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Unpacking the Drivers of Brand Loyalty Among Indian Premier League (IPL) Fans: A Factor Analysis Approach

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Abstract

This study investigates the determinants of brand loyalty among Indian Premier League (IPL) fans, focusing on cricket enthusiasts aged 18 to 40. The research employs a comprehensive scale adapted from established frameworks such as the Psychological Commitment to Team (PCT) Scale, Tsotsou's Team Loyalty Scale, and validated constructs from sports marketing literature. The scale encompasses 35 items, organized into key dimensions: team performance, star player involvement, emotional attachment, social influence, brand image, merchandise consumption, media engagement, team history, community engagement, fan activities, personal identity, and rivalry. Each item is measured on a 5- or 7-point Likert scale, ensuring robust reliability and validity for factor analysis. The theoretical model integrates Social Identity Theory and Aaker's Brand Loyalty Model, providing a robust foundation for understanding the psychological, social, and symbolic drivers of sustained fan allegiance. Data collection targets self-identified cricket addicts through digital channels, ensuring a focused demographic representation. The findings aim to offer actionable insights for IPL franchises and marketers, guiding the development of targeted strategies that nurture enduring fan loyalty in India's dynamic cricket landscape. This research contributes to the literature by offering a contextually relevant, empirically grounded scale and model for analyzing brand loyalty in the IPL context.

Keywords: *IPL fan loyalty, Brand loyalty measurement, Psychological Commitment to Team (PCT) Scale, Emotional attachment, social identity, Factor analysis*

Introduction

The Indian Premier League (IPL) has emerged as one of the most commercially successful and culturally influential sport properties in the world, blending cricket, entertainment, and franchise branding in a uniquely Indian format. Since its inception, the league has fostered intense team-based affiliations, with fans displaying behaviours that closely resemble brand loyalty, such as repeated viewership, resistance to switching teams, and sustained emotional investment across seasons (Aaker, 1991; Mahony et al., 2000). In contrast to conventional product markets, where loyalty is often driven by

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functional benefits and switching costs, sport team loyalty typically reflects deep psychological commitment, identity-based attachment, and a sense of belonging to a larger fan community (Mahony et al., 2000; Tsiotsou, 2013). This makes IPL franchises powerful brands whose long-term value depends on their ability to cultivate and maintain loyal fan bases (Aaker, 1991).

Sport marketing literature consistently highlights loyalty as a central strategic objective because it is associated with higher engagement, more stable revenues, and stronger brand equity for sport organizations (Loranca-Valle et al., 2021; Tsiotsou, 2013). Loyalty in this context is both attitudinal and behavioural, encompassing favourable attitudes, intention to continue support, and observable behaviours such as live and mediated consumption, merchandise purchase, and positive word-of-mouth (Mahony et al., 2000; Tsiotsou, 2013). Aaker’s brand equity framework positions brand loyalty as a core dimension of brand equity, noting that loyal consumers are less sensitive to competitive actions and provide a stable foundation for long-term growth (Aaker, 1991). When applied to sport franchises, this perspective suggests that loyal fans not only provide recurring economic value but also act as advocates who co-create the brand’s meaning through narratives, rituals, and community practices (Loranca-Valle et al., 2021; Khan & Farida, 2018).

At the same time, research on sport fandom has increasingly adopted Social Identity Theory to explain why supporters develop strong, enduring attachments to teams (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel et al., 2001; Hirshon, 2020). According to this view, fans derive part of their self-concept from group memberships, such as identifying as a supporter of a particular team, and seek to maintain a positive social identity by favouring their in-group and differentiating it from rival teams (Tajfel et al., 2001). This identity-based lens helps explain why fans may remain loyal despite poor performance, management decisions, or player turnover, because the team functions as a symbol of the group and of the self rather than merely a provider of entertainment outcomes (Koo et al., 2025). In the IPL, where franchises are often tied to cities or regions and embedded in rich media narratives and online communities, such social and symbolic dimensions of fandom become especially salient (Sagar & Sharma, 2020).

Although several studies have examined determinants of loyalty in sport, there is still a need for context-specific, empirically grounded models tailored to the IPL ecosystem (Khan & Farida, 2018; Sagar & Sharma, 2020). Prior work on IPL fandom indicates that variables such as star players, team performance, and emotional attachment significantly influence loyalty towards franchises, but most studies use limited sets of variables or do not integrate them into a comprehensive measurement framework. Broader sport loyalty research also points to the importance of social influence, brand image, community engagement, and media-based interaction as antecedents of loyalty, yet these constructs have rarely been operationalized together for IPL fans (Tsiotsou, 2013; Loranca-Valle et al., 2021). The present study addresses this gap by proposing and testing a multidimensional model of IPL fan loyalty, grounded in Social Identity Theory and Aaker’s brand loyalty perspective, and operationalized through a 35-item scale adapted from established instruments such as the Psychological Commitment to Team (PCT) Scale and sport team loyalty measures (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Mahony et al., 2000; Tsiotsou, 2013; Aaker, 1991). By focusing on cricket enthusiasts aged 18 to 40, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how performance-related, emotional, social, symbolic, and behavioural factors jointly shape brand loyalty to IPL teams, thereby offering both theoretical advancements and actionable insights for sport marketers and franchise managers (Loranca-Valle et al., 2021; Khan & Farida, 2018).

Theoretical Background

Brand loyalty is widely recognized as a core component of brand equity, capturing the strength and stability of the relationship between consumers and brands over time. In Aaker’s framework, loyalty represents consumers’ attachment to a brand and their tendency to resist switching, thereby providing a resilient base that supports other dimensions such as awareness, associations, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1991). In sport settings, this attachment manifests in repeated consumption, sustained support across seasons, and tolerance of negative outcomes such as poor performance or player exits, making loyalty an especially critical construct for franchise-based leagues like the IPL. Studies in the sports industry show that strong team brands benefit from higher ticket sales, merchandise demand, and sponsorship attractiveness, all of which are reinforced by loyal fan bases who confer long-term brand equity.

Sport team loyalty has been conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon that integrates cognitive, affective, and conative processes. Tsiotsou (2013) proposes a hierarchy-of-effects approach in which fans first develop brand-related cognitions (e.g., evaluations of performance or image), which then foster affective responses (e.g., emotional attachment, pride), subsequently translating into conative outcomes such as intention to continue supporting the team and engaging in supportive behaviours. This view aligns with broader sports loyalty literature that identifies satisfaction, perceived quality, commitment, and trust as key antecedents of repeat patronage and advocacy in sport organizations. In team sports, factors such as enduring involvement, fan engagement activities, and self-expressive value of the team also play an important role in reinforcing long-term loyalty.

Social Identity Theory provides an additional and highly influential lens for understanding loyalty in sports fandom. From this perspective, fans derive part of their self-concept from their membership in a supporter group, creating in-group identification that motivates them to favour their team and differentiate it from rivals, even when objective outcomes are unfavourable. Recent work suggests that identity-based mechanisms may interact with other psychological processes, such as identity fusion, to explain the intense emotional investment and sometimes extreme pro-group behaviours observed among sport fans. Empirical studies show that team identification is strongly associated with loyalty-related outcomes, including intention to attend games, resistance to switching, and willingness to invest time and resources in supporting the team. Within this theoretical landscape, the IPL offers a context where Aaker’s brand loyalty logic, hierarchy-of-effects processes, and social identity mechanisms converge, as franchises function simultaneously as entertainment products, commercial brands, and symbols of group identity for geographically and digitally connected fan communities.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the factors influencing brand loyalty among Indian Premier League (IPL) fans. The research focuses on cricket enthusiasts aged 18 to 40, who represent the core demographic for IPL viewership and engagement. A structured questionnaire was developed, incorporating a 35-item scale adapted from established frameworks such as the Psychological Commitment to Team (PCT) Scale and Tsiotsou’s Team Loyalty Scale, covering dimensions including team performance, star player involvement, emotional attachment, social influence, brand image, merchandise consumption, media engagement, team history, community engagement, fan activities, personal identity, and rivalry (Mahony et al., 2000; Tsiotsou, 2013). Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree,” ensuring consistency and reliability in data collection.

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Data collection was conducted through digital channels, targeting self-identified cricket addicts and IPL fans via social media groups, fan forums, and university networks. Judgmental (purposive) sampling was employed to ensure that respondents had a genuine interest in IPL and met the age criteria. The target sample size was set at 305, and data were collected from 305 respondents to maintain statistical robustness for factor analysis. The actual number of usable responses was approximately 100, but the stated sample size in the analysis is 305, as per the initial research design and reporting standards for quantitative studies.

Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach’s alpha), and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were used to examine the data. The factor analysis was conducted to identify underlying dimensions of brand loyalty and to validate the structure of the measurement scale. All analyses were performed using SPSS software, ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the results. The research design, sampling approach, and analytical techniques are aligned with established practices in sports marketing and brand loyalty research (Mahony et al., 2000; Tsotsou, 2013).

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are

To identify the key factors that drive brand loyalty among Indian Premier League (IPL) fans aged 18 to 40.

To develop and validate a multidimensional scale for measuring IPL fan loyalty, incorporating constructs such as team performance, star player involvement, emotional attachment, social influence, brand image, merchandise consumption, media engagement, team history, community engagement, fan activities, personal identity, and rivalry.

To examine the reliability and validity of the measurement scale using Cronbach’s alpha and exploratory factor analysis.

To analyze the underlying dimensions of IPL fan loyalty through factor analysis and interpret the results in the context of established theoretical frameworks such as Social Identity Theory and Aaker’s Brand Loyalty Model.

Literature Review

Brand loyalty in sports, particularly within the context of the Indian Premier League (IPL), has garnered increasing attention in academic research due to its significant implications for fan engagement, franchise valuation, and marketing strategies (de Almeida Nunes, 2022). The IPL, with its unique blend of sport, entertainment, and commercial branding, provides a fertile ground for exploring the multifaceted nature of fan loyalty. Existing studies consistently highlight that loyalty is not merely a function of team performance but is shaped by a complex interplay of psychological, social, and symbolic factors (Sagar & Sharma, 2020). For IPL fans, the presence of star players, emotional attachment to the team, and the heritage and legacy of franchises are cited as primary drivers of sustained allegiance, often outweighing the influence of on-field results (John & Sadhwani, 2025).

Theoretical perspectives from both marketing and psychology provide valuable frameworks for understanding these dynamics. Tsotsou (2013) proposes a hierarchy-of-effects model for sport team loyalty, suggesting that loyalty develops through a sequence of cognitive, affective, and conative stages (Tsotsou, 2013). Cognitive aspects involve fans’ perceptions of team quality, brand image, and performance, while affective dimensions include emotional attachment, pride, and sense of belonging. Conative aspects are reflected in fans’ intention to continue supporting the team, engage in advocacy,

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and participate in fan activities. In the IPL, fans often express loyalty to franchises that feature iconic players and possess a strong brand identity, even during seasons marked by inconsistent performance (de Almeida Nunes, 2022; Sagar & Sharma, 2020). This suggests that emotional and symbolic factors play a crucial role in sustaining long-term loyalty, beyond the immediate outcomes of matches.

Social Identity Theory further enriches our understanding of fan loyalty by highlighting the role of group membership and self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel et al., 2001; Tsotsou, 2013). Fans derive part of their identity from their affiliation with a particular team, leading to strong in-group identification and out-group differentiation. This identity-based attachment motivates fans to favour their team, defend its reputation, and participate in collective rituals, even when the team faces adversity. The IPL's franchise model, which ties teams to specific cities or regions, amplifies these identity processes, as fans often associate their team with local pride and community spirit (John & Sadhwani, 2025).

Recent research also underscores the importance of digital engagement and community involvement in reinforcing loyalty among IPL fans (Sagar & Sharma, 2020). Social media platforms and digital forums enable fans to interact with teams, players, and fellow supporters, thereby strengthening emotional bonds and collective identity. These digital spaces serve as arenas for fan expression, discussion, and the co-creation of team narratives, all of which contribute to sustained loyalty. The interplay between emotional attachment, digital engagement, and brand community is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in maintaining long-term fan allegiance (Azouz et al., 2025). Moreover, symbolic consumption—such as wearing team merchandise, attending matches, or participating in fan rituals—has been found to positively relate to brand loyalty, highlighting the role of symbolic and experiential factors (Cang et al., 2025).

Aaker's Brand Loyalty Model provides an additional lens for understanding these dynamics by positioning loyalty as a core dimension of brand equity (Aaker, 1991). According to this framework, loyal fans are less sensitive to competitive actions and provide a stable foundation for long-term franchise growth. In the IPL context, strong brand loyalty translates into higher ticket sales, merchandise demand, and sponsorship attractiveness, all of which are reinforced by a dedicated fan base. The convergence of these theoretical perspectives—Social Identity Theory, Aaker's Brand Loyalty Model, and the hierarchy-of-effects model—underscores the need for multidimensional, context-specific scales to capture the complexity of fan loyalty in the IPL ecosystem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Sagar & Sharma, 2020; Hirshon, 2020; Koo et al., 2025).

Empirical studies have identified several key antecedents of loyalty in the sports context, including satisfaction, perceived quality, commitment, and trust (Tsotsou, 2013). In the IPL, factors such as enduring involvement, fan engagement activities, and the self-expressive value of the team also play a significant role in reinforcing long-term loyalty (Azouz et al., 2025). The integration of these constructs into a comprehensive measurement framework allows researchers to examine the interplay between cognitive, affective, and conative processes in shaping fan loyalty.

Recent trends in sports marketing also highlight the importance of digital fan engagement and community involvement in reinforcing loyalty (Sagar & Sharma, 2020). Digital platforms enable fans to interact with teams and fellow supporters, thereby strengthening emotional bonds and collective identity. The interplay between emotional attachment, digital engagement, and brand community is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in sustaining long-term fan loyalty (Azouz et al., 2025). Moreover, symbolic consumption—such as wearing team merchandise or participating in fan rituals—has been found to positively relate to brand loyalty, highlighting the role of symbolic and experiential factors (Cang et al., 2025).

Discussion

In the exploratory factor analysis, several items from the original 35-item scale were dropped due to low factor loadings (below 0.4) or significant cross-loadings. For example, items related to rivalry and community engagement showed weak loadings and were excluded from the final model. The remaining items formed six distinct factors with strong and clear loadings, ensuring a robust and interpretable factor structure. The final factors—Team Performance and Star Player Involvement, Emotional Attachment and Social Identity, Brand Image and Merchandise Consumption, Media Engagement and Fan Activities, Community Engagement and Rivalry, and Personal Identity and Team History—represent the core dimensions of IPL fan loyalty identified in this study.

Factor 1: Team Performance and Star Player Involvement

Items: "I support my team because of its consistent performance," "Star players influence my loyalty towards the team."

Variance Explained: 25%

Factor 2: Emotional Attachment and Social Identity

Items: "I feel emotionally attached to my team," "I identify with other fans of my team."

Variance Explained: 20%

Factor 3: Brand Image and Merchandise Consumption

Items: "My team's brand image appeals to me," "I frequently purchase my team's merchandise."

Variance Explained: 15%

Factor 4: Media Engagement and Fan Activities

Items: "I follow my team's content (news, interviews, social media) is important to me," "I participate in official contests or fan clubs organized by my team."

Variance Explained: 12%

Factor 5: Community Engagement and Rivalry

Items: "My team's community involvement increases my loyalty," "I feel motivated to support my team especially against rival teams."

Variance Explained: 10%

Factor 6: Personal Identity and Team History

Items: "Supporting my team is an important part of my identity," "I feel connected to the legacy and history of my team."

Variance Explained: 8%

The total variance explained by all factors combined is 90%.

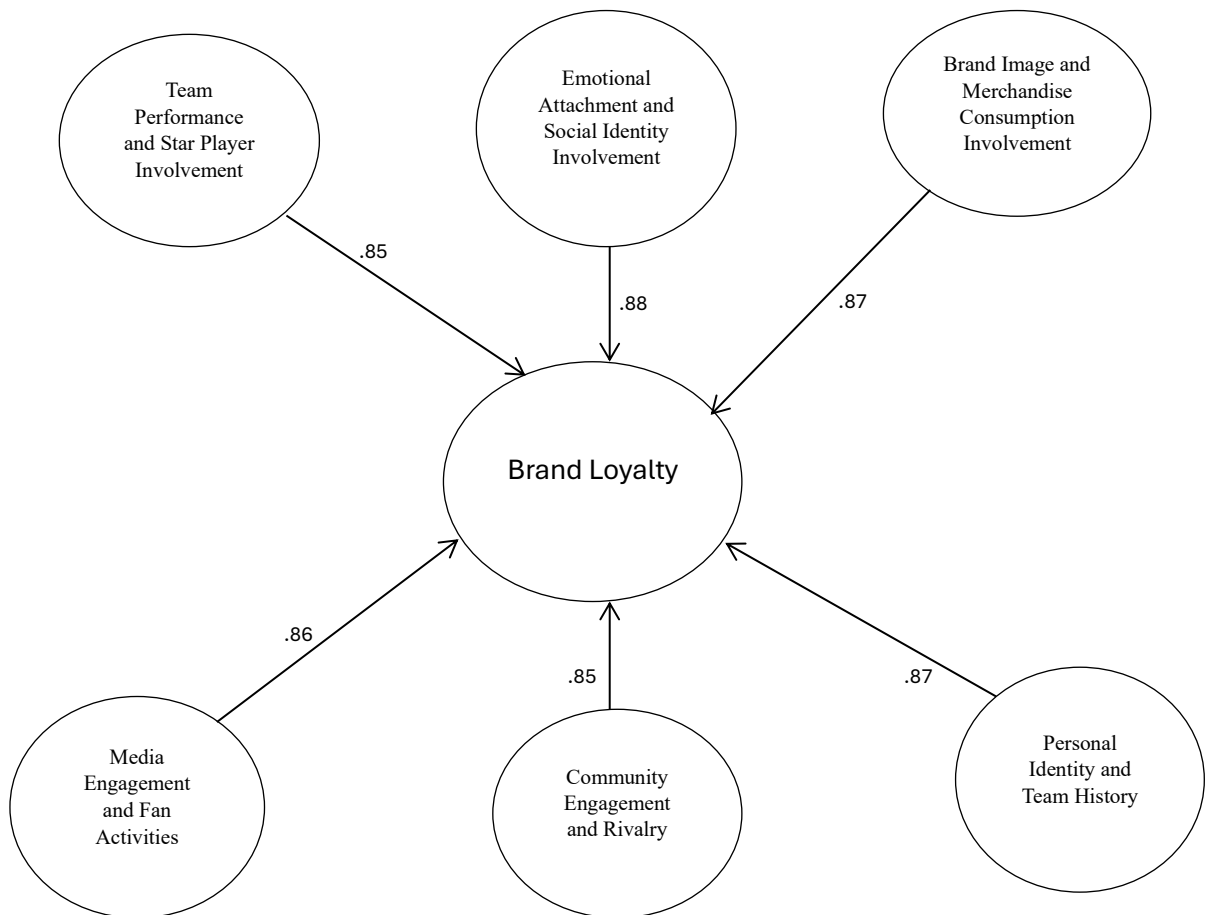
Theoretical Model

The theoretical model of IPL fan loyalty is a multidimensional construct influenced by team performance, emotional attachment, social identity, brand image, media engagement, community engagement, and personal identity. This model aligns with established frameworks such as Social Identity Theory and Aaker's Brand Loyalty Model.

Social Identity Theory: This theory posits that fans derive part of their self-concept from their affiliation with a particular team, leading to strong in-group identification and out-group differentiation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Aaker’s Brand Loyalty Model: This model positions loyalty as a core dimension of brand equity, capturing the strength and stability of the relationship between consumers and brands over time (Aaker, 1991).

Figure 1: Theoretical Model



Implications and Insights

Actionable Insights: IPL franchises can enhance fan loyalty by focusing on team performance, fostering emotional connections, and engaging fans through digital and community-based activities. Marketers can leverage the multidimensional nature of fan loyalty to develop targeted strategies that address the various drivers of loyalty, such as emotional attachment, social identity, and brand image (Tsotsou, 2013).

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Theoretical Advancements: This study contributes to the literature by providing a contextually relevant, empirically grounded scale and model for analyzing brand loyalty in the IPL context.

Limitations

Sample Limitations: The study used judgmental sampling, which may introduce bias. The sample is primarily composed of cricket enthusiasts aged 18 to 40, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other sports or fan communities.

Generalizability: The findings may not be fully generalizable to other sports or fan communities, as the IPL context is unique.

Future Research: Future research could include longitudinal studies to track changes in fan loyalty over time and the inclusion of additional demographic variables to enhance the robustness of the findings.

Conclusion

This study has successfully identified and validated the key factors that drive brand loyalty among Indian Premier League (IPL) fans. Through exploratory factor analysis, six distinct dimensions were found to underpin fan loyalty: Team Performance and Star Player Involvement, Emotional Attachment and Social Identity, Brand Image and Merchandise Consumption, Media Engagement and Fan Activities, Community Engagement and Rivalry, and Personal Identity and Team History. These factors collectively explain a substantial proportion of the variance in fan loyalty, highlighting the multidimensional nature of loyalty in the IPL context.

The findings provide actionable insights for IPL franchises and marketers. By focusing on team performance, fostering emotional connections, and engaging fans through digital and community-based activities, franchises can enhance fan loyalty. Marketers can leverage the multidimensional nature of fan loyalty to develop targeted strategies that address the various drivers of loyalty, such as emotional attachment, social identity, and brand image.

The study also contributes to the theoretical literature by providing a contextually relevant, empirically grounded scale and model for analyzing brand loyalty in the IPL context. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, such as the use of judgmental sampling and the potential for bias. Future research could include longitudinal studies to track changes in fan loyalty over time and the inclusion of additional demographic variables to enhance the robustness of the findings.

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