

Decoupling of Brand Equity from On-Field Performance: Brand Love, SERVQUAL, and the New Logic of IPL Franchise Loyalty in 2025

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Abstract:

For a long time, the conventional wisdom in sports marketing was remarkably simple: your brand is only as strong as your last win. If the team started losing, the logic went, the fans and the money would inevitably disappear. But after eighteen seasons of the IPL, that old rulebook is effectively being rewritten. We wanted to understand why some franchises remain commercial powerhouses despite years of mediocre results, so we applied the SERVQUAL framework—a tool usually reserved for high-end service industries—to measure the actual disconnect between what fans expect from their teams and what they really get.

To get to the heart of this, we surveyed 1,038 fans across all ten active franchises during the 2025 season. We didn't just ask them if they liked their team; we asked them how they would react if their team hit absolute rock bottom. The responses were nothing short of a revelation. Nearly half of the people we spoke to—49.4 percent, to be exact—insisted that their loyalty wouldn't budge even if their team finished in the cellar for two years in a row. When we pushed further, 64 percent admitted they would still tune in even if their team ended this current season in last place. Only about one in eight said they'd walk away entirely.

Perhaps the most telling part of the data involved the "superstar effect." There is a common fear that the IPL is driven solely by icons like Virat Kohli, MS Dhoni, or Rohit Sharma. However, 83% of fans told us that if these legends retired tomorrow, they would still stand by the team's banner. This suggests that "Brand Love"—that deep, often stubborn emotional bond—has become a massive safety net against poor performance. These franchises have evolved. They aren't just cricket teams anymore; for the most dedicated supporters, they have become personal identities and social communities. This paper explores how that shift happened and what it means for the future of sports business, where the "brand" has finally managed to decouple itself from the scoreboard.

Keywords:

brand love, digital belonging, emotional equity, ipl fan loyalty, losing team paradox, SERVQUAL, star power dependency.