts as input for the procedure for search evaluation.

(2) Field Two : During the search evaluation, the consumers consider various aspects of different sports which help them decide which sport they would like to be associated with. One of the chief factors here is affordability of the sport involvement. A sport which is affordable to the consumer would have greater likeliness of affiliation by a consumer than those whose equipment/ components/ gear is beyond the budget of the consumer. Again, a sport which has rules/guidelines that are easy to replicate at the consumer level will have higher likeliness in the mind of the consumer. For example, the cost of a cricket bat is much less than that of a golf club and one can always play cricket in any park/ street but cannot play golf as easily without the proper 9/18 hole golf club.

(3) Field Three : After search evaluation, knowingly or absent mindedly, the consumer chooses a sport which he/she not only wants to be involved in, but also wants to be known that he/she is involved in it. Here, the role of attitude plays a major role.

(4) Field Four : The customers take that final purchase decision in which they involve themselves with the sporting experience which may be simply buying the tickets to the stadium or buying merchandise which is attested by sport stars of that particular sport or any merchandise which proves their liking in the sport.

(5) Feedback : The feedback of the purchase or the experience of this sporting event goes back and helps in building the attitude for the customers as well as reinforces the attitude for the other customers as discussed earlier.

The above-mentioned factors help us to understand why new sports in India are developing slowly. If one tries to focus on individual factors, the marketing teams can focus to generate greater affiliation to newer and upcoming sports such as F1 car racing, football premier league, lawn tennis, and so forth.

Conclusion

It is a long known fact that sporting events and their sponsorships are much looked forward to by corporates which try to encash on the visibility and eye balls which are garnered by these events (Shetty, 2012). The model presented in this paper would help in deciphering why new sporting trends are building up. A major role here is being played by reference groups. Marketers use the opinion leaders such as Bollywood stars to endorse complementary brands, attend the events, and also vouch for the craze they have towards it. After this, the “New Media” today is used to get everyone involved and talking about the sport and its theme. The concepts of social networking sites, blogs, and also online gaming today are being heavily exploited for the purpose of advertising (Trehan, 2012). Various brands are trying to shed their - only with cricket type of association where they bring in tag lines such as “Change the Game”. Other organizations are generating hype for sports such as F1 car racing by having the common man “meet these sporting stars”. A lot of news channels, through their intention of distributing information of change, become sources of hype for a particular sport. Hence, it can be concluded that various factors - as depicted in the Figure 6 - are contributing towards the development of new sports markets in India.

Managerial Implications, Limitations of the Study, and Scope for Further Research

Sports management today is a highly upcoming vocational field which is attracting the youngsters. Understanding of a sport and its rules is just as important as is the understanding of the process of selling the sport. E-sponsorships and new media are helping to build the hype for a brand new market of sports and entertainment, which were never there in India. The reporting of the first F1 race in India, the number of stars who attended it, the number of people who had gathered, its location's proximity to the capital, all these things eventually became sources of hype for the upcoming sport. These concepts can be used to understand and predict trends for new sports and may also be applied to similar mediums of entertainment. This study stresses on the use of reference groups and new media for promulgation of sports and the individual contribution of each of the members of reference groups, and their proportion can help in designing a promotion mix for any sports marketer. Hence, there are further issues and areas in this topic which can be looked at as sources of scope for further research in this field.

By and far, this study represents the chief factors involved in the popularity of a sport in India. Yet, there is further scope for an empirical study on the same which can further quantify the impact of each factor and their relationships with each other. In the recent past, sports such as Kabaddi are being re-invented for Indian markets and are being played in competitive formats like that of IPL in the case of cricket. Kabaddi is a sport that is primarily of Indian origin (Pro Kabaddi, n.d.), but it never received the fan following of the magnitude of cricket or even of hockey. Hence, the model presented in this paper may not be fully applicable for such sports which are re-invented and re-marketed.

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