



Sports Leagues in India: Evolution through COVID19 Pandemic Period

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Abstract: The concept of sports leagues in India was boomed through the inception of IPL in 2008 and after that there was no looking back. Many sports leagues such as Pro Kabaddi League, Indian Super League etc. came into existence. The COVID19 pandemic period affected almost everything and it had a huge impact on these leagues and their organisations as well. The present study has the aim to see their evolution through this period. The two popular leagues i.e. IPL and ISL were considered for this study on the basis of their viewership in 2019, 2020 and 2021 which was respectively pre, during and post COVID19 years. It was asserted from the data that ISL has shown more growth, i.e. of around 55% in viewership during the pandemic in comparison with IPL which could manage to increase the viewership of around 8% only.

Key Words: Sports Leagues, Viewership, Cricket, Soccer, TRP, OTT.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The sports leagues in the sports culture of India is not a new concept but it has now updated itself by inculcating the franchises format leagues in different games. At present there are around seven active leagues in India. Some are at their growing stage and others like the IPL are at the peak of its popularity. People are taking interest both as viewers and potential players. So, there is a need of proper understanding of the interests before, during and after COVID19 period with reference to commercial sports viewership in India. Post India's victory in the 2007 T20 World cup, BCCI announced the franchise format of T20 cricket league. The competition called Indian Premier League (IPL). The first season of IPL was launched in 2008 in a high profile manner in New Delhi. First edition (2008) to latest edition (2021) contested by eight (08) teams. But, next tournament (2022) will be having Ten (10) teams competing for the trophy. All the IPL seasons set massive viewership records of million average impressions. IPL is usually held between month of March and May every year.

Indian super league is a men's professional football league. The league was structured similar to Indian Premier League. ISL was announced in October 2013. ISL is organised by All India Football Federation (AIFF) and their commercial partners Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL). They tie up with Hero Motor corp, for sponsorship, and hence it is officially called Hero Indian Super League. In its first season in 2014 the league witnessed the participation of eight teams. The league is now contested by 11 teams.

Thus, in this study the researchers have tried to figure out the growth rates of viewership of IPL and ISL before, during and after COVID19 keeping the viewership of TV/OTT platform users within the aforesaid duration.

1.1. OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this study was to analyse and observe the evolution of different popular leagues i.e. IPL and ISL before, during and after COVID19 period with reference to commercial sports viewership in India.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

One of the two most popular games in world i.e. Football (ISL) and Cricket (IPL) leagues of three seasons i.e. 2019, 2020 and 2021 were chosen for the purpose of this study as the study focuses on the evolution of these leagues before, during and after the pandemic. The purpose of this study was to analyse the viewership pattern of these games. The present study relies upon the secondary data for its major outcomes. The data from the various reports of BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) and some reputed news articles were collected and analysed graphically using Microsoft Excel and from the results obtained, the researchers have drawn their conclusions. The data shows how viewership pattern has evolved in these leagues before, during and after COVID19.



3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS:

The researchers observes the cumulative viewership of Indian Premier League (IPL) and Indian Super League (ISL) in millions with the help of various secondary sources data.

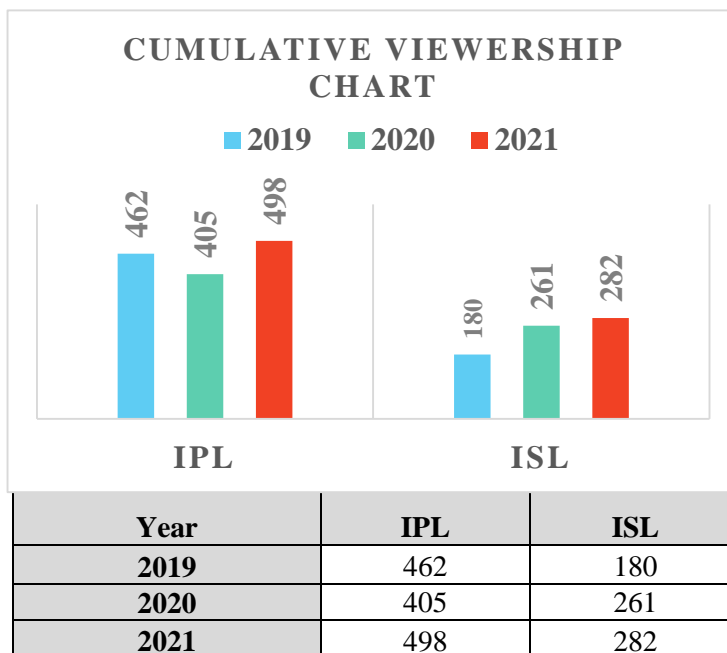
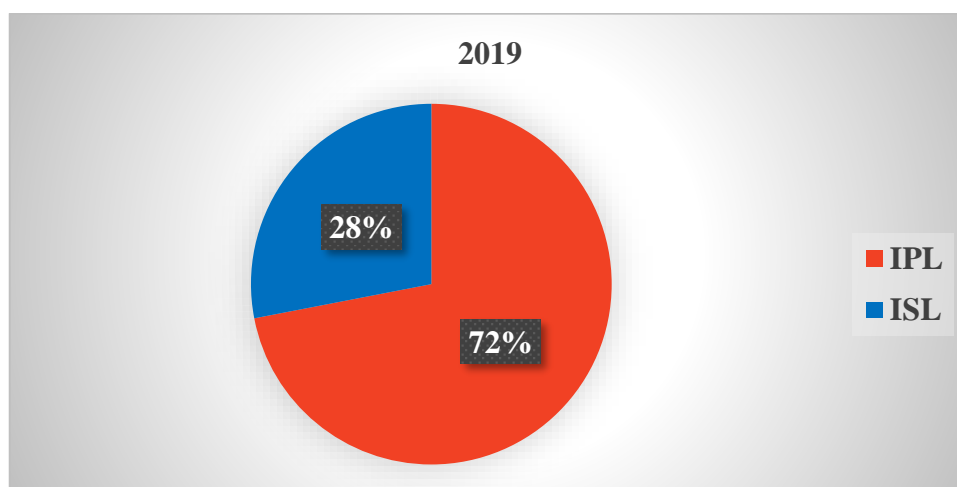


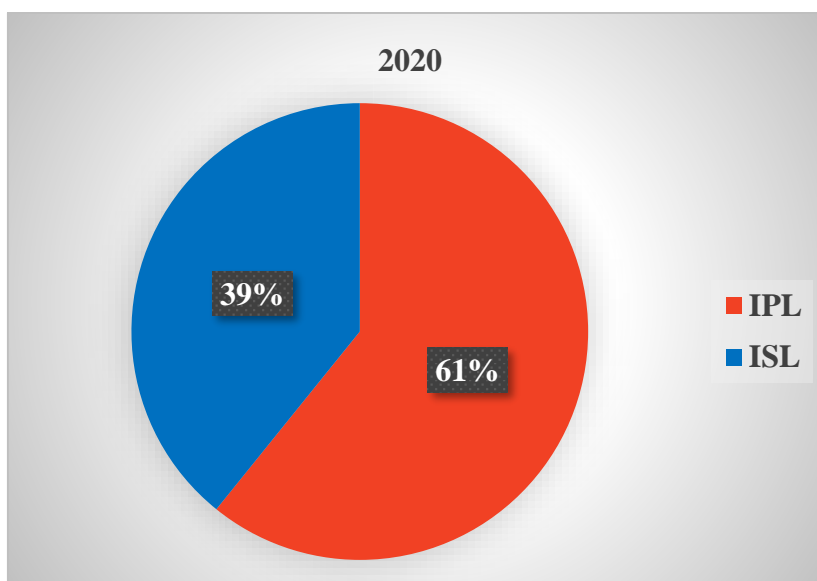
TABLE 1 & GRAPH 1: Cumulative Viewership of Indian Premier League (IPL) and Indian Super League (ISL) in millions

The data in table 1, obtained from various secondary sources regarding Cumulative Viewership of IPL and ISL during 2019, 2020 and 2021 were tabulated year wise. It has been observed that in Indian Premier League the viewership decreases during COVID19 period in 2020. But soon after the observing the first wave of COVID19, the 2021 season again shows the peak of cumulative viewership growth very close to 500 million. The Indian Super League has shown their regular growth season wise. This increase in Cumulative Viewership of IPL and ISL was due to many reasons but the major contributing reason was during lockdown period people evolved themselves in watching TV/OTT platforms due to COVID19. The similar observations can be easily observed through graph 1.



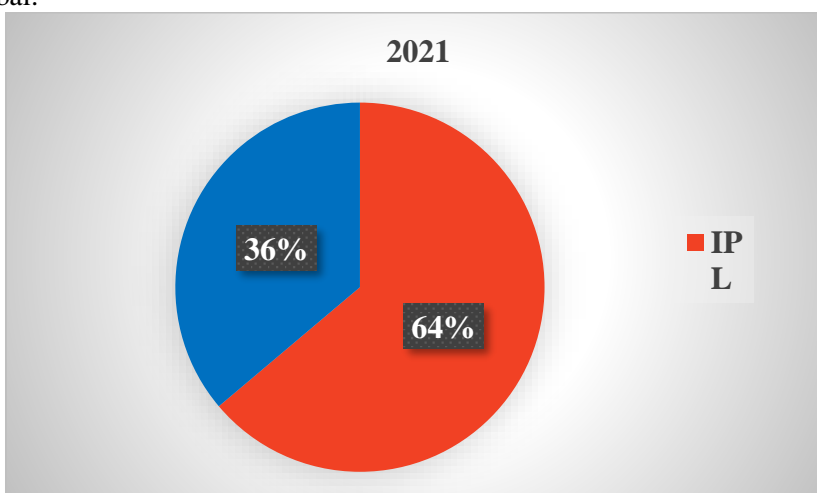
GRAPH 2: Cumulative Viewership of Indian Premier League (IPL) and Indian Super League (ISL) before COVID19 in millions

From graph 2, it was observed that before COVID19 (in 2019), the IPL with 72% viewership, has major portion of the shares of viewership market among these two leagues i.e. Indian Premier League (IPL) and Indian Super League (ISL). ISL has share of 28% to its account. It was observed that a clear dominance of Cricket fans over the Football fans before the pandemic. But the Football is also gaining visible growth in Indian viewership market.



GRAPH 3: Cumulative Viewership of Indian Premier League (IPL) and Indian Super League (ISL) during COVID19 in millions

From graph 3, it has been clearly observed that IPL have registered a loss of about 11 % in the cumulative viewership which is due to conducting the IPL right after the end of lockdown phase 1 in India (i.e. Sept-Oct, 2020), in spite of organising the same at its regular schedule in April- May every year. This has not been an issue with ISL because their regular seasons were organised after the lockdown. So, ISL registers a growth of 11% in its cumulative viewership as compared with its viewership in the previous season among these two prominent leagues. One of the evident reason for this growth was the announcement of the official inclusion of two teams from I-League to ISL from 2021 season, which surely elevated the interest of classical Indian Soccer fans towards ISL. However, a downfall of around 55 million in cumulative viewership is due to the fear of COVID19 right after the lockdown 1 and the shift of whole league in a foreign location i.e. Dubai.



GRAPH 4: Cumulative Viewership of Indian Premier League (IPL) and Indian Super League (ISL) after COVID19 in millions

From graph 4, it was being observed that between these two leagues, IPL has registered a growth of 3% in its cumulative viewership whereas there was a decrease in viewership data of ISL by percentage. But the ISL also has observed an increment in the cumulative viewership of around 20 million to its account from the last season. This shows the clear effect of new merger between I-league and ISL. It was being observed that around 55% (100 million) of the cumulative viewership increased for ISL when pre COVID and post COVID data was being compared. Similar change with an increment of more than 90 million viewership was observed for IPL from the previous season. This growth results in only around 8% for the IPL viewership as compared with pre COVID and post COVID data. This leads us to an assertion that the viewers are getting involved in other games as well along with Cricket.



5. CONCLUSION:

It was concluded that the cumulative viewership of IPL and ISL has survived and evolved successfully during this COVID19 pandemic which had left its greater impact on the whole world. For ISL, the net growth from pre COVID and Post COVID period was 55% which was a huge number and reflects a greater impact of the merger of I-League (official national level league of All India Football Federation) with ISL which eventually brought lots of Indian viewers and fans of I-League teams together with ISL viewers. For IPL, it was being cleared already from the data that it has gained a growth of around 8% only during this pre COVID and post COVID regime. IPL has also registers many unfortunate cases of players and officials being tested COVID positive which has led the discontinuation of the league for a period. But the IPL was still the most popular and top viewership leagues among all the other Indian Leagues. No doubt the growth is lesser as far as the numbers are concern but it was also true that the league was still growing in viewership numbers. This maybe the reason that IPL governing council has decided to cash the popularity of IPL by including two new franchise teams from the season 2022 which will be the fifteenth edition of the league.

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