

# Study To Analyse Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing in Building Brand Loyalty in the Indian Cricket Sports Industry

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**Abstract:** - The research report, titled “Study to Analyse Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing in Building Brand Loyalty in the Indian Cricket Sports Industry,” provides an analytical overview of how strategies centered on key personalities and digital creators influence consumer commitment to leading cricket equipment manufacturers. Specifically, the study examines the approaches of three major Indian brands: Sareen Sports (SS Ton), Sanspareils Greenlands (SG), and MRF (Madras Rubber Factory). Relying exclusively on secondary data from academic studies and industry analyses (e.g., Deloitte, Nielsen), the study synthesises evidence to build a conceptual framework around authenticity, trust, and fan engagement as critical mediating factors between influencer campaigns and brand loyalty. The findings highlight that mere celebrity association is insufficient; success depends on credible, values-aligned influencers who foster emotional connections and active fan interaction. Examples such as MRF’s long-term bat sponsorships with legends like Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli and SG’s product co-creation with Hardik Pandya demonstrate how strategic endorsement can enhance loyalty by linking performance, quality, and brand identity. The study concludes with managerial implications for SS, SG, and MRF, outlining how they can refine influencer strategies to cultivate lasting brand commitment in India’s emotionally charged cricket culture.

**Keywords** – Influencer marketing, brand loyalty, Indian cricket, SS Ton, SG, MRF, athlete endorsements.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Cricket in India transcends the definition of a mere sport; it is an economic powerhouse and a national obsession that permeates the social and cultural fabric of the country. Over 40 percent of Indians actively follow cricket, fuelling a robust market for cricket equipment and apparel. The Indian cricket equipment market, valued at approximately USD 46.5 million in 2024, is projected to reach around USD 82.2 million by 2034, driven by sustained fan demand, rising disposable incomes, and the professionalisation of the sport from grassroots to the Indian Premier League. The Asia-Pacific region, largely led by India, commands roughly 71 percent of the global cricket market, underlining the strategic importance of Indian brands in this sector.

Within this competitive environment, Sanspareils Greenlands (SG), Sareen Sports (SS Ton), and MRF have emerged as dominant indigenous manufacturers. SG and SS Ton are recognised as formidable forces in Asia-Pacific cricket gear, known for tailoring high-quality products to local playing conditions and preferences. MRF, primarily a tyre manufacturer, has leveraged its sports division and platforms such as the MRF Pace Foundation to build a powerful cricket brand identity. As competition intensifies and product offerings converge, cultivating long-term brand loyalty rather than one-time purchase becomes a key strategic imperative for these firms.

Loyal customers—those who regularly repurchase and recommend the brand—create predictable revenue streams and generate influential word-of-mouth. In an aspirational sport like cricket, where fans seek to emulate their heroes, the equipment used by elite players signals both performance and status. When a star batsman uses a specific bat brand, fans are more likely to desire and purchase that same brand, making player endorsement a powerful lever for shaping loyalty. Consequently, cricket brands invest heavily in influencer

marketing—particularly athlete endorsements—to tap into emotional bonds and convert hero worship into brand allegiance.

Influencer marketing, covering professional athletes, celebrities, and digital creators, has become a central engagement tool due to its perceived authenticity and personal credibility. Unlike traditional top-down advertising, influencers communicate in a more relatable, conversational style. Evidence shows that fans follow more individual creators than corporate brand accounts and increasingly unfollow generic brand pages, reinforcing the importance of authentic voices. In Indian cricket, this shift is visible in large-scale bat sponsorships, collaborative equipment design, and highly produced social media content built around star athletes.

Despite such high investment, there is limited academic work that specifically examines how these influencer campaigns affect long-term brand loyalty in the niche, high-emotion context of Indian cricket. Much of the existing literature is either global in scope or focused on short-term metrics such as awareness and reach. This gap motivates the central research question of this study: How effective is influencer marketing at building brand loyalty in the Indian cricket industry, specifically for SS Ton, SG, and MRF?

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. Influencer Marketing: Authenticity and Trust

Influencer marketing refers to strategic partnerships between brands and individuals with significant followings—whether athletes, celebrities, or digital creators—to advocate products and services. Recent developments show a shift from generic celebrity endorsements towards collaborations with social-media-savvy personalities who engage frequently and directly with their audiences. The success of this approach depends less on raw reach and more on perceived intimacy and authenticity in the influencer–follower relationship.

Academic studies consistently emphasise that authenticity is a prerequisite for long-term loyalty outcomes from influencer campaigns. Research indicates that endorsements must appear genuine and aligned with the brand's identity to overcome scepticism about paid promotions. The concept of influencer–brand congruence highlights that the influencer's values, lifestyle, and reputation should fit the brand image. In the context of cricket equipment, this means selecting athletes whose playing style, performance, and public persona reflect the quality and ambition that the brand aspires to project.

The underlying mechanism is often explained through the transfer of credibility and the development of parasocial relationships, where fans feel a one-sided emotional

connection with an influencer. When fans trust an influencer's judgment, that trust is transferred to the endorsed product, strengthening attitudes and purchase intentions. Empirical evidence shows that influencer credibility can explain a significant portion of variance in brand loyalty, underlining its commercial importance. Conversely, misaligned or insincere partnerships can backfire, damaging the brand's reputation and undermining loyalty.

### B. Brand Loyalty in Sports Context

Brand loyalty is commonly defined as the consumer's commitment to repurchase or continue using a brand over alternatives. In sports, loyalty is amplified by emotional intensity and the aspirational nature of athletic performance. Fans' affiliations with teams and players can translate directly into preferences for associated equipment and apparel brands. The Sponsorship Preference Effect, documented by market research, shows that a majority of sports fans prefer sponsor brands over non-sponsors when price and quality are similar, highlighting the value of strategic sponsorship.

When a revered cricketer like Virat Kohli uses an MRF-branded bat, fans often interpret this as an endorsement of quality and performance, making them more inclined to purchase MRF gear. This effect demonstrates how emotional allegiance to heroes can be monetised by brands through sponsorship. Athletes in the digital age are also powerful content creators, using social networks to share training routines, technical tips, and personal stories. These interactions reinforce trust and serve as ongoing, informal endorsement content that reinforces both short-term purchase intent and long-term loyalty.

### C. Empirical Evidence on Influence and Loyalty

Research on influencer marketing across industries provides quantitative evidence linking influencer exposure to improved brand outcomes. Studies by firms such as Nielsen report that users exposed to influencer-led advertising show significantly higher purchase intent compared to non-exposed control groups. For cricket brands, this implies that visibility through athlete endorsements and digital campaigns can be expected to enhance conversion rates and repeat purchase behaviour relative to traditional advertising.

However, converting purchase intention into durable loyalty requires more than one-off exposure. Literature emphasises the importance of consistent, values-aligned messaging and sustained engagement to deepen emotional ties. The role of community building is particularly important; initiatives such as loyalty programmes, fan clubs, academies, and interactive events can reinforce brand attachment. For example, MRF's Pace Foundation and associated cricket academies generate

goodwill beyond product promotion, strengthening the connection between brand and fan aspirations.

### D. Spectrum of Influence: Mega and Micro-Influencers

While mega-influencers such as international stars attract attention and provide high-profile visibility, trends suggest that micro-influencers—local coaches, domestic league players, and specialised cricket content creators—also play a critical role. Fans tend to follow more individual creators than corporate accounts and often perceive smaller influencers as more approachable and authentic. For brands like SS Ton and SG, partnering with emerging or regional players allows targeted engagement in niche segments and grassroots markets.

### E. Indian Cricket Culture and Hero Worship

The Indian cricket context is characterised by intense hero worship, where top cricketers attain quasi-iconic status. Their choices, including the equipment they use, carry symbolic meaning for fans. Brands like MRF have exploited this culture through decades-long associations with “the world’s greatest batsmen,” building an aura of premium quality and trust. Younger consumers in India often trust athlete recommendations as much as, or more than, traditional advertising, making these endorsements a strong driver of loyalty.

Given the limited academic work focussed specifically on Indian cricket influencers, industry case material serves as an important proxy. SG’s emphasis on performance-based authenticity, with players such as Hardik Pandya co-creating equipment like the “Arc” curved bat, and SS Ton’s blend of heritage craftsmanship with modern player testimonials, illustrate how authenticity and legacy can be integrated into influencer strategies. Together, the literature suggests that authenticity, trust, and strong fan-creator relationships are central to turning influencer marketing into loyal consumption.

## III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The core purpose of this study is to investigate how influencer marketing shapes brand loyalty for leading Indian cricket equipment manufacturers SS Ton, SG, and MRF. To address the overarching research question, five specific objectives are formulated to move from assessing impact to identifying mechanisms and managerial implications.

### Objective 1: Assess Influencer Impact on Brand Loyalty

The first objective is to examine how influencer-driven campaigns by SS Ton, SG, and MRF affect consumers’ commitment to these brands. This involves moving beyond superficial metrics, such as likes and views, to consider repeat purchase intent and overall brand commitment after exposure

to influencer promotions. In the cricket equipment context, repeat purchase intent reflects the willingness to choose the same brand during future upgrades despite competing options.

### Objective 2: Identify Key Influencer Strategies

The second objective is to identify and analyse the specific influencer strategies deployed by the three brands and evaluate how well they resonate with cricket fans. This includes mega-star endorsements (e.g., MRF’s high-value contracts with elite batsmen), product co-creation and technical testimonials (e.g., SG’s design collaborations with national stars), and social-media-led campaigns featuring emerging talent (e.g., SS Ton’s digital promotion of upcoming cricketers).

### Objective 3: Evaluate Moderating Factors

The third objective is to evaluate moderating factors such as authenticity, trust, and influencer–brand fit that shape the effectiveness of influencer campaigns on loyalty. The literature indicates that simply purchasing attention is inadequate if the partnership appears inauthentic. This objective investigates whether consumers perceive the chosen influencers as genuine, values-aligned ambassadors and explores how long-term relationships and product co-creation enhance credibility.

### Objective 4: Contextualise Within Indian Cricket Culture

The fourth objective is to contextualise influencer-driven loyalty within the socio-cultural specifics of Indian cricket. It examines how national passion, hero worship, and high social-media usage patterns influence the impact of endorsements on loyalty. The analysis considers how brands integrate traditional on-field visibility (e.g., bat stickers) with digital engagement (e.g., reels, training videos) to maximise reach and emotional intensity.

### Objective 5: Provide Managerial Insights

The final objective is to translate theoretical and empirical insights into practical recommendations for SS Ton, SG, MRF, and similar brands. This includes guidance on strategic partnering with influencers, content strategy design, measurement of loyalty outcomes, and cultural integration, thereby creating a blueprint for leveraging influencer marketing as a sustainable loyalty-building tool.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

This study employs a secondary data analysis methodology that is descriptive and analytical in nature. Rather than collecting primary data through surveys or interviews, the research synthesises existing evidence from academic sources, industry reports, and brand cases. This design is

appropriate for a strategic, market-level question such as evaluating the effectiveness of established, large-scale influencer campaigns.

### B. Rationale for Using Secondary Data

Several reasons justify the use of secondary data. First, the research requires a macro-level understanding of the Indian cricket equipment market, including size, growth trends, and fan behaviour, which is already documented by major market research firms such as Deloitte and Grand View Research. Second, elite endorsement deals, such as MRF's long-term contracts with Virat Kohli, involve confidential details that are accessible primarily through press releases, reputable news coverage, and case studies. Third, theoretical constructs like authenticity, trust, and influencer-brand congruence are best grounded in peer-reviewed literature. Finally, time and resource constraints at the MBA level favour the efficient use of existing high-quality data over extensive primary data collection.

### C. Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Secondary data for this study is drawn from three categories: academic and scholarly publications; industry reports and market intelligence; and credible brand case materials. Academic sources include journal articles and dissertations focussing on brand loyalty, celebrity endorsement, sports marketing, and digital influence. Industry reports from organisations such as Deloitte and Nielsen provide quantitative metrics on market size, growth projections, fan preferences for sponsor brands, and social-media behaviour. Brand case material comprises press releases, company profiles, and trusted media coverage detailing endorsement deals, product collaborations, and campaign narratives for SS Ton, SG, and MRF.

A recency criterion is applied by prioritising sources published from 2018 onwards to capture current dynamics in digital marketing and social media. Within this timeframe, preference is given to sources with strong methodological rigour and relevance to sports or influencer marketing contexts.

### D. Analytical Framework

The study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to integrate diverse sources into a coherent narrative. The analysis is guided by conceptual lenses derived from the literature, particularly authenticity, trust, influencer credibility, and fan engagement. Content from academic and industry sources is coded according to these constructs, and patterns relevant to the three brands are identified.

The cross-case synthesis method is used to compare how SS Ton, SG, and MRF deploy different influencer strategies and

how those strategies align with the theoretical framework. This facilitates the identification of common success factors and brand-specific nuances in their approaches. The methodology, though qualitative, remains anchored in empirical statistics where available, such as market growth figures and reported effects of influencer campaigns on purchase intentions.

### E. Limitations

The exclusive reliance on secondary data introduces certain limitations. The study cannot directly measure the attitudes or loyalty levels of individual consumers and must infer these from published analyses and case material. Furthermore, there is limited academic work focussed explicitly on Indian cricket influencer campaigns, necessitating reliance on broader sports marketing and general influencer literature. Nevertheless, the triangulation of academic, industry, and brand data provides a robust basis for the conceptual conclusions drawn.

## V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### A. Overview of Influencer Strategies of SS Ton, SG, and MRF

The analysis reveals that MRF, SG, and SS Ton adopt distinct but complementary influencer strategies. MRF emphasises high-profile, long-term sponsorships with internationally renowned batsmen, positioning its brand alongside excellence and legacy. SS Ton combines its heritage narrative—craftsmanship since 1969—with endorsements from established and emerging Indian players to appeal both to aspirational and performance-driven consumers. SG focuses on performance-based authenticity, highlighting that top players use and help design its products, particularly through collaborations such as Hardik Pandya's involvement in the "Arc" bat.

These strategies map onto different dimensions of influence. MRF's approach prioritises awe-inspiring visibility and premium positioning, SG's emphasises technical credibility and co-creation, and SS Ton's leverages a blend of tradition and modern relevance. All three brands, however, rely heavily on the emotional pull of athlete endorsements to drive fan interest and loyalty.

### B. Role of Authenticity and Trust

The findings underscore that authenticity and trust are central to the effectiveness of influencer campaigns. MRF's long-term relationships with legends such as Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli create a perception that the players use the equipment because it meets their professional standards, not merely due to contractual obligations. This longevity reinforces the idea that the brand genuinely

supports and believes in its endorsers, which fans interpret as a sign of reliability.

SG's co-creation initiatives, where players contribute to product design, further enhance authenticity by demonstrating an active technical partnership rather than a passive endorsement. Fans perceive such collaborations as evidence that the brand listens to athlete feedback and invests in performance innovation. SS Ton's emphasis on heritage, combined with testimonials from contemporary players, bridges the past and present, suggesting both enduring quality and current relevance.

### C. Influence on Purchase Intent and Loyalty

Industry data indicates that exposure to influencer-driven campaigns tends to increase purchase intent, and case analysis suggests that this effect extends to the cricket equipment context. When players showcase branded bats or protective gear in matches and on social media, they provide repeated, credible cues about quality. Over time, these cues shape fans' consideration sets and brand preferences, especially among serious amateur players who seek aspirational yet performance-validated gear.

To translate heightened intent into loyalty, the brands must maintain consistency in messaging and partnership quality. The evidence suggests that campaigns rooted in authentic, long-term relationships and sustained fan engagement—through content, academies, and events—are more likely to result in repeat purchases and enduring brand attachment. Short-term, purely promotional collaborations risk being perceived as transactional and may not produce lasting loyalty.

### D. Cultural Context: Indian Cricket Fandom

The Indian cricket culture amplifies the impact of influencer marketing due to pervasive hero worship and strong national pride. Fans often look to top-tier cricketers as role models whose choices in equipment, training practices, and lifestyle set benchmarks. Endorsements that align with emotionally significant moments—such as iconic innings or tournament victories—can become embedded in fan memory and shape long-term brand associations.

The rapid rise of digital platforms in India further magnifies these effects. Players and brands use social media to create behind-the-scenes content, training tips, and interactive sessions, making the endorsement relationship more personal and continuous. MRF, SG, and SS Ton can thus combine on-field visibility with off-field digital engagement to create a multi-touch point influence journey that reinforces loyalty.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that influencer marketing is a powerful tool for building brand loyalty in the Indian cricket equipment market, provided campaigns are grounded in authenticity, trust, and sustained engagement. High-profile athlete endorsements, especially when structured as long-term partnerships, can anchor strong emotional associations and drive fans to prefer sponsor brands over competitors. However, the quality of influencer-brand fit and the depth of collaboration are critical determinants of success.

Managerial implications for SS Ton, SG, and MRF include the need to prioritise values-aligned partnerships over short-term visibility deals. Brands should select influencers whose playing style, public persona, and personal values reflect the brand's positioning, and who are willing to engage in meaningful, ongoing collaboration. Investment in content that goes beyond simple product placement—such as co-creation narratives, training tutorials, and behind-the-scenes stories—can further humanise the brand and deepen fan connection.

Additionally, managers should leverage fan communities through academies, loyalty programmes, and digital fan clubs to convert emotional engagement into structured loyalty. Tracking metrics such as repeat purchase intent, Net Promoter Score, and social-media sentiment around influencer content can help measure the impact of campaigns and refine strategies over time. By integrating cultural insights about Indian cricket fandom with best practices from the influencer literature, SS Ton, SG, and MRF can convert the immense passion of cricket fans into sustainable brand allegiance.

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