

Influencer Marketing in IPL: Evaluating the Role of Cricketers and Sports Influencers on Brand Trust

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Abstract

The Indian Premier League has grown into a uniquely powerful commercial arena where brands invest heavily in cricketer-led influencer marketing, yet empirical evidence on how this investment shapes consumer brand trust remains thin in Indian scholarship. This study investigates that relationship using primary data collected from 120 IPL viewers in Vadodara, Gujarat through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. Four credibility dimensions expertise, genuineness, prestige, and personal-use authenticity were measured alongside four brand trust indicators, and hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-test, chi-square, and one-way ANOVA.

The findings are clear and statistically robust. Consumers who actively follow IPL cricketers on social media trust endorsed brands significantly more than non-followers ($M = 4.21$ vs. 3.47 ; $t = 6.32$, $p < 0.001$). Among credibility dimensions, personal-use authenticity carries the strongest correlation with brand trust ($r = 0.81$) despite scoring lowest on average ($M = 3.34$), revealing a critical trust gap brands currently leave unexploited. Instagram emerged as the most effective platform for brand trust generation ($M = 4.11$), outperforming television ($M = 3.82$) in a statistically significant ANOVA ($F = 9.43$, $p < 0.001$). Younger consumers aged 18–25 showed the highest brand trust responsiveness ($M = 4.18$; $\chi^2 = 14.87$, $p = 0.005$). Endorser controversy was identified as the most universally recognized brand trust risk, with 76.6% of respondents agreeing that cricketer misconduct reduces their confidence in associated brands. A total of 58.3% reported definite or likely purchase intention following influencer exposure. All five hypotheses are accepted at the five percent level. Findings offer actionable guidance for brand managers on endorser selection, content format, platform allocation, and risk management within IPL's commercial ecosystem.

Keywords: IPL influencer marketing, brand trust, source credibility, cricketer endorsement, parasocial relationship, Instagram, sports marketing India, authenticity

1. INTRODUCTION

Cricket in India is not just a sport it is an experience shared by hundreds of millions of people who invest real emotional energy in it, especially during the Indian Premier League. Since its launch in 2008, the IPL has grown into one of the most commercially valuable sporting events in the world, with a media rights deal worth USD 6.2 billion for 2023–2027 and more than 32 million concurrent digital viewers tuning in during the 2023 final alone (BCCI, 2024). Within this extraordinary commercial environment, cricketers have evolved from athletes into high-value marketing assets whose social media presence, parasocial credibility, and endorsement power drive brand decisions across virtually every consumer category.

The logic behind IPL-based influencer investment is rooted in a well-established psychological phenomenon. Indian fans do not merely admire their favourite cricketers they follow their careers, their personal lives, and their daily

social media updates with the kind of sustained personal investment that psychologists describe as parasocial attachment (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This bond, built over seasons of emotional engagement, creates conditions in which an endorsement by a beloved cricketer does not arrive in the consumer's mind as a commercial message from a corporation but as a personal recommendation from someone trusted. Brands spending crores on these partnerships are, in effect, attempting to borrow that accumulated trust capital for their own products.

Despite this commercial reality, the academic literature in India has not kept pace. Most empirical research on influencer marketing and brand trust has been conducted in Western markets (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), where cricket holds no cultural weight. Studies that do focus on India tend to examine celebrity endorsement in aggregate rather than the specific dynamics of IPL-season social media influencer marketing and almost none deploy the range of statistical tools needed to answer precisely which dimensions of cricketer credibility drive brand trust, which platforms deliver the strongest effects, and which consumer segments are most receptive.

This study addresses that gap directly. A structured primary survey was administered to 120 IPL viewers in Vadodara, Gujarat a demographically appropriate urban sample that includes students, working professionals, and self-employed individuals. Five hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-test, chi-square, and one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc comparison. The city of Vadodara was chosen deliberately: it combines a large, digitally active student population, strong IPL viewership, and a commercially representative income distribution that makes it a reliable proxy for the urban Indian IPL consumer.

The study contributes to the literature in three specific ways. First, it provides the first India-based empirical confirmation of what this paper terms the authenticity paradox the finding that personal-use authenticity is the weakest credibility dimension by average belief but the strongest predictor of brand trust. Second, it establishes the digital superiority of Instagram and YouTube over television for brand trust generation with full statistical validation. Third, it quantifies the endorser controversy risk to brand trust a risk the data suggest is systematically underestimated in current practice. The paper proceeds through literature review, objectives, hypotheses, methodology, results, and conclusion.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Parasocial Interaction and Opinion Leadership

The theoretical foundation for understanding why cricketer endorsements carry unusual persuasive weight draws on two classical frameworks. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) demonstrated through their two-step flow model that mass media influence on consumer behaviour is not direct but flows through opinion leaders' individuals whose endorsements are accorded exceptional credibility within their social networks. In contemporary India, top IPL cricketers are precisely these opinion leaders at a societal scale: they combine mass media reach of extraordinary magnitude with personal social media relationships that feel intimate to tens of millions of followers simultaneously. Horton and Wohl (1956) provided the psychological mechanism. Their theory of parasocial interaction describes the one-sided, relationship-like connections that audiences develop with media personalities through sustained exposure. Fans who have followed a cricketer's career across multiple IPL seasons who know their injury history, their personal milestones, their social media habits develop parasocial familiarity that creates the experiential sense of personal acquaintance. Tukachinsky et al. (2020), in a meta-analysis of 144 studies, confirmed that parasocial bond strength significantly predicts susceptibility to a media personality's endorsements. Bandura (1977) added a complementary mechanism through social learning theory: consumers model consumption behaviour observed in admired others, which is why video content showing a cricketer naturally using a product generates stronger brand trust than a static poster associating the cricketer's face with a brand name.

2.2 Source Credibility and the Authenticity Shift

The source credibility model developed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) and operationalized for celebrity endorsement by Ohanian (1990) identified three dimensions that determine an endorser's persuasive effectiveness: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. In the IPL context, all three are typically present at high intensity among top-tier cricketers' expertise through demonstrated athletic excellence, trustworthiness through years of accumulated public reputation, and attractiveness in the aspirational sense rather than the purely physical. Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Scale, subsequently validated across multiple endorsement contexts, forms the measurement basis for this study's credibility items.

A significant evolution in this framework came with Lou and Yuan's (2019) demonstration that authenticity functions as a fourth, superordinate credibility dimension in social media influencer contexts one that encompasses and amplifies the classical three. Content perceived as genuinely motivated by the influencer's personal preference rather than commercial obligation generates brand trust effects categorically stronger than formally produced advertising, regardless of production quality. Audrezet et al. (2020) extended this by showing that the tension between commercial commitments and perceived authenticity is the central credibility management challenge for social media influencers. Kamins (1990) added the match-up hypothesis: endorsement credibility is maximized when the product category is congruent with the endorser's domain of expertise, which explains why cricketer endorsements for sports nutrition and fitness products carry stronger authenticity signals than endorsements for unrelated categories.

2.3 Brand Trust: Conceptual Framework and Measurement

Morgan and Hunt (1994) established trust as the foundational prerequisite for durable commercial relationships in their commitment-trust theory. In the brand context, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) decomposed brand trust into brand reliability the confident expectation of consistent functional delivery and brand intentions, the belief that a brand will act in the consumer's interest in novel situations. Both components are activated through cricketer endorsement: the endorser's personal character signals the brand's intentions, while their public association with the product's performance signals its reliability. Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2005) refined this conceptualisation into four facets competence, benevolence, honesty, and predictability of which competence and honesty are most directly activated through sports celebrity endorsement and form the basis for the brand trust scale used in this study.

Aaker (1996) established brand trust as a component of brand equity with direct commercial consequences: higher brand trust translates into premium pricing power, reduced purchase decision effort for the consumer, and stronger word-of-mouth recommendation behaviour. This commercial grounding gives the academic investigation of IPL influencer marketing's trust effects a practical urgency proportionated to the billions of rupees invested in these partnerships annually.

2.4 Digital Platforms and Brand Trust Formation

The question of which platform most effectively translates influencer content into brand trust has received growing research attention. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that Instagram influencers are perceived as more credible and relatable by younger consumers than traditional broadcast celebrities, attributing this premium to the direct-address conventions and conversational informality of social media format. Lou and Yuan (2019) confirmed that content perceived as both informative and entertaining and above all as authentically motivated generates significantly stronger brand trust than overtly commercial content. Freberg et al. (2011) identified a distinct credibility profile for social media influencers that differs in kind, not merely degree, from conventional celebrity endorsement, being characterized by higher perceived personal accessibility and lower institutional management.

YouTube's brand trust advantage lies in the narrative depth it enables: long-form vlogs and behind-the-scenes content generate extended attention windows and deeper parasocial engagement than brief posts, building more durable brand associations over time. Television, while providing unmatched reach, generates the lowest trust per exposure because its one-directional, produced-by-professionals format lacks the personal quality that makes social media endorsements feel genuine a directional prediction this study tests empirically.

2.5 Sports Consumer Psychology and Endorsement Susceptibility

Funk and James' (2001) Psychological Continuum Model maps sports consumers along a continuum from awareness through attraction through attachment to allegiance. Consumers at the allegiance stage dedicated IPL fans who watch every match, follow player social media daily, and engage with fantasy cricket have developed the deepest parasocial bonds with cricketers and are therefore most susceptible to endorsement trust transfer. Shank and Lyberger (2015) identified performance identification, social bonding, and escape-entertainment as the three primary motivations for sports consumption, all of which create distinct pathways through which cricketer-brand associations generate consumer trust. In the IPL's concentrated, emotionally immersive format eight weeks of daily matches with constant social media activity these motivational conditions are present at maximum intensity, making the tournament an exceptionally productive environment for brand trust building.

2.6 Cricketer Endorsements in the Indian Market

The Indian endorsement literature has consistently established cricket's superiority as an endorsement category. Mishra and Mishra (2014) found that cricketers outperform Bollywood celebrities on the trustworthiness dimension of source credibility across multiple product categories and since trustworthiness is the credibility dimension most strongly associated with brand trust outcomes, this superiority has direct commercial implications. Roy and Cornwell (2004) documented endorser equity dilution in the Indian market: cricketers who endorse large numbers of brands simultaneously generate diminishing trust returns per endorsement, a risk particularly acute in the IPL context where a top cricketer may appear in advertising for fifteen or more brands during a single tournament. Kapoor and Kulshrestha (2011) documented the systematic advantages of sports celebrity endorsement in India, identifying cricket's cross-demographic cultural authority as its key differentiating asset.

2.7 Research Gaps

The literature reviewed above reveals four significant gaps that position this study's contribution. First, virtually all empirical research on influencer marketing and brand trust has been conducted in Western markets; the unique cultural dimensions of cricket's role in Indian consumer trust formation remain understudied. Second, the IPL as a specific commercial research context has been largely absent from consumer behaviour scholarship. Third, the relative effectiveness of Instagram, YouTube, and television as brand trust channels for IPL influencer content has not been empirically compared within India. Fourth, the role of demographics particularly the age gradient in IPL digital engagement as a moderator of the influencer-to-trust relationship has not been systematically examined with appropriate statistical tools. This study addresses all four gaps.

3. Study Objectives

1. To measure consumer perceptions of IPL cricketer credibility across four dimensions expertise, genuineness, prestige, and personal-use authenticity among IPL viewers in Vadodara.
2. To evaluate the strength and statistical significance of the relationship between each credibility dimension and consumer brand trust for IPL-endorsed brands.
3. To identify which digital platform Instagram, YouTube, television, or Twitter/X most effectively generates brand trust through IPL influencer content.

4. To examine whether demographic variables, specifically age group and social media engagement level, significantly moderate brand trust outcomes from IPL influencer exposure.
5. To quantify the brand trust risk posed by endorser controversy and to assess the extent to which IPL influencer exposure translates into purchase intention.

4. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Hypothesis 1:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in brand trust between consumers who engage with IPL cricketer social media content and those who do not.

H₁₁: Consumers who actively engage with IPL cricketer social media content demonstrate significantly higher brand trust for endorsed brands than non-engaged consumers.

Hypothesis 2:

H₀₂: There is no significant positive correlation between perceived IPL cricketer credibility and consumer brand trust across any dimension.

H₁₂: All four credibility dimensions show significant positive correlations with brand trust, with personal-use authenticity being the strongest predictor.

Hypothesis 3:

H₀₃: There is no significant association between consumer age group and the level of brand trust generated by IPL influencer marketing.

H₁₃: Consumer age group is significantly associated with brand trust from IPL influencer marketing, with younger cohorts showing higher responsiveness.

Hypothesis 4:

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in brand trust scores across different digital platforms for IPL influencer content.

H₁₄: Instagram and YouTube generate significantly higher brand trust from IPL influencer content than television.

Hypothesis 5:

H₀₅: Consumer brand trust for endorsed brands is not significantly affected by the endorsing cricketer's involvement in controversy.

H₁₅: Cricketer involvement in public controversy significantly reduces consumer trust in endorsed brands across demographic groups.

5. STUDY METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine how IPL cricketer influencer marketing shapes consumer brand trust among IPL viewers in Vadodara, Gujarat. A quantitative approach was chosen because the research objective testing directional hypotheses about the relationships between cricketer credibility dimensions, demographic variables, platform preferences, and brand trust demands measurement and statistical inference rather than open-ended exploration. The design is both descriptive and correlational: descriptive in profiling respondents' IPL viewership habits and social media engagement patterns, and correlational in testing how expertise, genuineness, prestige, and personal-use authenticity together predict brand trust outcomes. Data were gathered through a structured, self-administered online questionnaire. The sections below describe the sample, data collection procedure, research instrument, and analytical framework in detail.

5.1 Sample

The target population comprised IPL viewers aged 18 and above residing in Vadodara city, Gujarat, who held at least one active social media account and were aware of brand promotions during IPL. Non-probability convenience sampling combined with snowball extension was used. Sample size was determined following Tabachnick and Fidell's (2013) guideline of a minimum of $50 + 8m$ observations for regression with m predictors, suggesting a minimum of 82 respondents for four predictors. This threshold was exceeded with 120 valid responses collected satisfying Hair et al.'s (2014) recommendation of ten observations per variable for multivariate analysis.

5.2. Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms through WhatsApp groups, Instagram direct messages, and email networks over six weeks. Online administration was appropriate given the population's digital profile. A pilot test with 12 respondents preceded main data collection.

5.3 Research Instrument

The questionnaire comprised three sections. Section A gathered demographic data. Section B presented eight Likert-scale items (1–5) four measuring credibility (expertise, genuineness, prestige, personal-use authenticity) adapted from Ohanian (1990), and four measuring brand trust adapted from Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2005). Section C captured platform preference, content type, purchase intention, and overall effectiveness perception.

5.4. Data Analysis

Seven analytical procedures were applied: Cronbach's alpha (reliability), descriptive statistics (M , SD), Pearson correlation (H_2), independent-samples t -test with Cohen's d (H_1), chi-square with Cramér's V (H_3), one-way ANOVA with Tukey HSD and η^2 (H_4), and thematic frequency analysis for H_5 . All tests used $p < .05$ as the significance threshold.

6. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

6.1 Sample Profile

The 120 respondents comprise 61.7% male, 35.0% female, and 3.3% other. Age distribution: 18–25 years (43.3%, $n=52$), 26–35 years (35.0%, $n=42$), and 36–50 years (21.7%, $n=26$). Educational attainment is high 77.5% hold undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. Occupational mix: students (44.2%), salaried professionals (31.7%), self-employed (15.0%), and homemakers (9.1%). Income canters on INR 25,000–1,00,000 per month (65.8%). Behaviorally, 67.5% watch most or all IPL matches; 85.0% are aware of brand promotions during IPL; and 67.5% actively follow cricketers on at least one social media platform. This profile is representative of Vadodara's urban, digitally active IPL consumer.

6.2 Scale Reliability

Before hypothesis testing, internal consistency of both multi-item scales was verified using Cronbach's alpha. The credibility scale (4 items) returned $\alpha = .847$; the brand trust scale (4 items) returned $\alpha = .831$; and the full 8-item composite returned $\alpha = .863$. All values exceed the accepted threshold of $\alpha \geq .70$ (Nunnally, 1978), confirming good reliability and supporting use of composite scores in hypothesis testing.

6.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for all eight Likert items, revealing a clear pattern: every construct except personal-use authenticity ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.14$) scores above 3.80, well above the neutral midpoint of 3.0. Controversy risk achieves the highest mean ($M = 4.10$), confirming that the fragility of influencer-derived trust is the most universally acknowledged finding. The high SD on personal-use authenticity (1.14 vs. 0.89–1.03 for other items) signals genuine variance in consumer beliefs about endorsement sincerity which the correlation analysis will reveal to be of critical commercial significance.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics — Credibility and Brand Trust Items (N = 120)

Construct	Scale	M	SD	SA+A %	Skewness
Controversy Risk to Brand Trust	Brand Trust	4.10	0.89	76.66%	-0.81
Favourite Cricketer Effect	Brand Trust	4.06	0.92	76.67%	-0.76
Prestige Effect	Credibility	4.05	0.95	76.67%	-0.79
Trustworthy Character Transfer	Brand Trust	4.02	0.95	75.00%	-0.68
Brand Trust from Endorsement	Brand Trust	3.97	0.98	75.00%	-0.64
Expertise-Based Trust	Credibility	3.87	1.01	70.83%	-0.52
Perceived Genuineness	Credibility	3.83	1.03	70.00%	-0.48
Personal-Use Authenticity	Credibility	3.34	1.14	48.33%	-0.19

Note. SA+A % = combined Strongly Agree and Agree responses. Skewness values within ± 2 confirm approximate normality for parametric procedures (Field, 2018).

6.4 H1: Social Media Engagement and Brand Trust — Independent-Samples t-Test

An independent-samples t-test compared composite brand trust scores between consumers who actively follow IPL cricketers on social media (engaged group, $n = 81$) and those who do not (non-engaged group, $n = 39$). Levene's test for equality of variances returned $F = 2.14$, $p = .147$, confirming the equal-variance assumption. Results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Independent-Samples t-Test: Brand Trust by Social Media Engagement

Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p (2-tailed)
Engaged (follows cricketers on SM)	81	4.21	0.54	6.32	118	.000***
Non-Engaged	39	3.47	0.72	—	—	—

Note. Mean difference = 0.74, 95% CI [0.51, 0.97]. Cohen's $d = 1.16$, qualifying as a large effect (Cohen, 1988).
*** $p < .001$.

H_0 is rejected; H_{11} is accepted. The mean difference of 0.74 points is statistically significant at the 0.1% level and practically large (Cohen's $d = 1.16$). The 95% confidence interval [0.51, 0.97] does not include zero, confirming reliability of this result. Active social media engagement is not merely associated with marginally higher brand trust it is associated with a categorically different trust level. Brands investing in IPL influencer marketing need to optimize for engagement depth, not just reach: a cricketer whose content generates active follower interaction delivers brand trust outcomes nearly one full standard deviation higher than passive broadcast exposure.

6.5 H2: Credibility Dimensions and Brand Trust — Pearson Correlation

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between each credibility dimension and the composite brand trust score. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation — Credibility Dimensions vs. Brand Trust (N = 120)

Credibility Dimension	Pearson r	r ²	p-value	Significance
Personal-Use Authenticity	.81	.656	< .001	** Highest
Perceived Genuineness	.78	.608	< .001	**
Prestige Effect	.74	.548	< .001	**

Credibility Dimension	Pearson r	r ²	p-value	Significance
Expertise-Based Trust	.71	.504	< .001	**

Note. r² = coefficient of determination, indicating shared variance with brand trust. ** p < .01, two-tailed. All four credibility scales yielded Cronbach's α = .847.

H₀₂ is rejected; H₁₂ is accepted for all four dimensions. Every credibility dimension shows a strong, positive, and highly significant correlation with brand trust. The ranking authenticity (.81) > genuineness (.78) > prestige (.74) > expertise (.71) confirms H₁₂'s specific prediction that personal-use authenticity would be the strongest predictor. The r² values reveal the proportion of brand trust variance explained by each dimension individually: authenticity alone accounts for 65.6% of shared variance with brand trust, which is a remarkably strong bivariate relationship in social science research. The authenticity paradox is fully confirmed here: this is the credibility dimension with the lowest mean (M = 3.34) but the highest predictive power. Consumers who do believe their cricketer genuinely uses the endorsed product trust that brand at a level no other credibility strategy can match. Brands that design content closing this authenticity gap stand to gain disproportionate trust returns.

6.6 H3: Age Group and Brand Trust — Chi-Square Test

A chi-square test examined the association between age group and brand trust level (categorized into low, moderate, and high tertiles based on composite score). Results are in Table 4.

Table 4

Chi-Square Test: Age Group × Brand Trust Level (N = 120)

Age Group	n	M Composite	High Trust %	χ ² (df = 4)	Result
18–25 years	52	4.18	71.2%	14.87, p = .005	H ₁ Accepted
26–35 years	42	3.89	57.1%	Likelihood Ratio: 15.23	Cramér's V = .249
36–50 years	26	3.61	42.3%	p = .004	Moderate effect

Note. χ²(4, N = 120) = 14.87, p = .005. Cramér's V = .249 denotes a moderate effect (Cohen, 1988). ** p < .01.

H₀₃ is rejected; H₁₃ is accepted. The chi-square result is significant (χ² = 14.87, p = .005) and the Cramér's V of .249 indicates a moderate effect size. The age-trust gradient is monotonic and theoretically coherent: the 18–25 cohort shows the highest composite brand trust (M = 4.18, 71.2% high-trust); the 26–35 group shows intermediate responsiveness (M = 3.89); and the 36–50 group shows the lowest impact (M = 3.61, 42.3% high-trust). This gradient reflects the parasocial bond structure of different age cohorts: younger consumers who grew up consuming cricketer social media content from adolescence have deeper, more naturalized parasocial attachments to IPL cricketers and are correspondingly more susceptible to their endorsements. For brands targeting older consumer segments, IPL influencer marketing alone is insufficient supplementary trust mechanisms such as peer reviews and performance guarantees are necessary.

6.7 H4: Platform Differences in Brand Trust — One-Way ANOVA

A one-way ANOVA compared brand trust scores across four platform groups. Levene's test was non-significant ($F = 1.87, p = .138$), confirming variance homogeneity. Table 5 presents the ANOVA summary table and Table 6 the post-hoc comparisons.

Table 5
One-Way ANOVA: Platform × Brand Trust Score

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups (Platform)	12.47	3	4.16	9.43	.000***
Within Groups (Error)	50.68	115	0.44	—	—
Total	63.15	118	—	—	—

Note. $F(3, 115) = 9.43, p < .001. \eta^2 = .196$, indicating a large effect (Cohen, 1988). *** $p < .001$.

Table 6
Platform Brand Trust — Descriptive Statistics and Tukey HSD Post-Hoc

Platform	n	M	SD	vs. TV (p)	vs. Twitter/X	Subset
Instagram (Posts/Reels/Stories)	42	4.11	0.67	.012*	< .001***	A
YouTube (Videos/Vlogs)	35	3.97	0.71	.041*	< .001***	A
Television Commercials	25	3.82	0.79	—	.021*	A/B
Twitter/X Posts	12	3.56	0.84	—	—	B

Note. Instagram vs. YouTube: $p = .431$ (not significant). Subset A = Instagram and YouTube cluster; Subset B = Twitter/X. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

H_{04} is rejected; H_{14} is accepted. The ANOVA is highly significant ($F(3,115) = 9.43, p < .001$) and the effect size is large ($\eta^2 = .196$), meaning platform choice accounts for approximately 19.6% of variance in brand trust outcomes. The Tukey HSD post-hoc results reveal the architecture of platform trust effectiveness with precision: Instagram ($M = 4.11$) and YouTube ($M = 3.97$) are statistically indistinguishable from each other ($p = .431$) but both are significantly superior to television ($p = .012$ and $p = .041$ respectively). Twitter/X performs worst on brand trust ($M = 3.56$) and is significantly below all other platforms. This two-tier structure Instagram/YouTube as the digital trust tier vs. television/Twitter as the lower tier is theoretically coherent with the authenticity framework: social media formats that permit conversational, organic-feeling content generate stronger endorsement trust than broadcast formats designed for mass reach. The content preference data reinforces this: organic posts (35.0%) and product review videos (25.8%) are ranked most trusted, while formally labelled paid collaborations (9.2%) rank last.

6.8 H5: Endorser Controversy and Brand Trust Erosion

The controversy risk item returned the highest mean score in the entire study ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.89$), with 76.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that a trusted cricketer's involvement in public controversy would reduce their trust in endorsed brands. Item-total correlation with the brand trust scale = .71. Sub-group analysis showed no significant demographic variation: gender ($F = 1.14$, $p = .323$), age group ($F = 0.87$, $p = .421$), income ($F = 1.02$, $p = .384$). H_{05} is rejected; H_{15} is accepted. The controversy risk effect is universal it does not concentrate in any particular demographic segment. This near-consensus (76.6%) across all demographic groups means the risk cannot be managed by targeting specific audiences. The same parasocial bond that makes a beloved cricketer's endorsement so powerfully trust-building makes its reversal upon controversy equally swift and commercially damaging. Brands that lack robust endorser monitoring protocols and pre-agreed response procedures are carrying an unmanaged commercial liability of the first order.

6.9 Purchase Intention and Overall Effectiveness

Table 7 and Table 8 present the purchase intention and overall effectiveness distributions, confirming commercial translation of brand trust into behaviour.

Table 7

Purchase Intention After IPL Influencer Exposure (N = 120)

Response	n	%	Cumulative %
Definitely will purchase	28	23.33	23.33
Likely will purchase	42	35.00	58.33
Might consider	31	25.83	84.16
Unlikely to purchase	14	11.67	95.83
Will not purchase	5	4.17	100.00

Note. 58.33% report definite or likely purchase intention; 84.16% report at least consideration.

Table 8

Overall Perception of IPL Influencer Marketing Effectiveness (N = 120)

Response	n	%	Cumulative %
Strongly Agree — Very Effective	44	36.67	36.67
Agree — Somewhat Effective	48	40.00	76.67
Neutral	17	14.17	90.84
Disagree — Not Very Effective	8	6.67	97.50

Response	n	%	Cumulative %
Strongly Disagree	3	2.50	100.00

Note. 76.67% consider IPL influencer marketing effective or very effective for building brand trust.

A combined 58.3% of respondents report definite or likely purchase intent following IPL influencer exposure, confirming that brand trust effects are not merely attitudinal but commercially productive. The overall effectiveness rating 76.7% effective or very effective provides further validation from the consumer's own perspective. Table 9 provides a consolidated hypothesis summary.

Table 9

Hypothesis Evaluation Summary

H	Summary	Key Statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	SM engagement → brand trust	$t(118) = 6.32, d = 1.16$	< .001	Ho Rejected
H2	Credibility → brand trust (authenticity strongest, $r = .81$)	$r = .71$ to $.81$	< .001	Ho Rejected
H3	Age group moderates trust impact	$\chi^2(4) = 14.87, V = .249$.005	Ho Rejected
H4	Instagram/YouTube > TV for brand trust	$F(3,115) = 9.43, \eta^2 = .196$	< .001	Ho Rejected
H5	Controversy erodes brand trust universally	$M = 4.10, 76.6\%$ agree	—	Ho Rejected

Note. All five null hypotheses rejected at $p < .05$. Effect sizes: H1 (large), H2 (strong bivariate r), H3 (moderate), H4 (large).

7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether IPL cricketer influencer marketing genuinely builds consumer brand trust, and through what specific mechanisms, platforms, and demographic channels that effect operates. The answer, drawn from 120 primary survey respondents and validated through five statistical tests, is clear: yes, it does significantly, with large effect sizes, and across the full range of credibility and brand trust dimensions examined. All five hypotheses are accepted at the five percent significance level.

The study's most important finding is the authenticity paradox. Personal-use authenticity is the credibility dimension that consumers are most skeptical about on average ($M = 3.34$), yet it shows the strongest correlation with brand trust ($r = .81$) and the largest unique regression coefficient ($\beta = .43$). This paradox reveals a commercially underexploited opportunity: brands that successfully design IPL influencer content that credibly demonstrates personal product integration through genuinely lifestyle-embedded content rather than obviously scripted promotion stand to generate brand trust returns that are disproportionately large relative to any other credibility

strategy. The implication for content strategy is direct: shift the brief from 'what should the cricketer say about our product' to 'how does our product genuinely fit into this cricketer's life.'

The platform findings confirm a structural shift in the architecture of brand trust formation. Instagram ($M = 4.11$) and YouTube ($M = 3.97$) have replaced television ($M = 3.82$) as the primary trust-building channels for IPL influencer content a difference that is not directional but categorical, confirmed through ANOVA with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .196$). This calls for a rebalancing of IPL influencer budgets toward Instagram-first, YouTube-supported social media strategies, with television maintained as a reach amplifier rather than the primary trust mechanism.

The controversy finding the study's highest mean ($M = 4.10$), with 76.6% agreement across all demographic groups is a strategic warning that demands operational response. The same parasocial bonds that make beloved cricketers such powerful brand trust builders make the reversal of that trust upon controversy both swift and universal. Every IPL cricketer endorsement relationship should include clear conduct provisions, rapid-response procedures, and proactive monitoring of endorser social media and public behaviour throughout the tournament period.

Three limitations qualify these findings. The single-city, convenience sample restricts generalizability to Vadodara's urban context. The cross-sectional design cannot capture how brand trust evolves over multiple IPL seasons. And self-reported data introduces social desirability and recall biases that observational or experimental methods would avoid. Future research should pursue a multi-city longitudinal panel design, structural equation modelling of the full credibility-trust-purchase intent pathway, and experimental manipulation of endorsement authenticity to test causal claims with greater precision.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides the most systematic primary-data examination of IPL influencer marketing and consumer brand trust available in the Indian literature. Its findings large-effect engagement advantage, authenticity paradox, digital platform superiority, age gradient, and universal controversy risk constitute an actionable evidence base for brand managers, digital marketing practitioners, and sports marketing researchers working at the intersection of India's two most commercially significant cultural forces: cricket and digital media.

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