

A Customer Centric Brand Analysis of IPL Using Brand Molecule Tool

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ABSTRACT

This paper through an explorative research and metaphorical use of a molecule, determines the various factors that exists in regards to the brand "IPL". The paper also compares the results with the dimensions which have already been used by practitioner led sources to measure the same construct. This analysis helps one to achieve greater insight into the branding process. According to American Appraisal report "Clearing The Fence with Brand Value", the brand value of IPL has been estimated to be US\$3.2 billion in 2014. The league has been tipped to rival the likes of the English Premier League in the near future. Increasing internet as well as TV penetration and increasing per capita income of the large and cricket frenzy Indian population is likely to fuel the growth of IPL as a brand in the coming future. As a part of this paper we have developed an understanding of brand value of IPL using brand molecule tool. Various drivers of brand value such as management strength, marquee players, celebrity influence, geographical location etc. has been studied in this report using the brand molecule tool.

Key words: Brand, Brand Molecule, Customer, IPL

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Premier League (IPL) is a professional cricket league held annually in India in the month of April-May. The event is contested between 8-11 franchise teams representing Indian cities. In just 8 years IPL has become the most attended and viewed cricket league in the world amongst all sport leagues. According to American

Appraisal report “CLEARING THE FENCE WITH BRAND VALUE”, the brand value of IPL has been estimated to be US\$3.2 billion in 2014. The league has been tipped to rival the likes of the English Premier League in the near future. Increasing internet as well as TV penetration and increasing per capita income of the large and cricket frenzy Indian population is likely to fuel the growth of IPL as a brand in the coming future.

Brand molecule is a new three dimensional approach which maps various brand portfolios with that of the desired company. The approach includes in a company’s portfolio all the brands that plays a role into a consumer’s decision to buy, irrespective of whether the company owns them or not. It is a mapping tool which provides an image to the company, of how the brands actually appear to customers. In a brand molecule all the various brands associated with a given company take the form of atoms, and are oriented in such a manner that reflects how customers perceives them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand can be defined as a name, symbol, design, term, sign, or a mix of them, which is intended and helping customers identify goods or services of a seller and help differentiate it from its competitors (Philip Kotler, year). Brand means different things to different audiences, to a consumer it would be a point of purchase differentiator, it would signify trust etc, but to a seller it would signify a competitive advantage, a financial advantage & a sign of quality to their customers. [1]

Brand has evolved from the stone age where hunters used branded weapons (Almquist & Roberts: 10) to the era where everything we see is branded.

The constantly changing business dynamics (Knox and Bickerson: 2003) has led to development of brand as a concept.

Branding concepts have evolved from its mere establishment (Marquardt et al.: 1965) to brand equity (Aaker: 1991, Keller: 1993), relationship branding (Brodie et al.:2002) & CSR (Blumenthal & Bergstrom: 2003). [2]

Ambler (1992) takes a customer-oriented approach in defining a brand as a promise of the bundle of attributes that someone buys to fulfil their need and desires. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible. This definition of brand explains the rationale behind the concept, identifying customer need and desires and meeting their expectations to provide contentment. [2]

METHODOLOGY

As a part of this paper we have developed an understanding of brand value of IPL using brand molecule tool. Various drivers of brand value such as management strength, marquee players, celebrity influence, geographical location etc. has been studied in this report using the brand molecule tool.

All those brands which influences a person (consumer) to watch or not to watch IPL are included in its brand portfolio. The list is classified lead, strategic or support

brands on the basis of the following five questions:

- How important is a brand to viewers' decision to watch IPL?
- What is the impact of the influence – positive or negative?
- What is the market positioning of a brand relative to the other brands in the portfolio?
- What is the level of connect of a brand to the other brands in the portfolio?
- What is the level of control over this brand?

On the basis of our team's judgments which had least possible subjectivity and on the basis of a survey of 80 online respondents and adopting the close-ended questionnaire approach, we were able to classify the brands in the form of a spreadsheet on the basis of five key dimensions: importance to viewers, influence on viewers, positioning of the brand, connections and degree of control. We have shown this by the chart titled "Data Table for the IPL Portfolio".

The survey helped us to gather view on some important questions like to what extent viewers view the participating teams or the marquee players or the celebrity quotient attached with IPL as a reason to watch IPL.

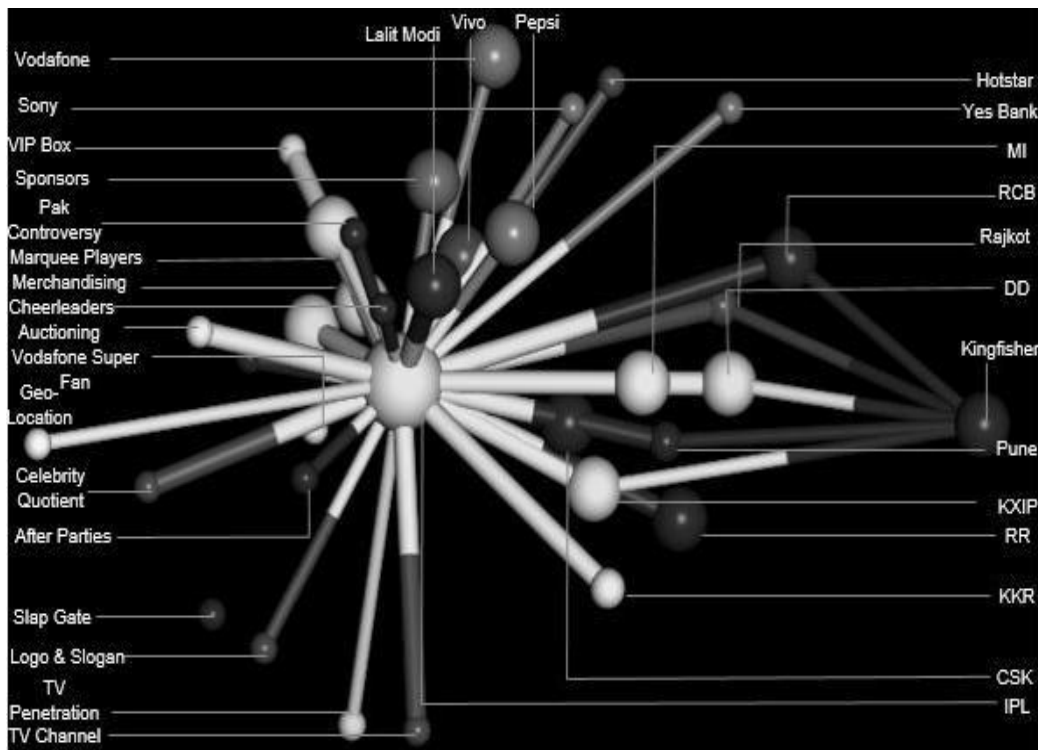
THE BRAND MOLECULE

The centermost atom in this study is "IPL" which is also called as the lead brand. We then include various brands which influences the way a consumer views the IPL as atoms. Different size, shade and location of atoms has been used to indicate different characteristics of brands. Size represents the role of the particular brand. Largest atom in the portfolio is always the *lead brand*. Midsize atoms are *strategic brands* which have a very strong influence over the viewers who watch cricket regularly (as marquee players like Dhoni or Gayle for IPL) or luring new viewers to the game (as Facebook does). *Support brands* are represented as the smallest atoms in the portfolio. The player auctions and slap gate controversy, both of which are particular to IPL, play the role of support brands for IPL. The links between various atoms is referred to as *nodes*. For IPL, Kingfisher and Celebrity quotient act like nodes because of their connection with so many teams. [7]

The shade of the atom represents the influence of the brand on the customer's decision making process. They can exert a positive influence (light), a negative influence (dark) or a neutral influence (medium). In the IPL molecule, "CSK" and "MI" are light because they cater to a huge community of Dhoni and Sachin's followers.

Events like IPL after party, on the other hand, are dark because it creates a bad image of IPL as a competition among non-professional players. TV broadcasters like SONY MAX, has a neutral influence and thus is medium.

Next aspect of a brand molecule is the location of the atoms. Location has two roles to play. Firstly, Proximity between the atoms indicates the relatedness of market positioning. Pepsi and Vodafone are both at the same distance, indicating similar positioning. While Kingfisher is further away representing different positioning. Secondly, links between atoms indicate the company's relationship to the brands. A single link between IPL and RR shows the direct relationship between IPL and RR. The degree of control over a brand is indicated by the width of the link, thickness being direct reflection of the ease of control. IPL, for example, can have significant influence on the involved franchisees like KKR, DD etc. it has much less influence over controversies like slap gate, match-fixing etc.



CONCLUSION

The IPL Brand has been losing its image of a very competitive league where the best players could show their worth. Instead it has emerged as business and entertainment oriented competition. Several reasons are responsible for this tarnish in the image of the IPL brand. Most of the studies and secondary data available on the internet and other media sources shows that the large number of scandals of 2011 along with spot match fixing that took place in 2013 are responsible for this bad image of the IPL brand. The involvement of big business tycoons like Mr. Meyappan, owner of Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in betting scandal, too much amount of cricket with almost eighty matches per season and the attachment of Mr. Vijay Mallya led Kingfisher group as a franchisee and as a sponsor is further attributed for the

decrease in the brand image of the brand IPL. In the recent years, the TV ratings (TVR) of IPL have improved. Many consider the restructuring of the IPL governing board, the suspension of IPL teams like Rajasthan Royals and Chennai Super Kings (CSK) as the reasons for this improvement in the image of the Brand IPL. [8]

However, our brand molecule as a tool to form the brand portfolio represents the following inferences highlighting the reasons for the good and bad image of the brand IPL and what factors play an important role in attracting or repelling the viewers from the game.

The teams and marquee players continue to be the biggest attracters for IPL as shown by their proximity and size in the brand molecule. Teams like Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) continue to be in a strategic position despite their close attachment with Kingfisher, a negative influence causing brand. This is because of the presence of marquee players like Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle and AB De Villiers in the team. Also it has been found that people are more attached to the teams than their sponsors or owners and hence neglect any wrongdoings on their behalf. (See Appendix B, D)

Although IPL continues to give a huge amount of importance to the celebrity quotient attached with it but as inferred from the survey and as visible from our brand molecule, celebrities are no longer attracting viewers towards IPL. In fact the attachment of big businessmen like Mr. Vijay Mallya and celebrities like Indian film and television actor Mr. Vindu Dara Singh who are accused of serious charges under Indian law are tarnishing the brand IPL. (See Appendix C, E)

The locations where matches are hosted and television broadcasters have no strategic advantage as opposed to the popular belief of location centric marketing. This is against the perceived perception that people have emotional attachment for a particular team because of it being a representative of a particular location. In fact people give more importance to the players and team structure than to which location they belong to. This fact allows IPL to explore new locations without worrying about the fall in viewership. Also more experiments can be done with the various modes of online broadcasting. Online telecasts on HotStar and Youtube in the past are results of such experiments only. (See Appendix A, F & G)

Controversies like Intense infighting among the board members leading to the ouster of Mr. Modi and subsequent charging of Mr. Meyappan, owner of Chennai Super Kings' in betting scandal, the involvement of a huge betting syndicate has further eroded the games authenticity and have a long term negative effect on the brand value of IPL.

The spot fixing allegations where a few Indian cricketers' were caught in a TV sting saying they were ready to accept bribes and throw the match has resulted in a situation that if a batsman hits a six, then viewers feel that the bowler has taken money to give away runs. Our brand molecule clearly highlights the negative image these scandals scatter over the overall brand of IPL. (See Appendix C)

Despite the currently prevailing negative image of Kingfisher, several IPL teams

continue to partner with Kingfisher. This has a negative effect on the associated brands but not to the extent as expected and shown by the available secondary sources. Viewers continue to support teams like Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) who have Kingfisher as their primary sponsor and owner.

Also the ouster of teams like Rajasthan Royals (RR) and Chennai SuperKings (CSK) has not had much effect on the viewership towards the game. (See Appendix D, Appendix G)

As it is evident, a brand molecular approach can virtually reverse all the strategies followed by the brand managers of IPL. This is because a brand molecule is a representation of a customer's view towards a brand.

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