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**COMMERCIALIZATION OF SPORTS ACTIVITIES IN INDIA
(A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE HARYANA STATE): A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF PRE-CORONA AND POST-CORONA PERIOD**



Kumar Naveen^{1*}



Singh Baldev²

¹Associate Professor of Commerce, Govt. National College, Sirsa, (H.R), India.

²Associate Professor of Physical Education, Govt. National College, Sirsa, (H.R), India.

*Corresponding Author: Kumar Naveen

Email: navmak@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The commercialization of sports has been a dynamic and transformative process globally. India, with its rich sporting culture, has also embraced this trend, particularly in recent decades. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, disrupted sports activities across the world, causing a shift in the patterns of commercialization, investments, and public engagement. This paper seeks to examine the commercialization of sports activities in India, with special reference to Haryana, a state renowned for producing world-class athletes. The research focuses on comparing the commercialization of sports in the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods, analyzing changes in sponsorships, media rights, infrastructure development, and public interest.

Keywords: Sports commercialization, Haryana, COVID-19, Sponsorship, Sports economy, Pre-Corona & Post-Corona.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Sports in India have evolved from being an amateur pursuit to a highly commercialized sector. States like Haryana have emerged as key contributors to India's sporting success, especially in sports such as wrestling, boxing, athletics, and hockey. The rise of professional leagues, corporate sponsorships, and increased media rights has

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driven the commercial aspect of sports to new heights. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 triggered unprecedented disruptions in sports activities, globally and domestically. This paper investigates the trajectory of sports commercialization in India, with a focus on the state of Haryana, comparing the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods.

Rationale for the Study

Haryana, with its robust sports infrastructure and culture, serves as an excellent case for studying the impact of commercialization in the context of a largely rural yet sport-dominant region. The state has produced numerous Olympic and Commonwealth medallists. However, the effects of the pandemic on sports commercialization, particularly in Haryana, have been under-researched. A comparative analysis of pre- and post-COVID-19 periods will provide insights into the resilience and adaptability of the sports industry in the state.

Research Questions

1. How has the commercialization of sports evolved in Haryana pre- and post-COVID-19?
2. What are the key changes in sponsorship, media rights, and public engagement in sports post-pandemic?
3. How has the pandemic affected the sports infrastructure and the overall sports economy in Haryana?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Commercialization of Sports in India

The commercialization of sports in India can be traced back to the introduction of major cricketing leagues such as the Indian Premier League (IPL) in 2008. The success of IPL paved the way for other sports leagues like the Pro Kabaddi League, Indian Super League (football), and Hockey India League. These leagues brought in significant investments, sponsorships, and broadcasting rights, turning sports into a multi-billion-dollar industry.

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Sports in Haryana: A Tradition of Excellence

Haryana has always had a strong sporting tradition, especially in wrestling, boxing, and athletics. The state has consistently contributed to India's medal tally in international competitions, including the Olympics. Government schemes like the Haryana Sports Policy and various incentives for athletes have fostered a pro-sports culture in the state. The role of corporate sponsorship in supporting athletes and developing infrastructure in Haryana has also been significant.

Impact of COVID-19 on Global Sports

The pandemic resulted in the postponement or cancellation of major sporting events, including the Tokyo Olympics 2020. Sports leagues across the globe faced severe disruptions, with losses in revenues from ticket sales, sponsorship deals, and media rights. The digital shift, however, accelerated the adoption of virtual fan engagement and remote broadcasting solutions.

Commercialization of Sports in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Post-COVID-19, the sports industry has witnessed a rebound but with significant transformations. Health protocols, limited in-person attendance, and increased reliance on digital platforms for fan engagement became the norm. In India, sports leagues resumed with bio-bubble environments and live-streaming services attracting high viewership. The role of technology in fan engagement, sponsorship activations, and data analytics grew multifold post-pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employs a comparative analysis of the commercialization of sports in Haryana during two periods: Pre-COVID-19 (2015-2019) and Post-COVID-19 (2021-2023). A mixed-method approach is used, combining both qualitative and quantitative data.

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DATA COLLECTION

1. **Primary Data:** Interviews with sports officials, athletes, sponsors, and event organizers in Haryana.
2. **Secondary Data:** Analysis of government reports, sponsorship data, media rights contracts, and industry reports on sports commercialization in India.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data is analyzed through comparative charts, graphs, and thematic content analysis. Pre- and post-COVID-19 commercialization trends are contrasted to identify the impact of the pandemic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-COVID-19 Commercialization of Sports in Haryana

The pre-pandemic period saw rapid growth in sports commercialization in Haryana. Major corporate sponsors like JSW Sports, Reliance Foundation, and Tata Group invested in sports academies and athletes. Media rights deals for national sporting events also surged. The rural nature of Haryana posed challenges, but government initiatives such as cash rewards for athletes and investments in training infrastructure created a conducive environment for commercial ventures.

Impact of COVID-19 on Sports in Haryana

COVID-19 brought sports activities in Haryana to a standstill. Local tournaments, training camps, and international events were either cancelled or postponed. The state's athletes faced challenges in maintaining their form due to the closure of training facilities. Sponsorship revenues dropped significantly as businesses reallocated budgets to mitigate pandemic-related losses.

Post-COVID-19 Resurgence

The post-pandemic period witnessed a gradual revival of sports activities in Haryana. The government and private sector focused on building bio-secure training environments and leveraging digital platforms for fan engagement. Sponsorship deals

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rebounded, but with a focus on digital and virtual marketing strategies. Virtual events and sports saw a surge in popularity, signaling a shift in sports consumption patterns.

Comparative Analysis: Pre- and Post-COVID-19

- **Sponsorship and Revenue:** Sponsorship deals post-COVID-19 focused on digital activations and virtual fan engagement, whereas pre-pandemic deals relied heavily on physical events and live audiences.
- **Media Rights:** Post-COVID-19 saw a rise in digital media rights, with broadcasters and streaming services becoming crucial for revenue generation.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The pre-pandemic period witnessed the construction of multiple sports academies and facilities in Haryana. Post-pandemic, the focus shifted to ensuring health protocols and enhancing digital access to training.
- **Athlete Performance:** Athletes faced difficulties in maintaining form during the pandemic due to restricted access to facilities, but the post-pandemic recovery was marked by rapid adaptability and resilience.

CONCLUSION

The commercialization of sports in Haryana, like in the rest of India, experienced both setbacks and growth due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pre-pandemic period was marked by a boom in sponsorships, infrastructure development, and media rights deals, while the post-pandemic period saw a digital shift in sports consumption and commercialization strategies. Despite challenges, Haryana's sports ecosystem adapted to the new normal, with technology playing a pivotal role in driving commercialization in the post-pandemic era.

Recommendations

1. **Investment in Digital Platforms:** To future-proof sports commercialization, Haryana should focus on enhancing digital sports engagement platforms.

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2. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Continued collaboration between the government and corporate sponsors is essential to rebuild and enhance sports infrastructure post-pandemic.
3. **Support for Athletes:** Creating robust athlete welfare programs that include mental health support, especially during uncertain periods, is critical for sustaining performance levels.

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