

## Role of Commercial Television Channels in Reviving Traditional Sports Viewership; with Reference to Kabaddi and Hockey in India

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### ABSTRACT

*Over the past decade, television has grown as a profound medium for mass communication. With the advent of commercial channels and international production houses, the reach and impact of television viewership can be prominently seen in all walks of life. Not only does it keep us updated with the recent news and happenings around the world; but it has also grown to be a great source of entertainment. With reference to the sports industry, specialized television channels and form that had long become commercially nonviable. We see a similar trend when we chart the commercial viability and popularity of Kabaddi and Hockey in India. The two sports forms have been integral part of Indian sports but over time had lost their charm and became commercially nonviable. Nevertheless, the start of Pro Kabaddi and Hockey India League; has seen the two sports form gain a new trajectory. Being telecast on popular channels, have helped them regain popularity. The paper seeks to understand the role of television in reviving sports and making it commercially viable. It further aims to understand as to why people watch a particular sport on television; and what is the reason behind their growing likeliness. Further, the paper would draw a conclusion on how viewership makes sports telecast more commercially viable.*

**Keywords:** Viewership, Television, Kabaddi, Hockey, Telecast, Sports.

### INTRODUCTION

India had a very dormant approach towards commercial television industry; with advent of Doordarshan (DD) as the national broadcaster in 1982. It further took more than a decade for a specialized national sports channel to come into being; with DD Sports being launched in 1998. Today, there are approximately close to 1800 television channels available for viewers in the different regional languages.

In the Indian sports industry, post the advent of commercial television channels, Cricket picked up maximum popularity, and henceforth the sponsorship/advertisement money which helped it flourish furthermore. In the year 2008, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) which is the governing body for cricket in India started the league matched format grounded on League of England and the National Basketball Association (NBA) of the United States. It came up with the twenty-twenty format of league matches known as the Indian Premier League (IPL) - The teams and players in IPL are decided via auction. IPL gave birth to the concept of 'Made for Television Sport' that stressed on league development and player development in India. This gave future trends towards the rise of not only television but also digital, online media and mobile-based sports activities in the coming years in India. Other sports like football, Kabaddi, hockey, lawn tennis is also rapidly picking up on the same lines.

According to SMRI (Sports and Management Research Institute) sports is the next big industry in India, "Today, sports contribution to India's total employment is just .05%. The

great initiatives such as Indian Premier League (Cricket), Hockey India League, Indian Badminton League, Pro Kabaddi, Indian Super League (Football) and professionalization of Heritage sports events such as Got, Gilliland, Liguori, Militant, Battisti are changing the old face of Indian sports. Once, we believed that only cricket will succeed in India. But the above-mentioned initiatives have shown Indians, a world of sports beyond cricket. These initiatives prove that sports have a future in India as a business.”

The Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) and Hockey India League (HIL) are based on the formats of the India Premier League T20 cricket tournament. The telecasts of these matches on national television channels have helped regain the popularity of the sports. The reason for choosing Kabaddi for this study is because it is a traditional Indian sport originally meant to develop self-defense skills, and majorly prevalent in rural India. Also, the Pro Kabaddi League founded recently in 2014 has been largely successful in popularizing Kabaddi all over India yet again. In contrast, Indian Hockey League founded in 2013, has still not gained much momentum despite its glorious past of where India won eight gold medals, one silver medal and two bronze medals in Olympic Games between 1928 to 1980.

Business Standards stated that “Indian sports viewership (TV) numbers grew thirty per cent over the two-year period between 2014 and 2015, according to a report titled The Business of Sports. The report, released by KPMG India in association with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) says that in 2015, the Indian sports sponsorship market grew 6.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 51.9 billion. The report says sports consumption in India is on the rise with leagues, as well as international sports garnering strong support across multiple platforms.”

Rebecca Hawkes from Rapid TV News wrote an article on Sports viewership in India. She started that television viewership figures for sports in India grew 30 per cent in two years ending in 2015; according to CII-KPMG study. She also mentioned that the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) witnessed an amazing television viewership of 435 million people. Leagues are now gathering a strong support market across multiple platforms in India. Not only this, but it has also managed to a large amount of television viewer in rural areas of India through the interesting format of regional/traditional Indian Sports. According to KPMG, more women are now watching sports content on television in India. “The country’s sports sector is going through a significant transition. In February 2016, the Government accorded an industry status to sports infrastructure, which is expected to attract investments from the private sector, thereby not limiting its role to just corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and non-profit organizations,” said Jaideep Ghosh, Partner and Head - Transport, Leisure and Sports, KPMG India. KPMG claims the Indian sports sponsorship market grew 6.7 per cent year-on-year to INR51.9 billion in 2015. Cricket maintained its advertising stronghold with 51per cent of the on-ground sports sponsorship, 61per cent in team sponsorship and 64 per cent in endorsements; however, football and Kabaddi are picking up shares in both audience and sponsorship.

Star Sports owned by Star India (21st Century Fox: a mass media company) is a network that showcases the best live sports and sports-related programs in India. It telecasts the live Hockey India League (HIL) and Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) matches. Not only this ‘Hotstar’ which is a digital and mobile entertainment platform owned by the same company also covers all the Hockey India League (HIL) and Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) matches which a person can watch anytime and anywhere with the help of the required network. Hot star which was launched in February 2015 and telecast all the league matches including Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) and Hockey India League (HIL), reported 1.6 million downloads in the first week after its launch. The application acquired 340 million views for 49 matches of ICC Cricket and 201 million views for IPL season 8. Approximately 25 million downloads are recorded on Hotstar and nearly 100 advertisers are using the Hot star platform as their advertising medium.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to analyze how commercial television improves sports viewership and makes it more commercially viable in India, with reference to two traditional Indian sports format- Kabaddi and Hockey. The secondary objective is to find out why people watch a particular sport on television; and what is the reason behind their growing likeliness.

## METHODOLOGY

Traditional Indian sports namely Kabaddi and Hockey are chosen as references, and the questions for the questionnaire are formed accordingly. The study proposes is to cover the television viewership pattern of the two sports. The study relies upon the primary data for its major findings and has followed a survey method for which a questionnaire was prepared and administered to a total of 112 respondents. The questionnaire contained 15 questions. The respondents were selected using a non-probability (convenience sampling) method. Respondents included a mixed sample based in India consisting of people from all walks of life- not restricted to a particular demographic or economic segment. The sample comprised of students, self-employed, government and private sector employees. The data was collected and analyzed using standard statistical method and conclusion was drawn from the results.

The Secondary data information shows how television has evolved, not only this it further provides us with the background of Sports in India and how the trend of league matches started. The secondary data also tells us the viewership impact on league matches and the fact that in India, due to the growing likeliness of league matches, sports other than Cricket too are benefiting and moving to become commercially successful and gaining popularity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Our result is a culmination of secondary data as noted from ReelNReel and a detailed primary research pattern drawn from customer viewership survey conducted of over 112 respondents.

(Questionnaire attached in annexure for your reference) \*

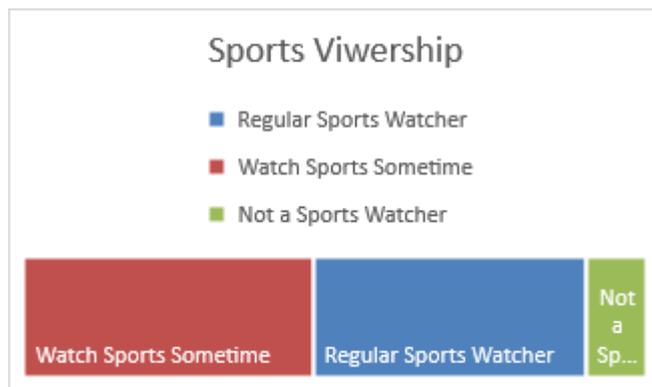
### Primary data analysis:

#### *i) Viewership pattern:*

The sample respondents are avid television viewers, and as per our study, a majority of them watched sports regularly on television (ref. Table-i). This helped us to know how many were interested in watching sports on television as well as it helped in screening the required candidates for the survey.

Table-I:

Regular Watcher	43.8%
Watch sometime	46.4%
Not a Sports Watcher	9.8%

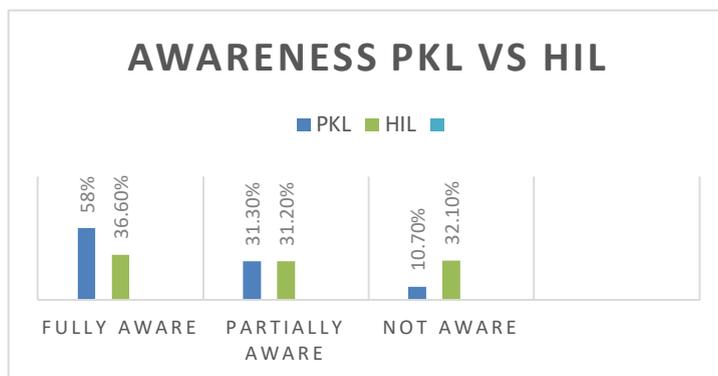


ii) **Awareness about PKL & HIL:**

Close to 60 per cent of the respondents were aware of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) matches the commercial league format for Kabaddi; in comparison to almost half who knew a similar format also existed for Hockey in the name of Hockey India League (HIL)

Table-ii:

Response	PKL	HIL
Fully aware	58%	36.6%
Partially Aware	31.3%	31.2%
Not aware	10.7%	32.1%

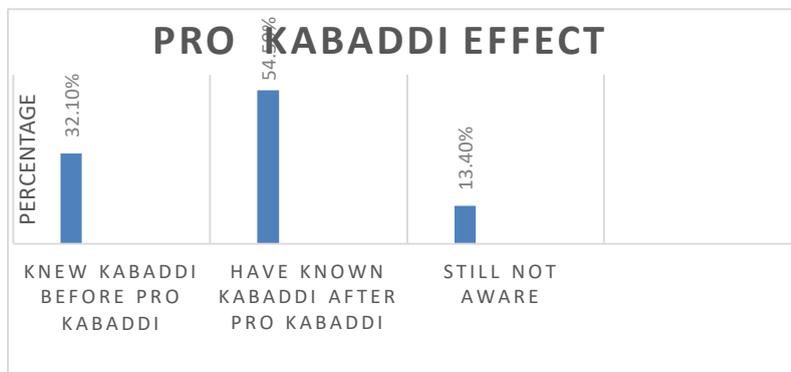


iii) **PKL Building awareness about Kabaddi:**

To know whether Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) was helpful in making people aware about Kabaddi the respondents were asked as to how much they were aware of Kabaddi before Pro Kabaddi League (PKL). Around 54 per cent admitted that they got to know about the sport primarily because of the introduction of the Pro Kabaddi League format.

Table-iii

Knew Kabaddi <b>BEFORE</b> Pro Kabaddi	32.1%
Have known Kabaddi <b>AFTER</b> Pro Kabaddi	54.5%
Still not aware	13.4%

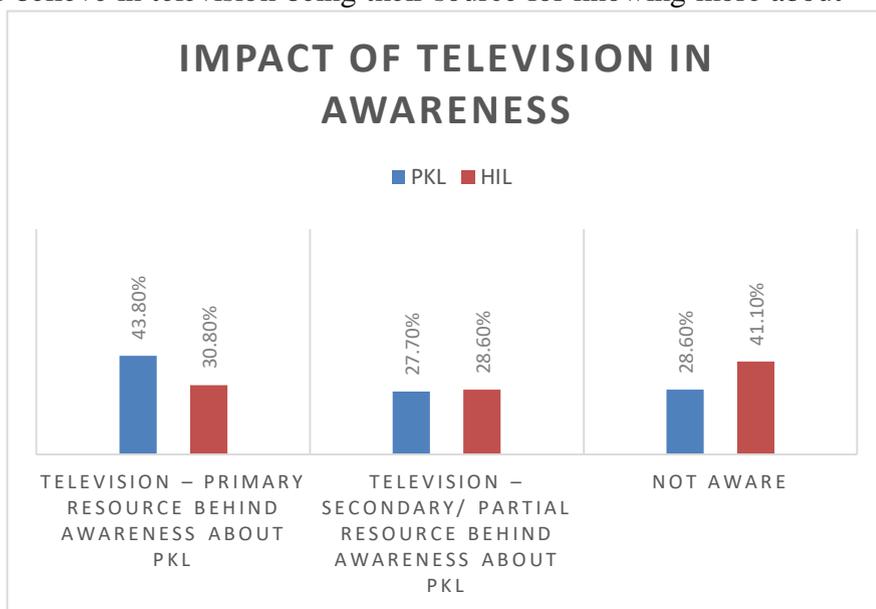


iii) **Television as a medium of awareness**

As this paper deals with the role of commercial channels in reviving sports viewership; it was important to know whether television helped respondents in building awareness about Kabaddi and Hockey. Hence the respondents were asked about the role television played in making them aware about these sports forms in general. A maximum number of respondents admitted that in case of Kabaddi that television was their primary source to build/grow their awareness about the sport. Close to 70 per cent (ref. Table-iv) people gained their awareness completely or partially through television of the sport. Whereas in the case of Hockey Television was responsible for building awareness completely and partially for close to 58 per cent respondents. Thus, a majority did believe in television being their source for knowing more about the sports form.

Table-iv:

Response	PKL	HIL
Television – <b>Primary</b> resource behind awareness about PKL	43.8%	30.8%
Television – <b>Secondary/ partial</b> resource behind awareness about PKL	27.7%	28.6%
Not aware	28.6%	41.1%

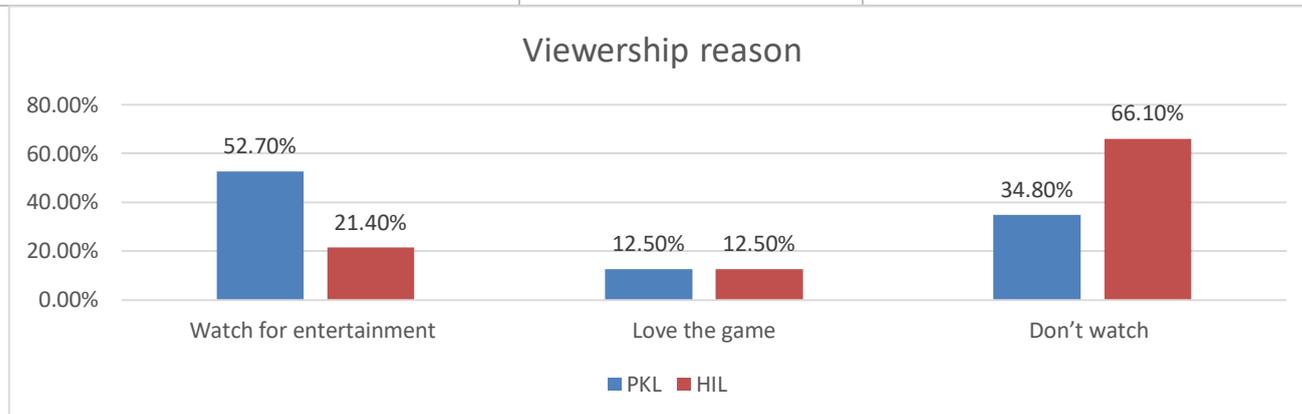


iv) **Viewership of PKL Vs. HIL:**

In a direct face-off between Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) & Hockey India League (HIL), respondents were asked as to which sports format they watched and the reason for the same. Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) came out a true winner, purely for its entertainment factor. Moreover, in a shocking revelation close to 66 per cent respondents did not even prefer watching Hockey India League (HIL).

Table-v:

Response	PKL	HIL
Watch for entertainment	52.7%	21.4%
Love the game	12.5%	12.5%
Don't watch	34.8%	66.1%

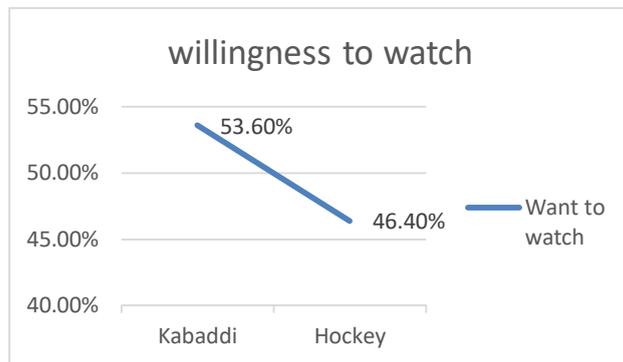


v) **Willingness to watch PKL vs HIL**

To know their preference the respondents were questioned if they are given a choice, which sports would they prefer; Kabaddi or hockey. A majority still chose Kabaddi, for the thrill, newness and entertainment factor. Amongst those respondents who choose Hockey (ref. Table-6) a majority of them were ill-informed. The people who choose Hockey said so because they thought it was India’s national game. But in a reply made by the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports to a ‘Right to Information’ query, it was not notified that India does not have any national game as such. Others who choose hockey said that they were inspired by Dhyana Chand who is considered the greatest field hockey player of all times from India. Hardly a few sported it for the love of the sport or actually knew the intricacies of the game.

Table-vi:

	<b>Willingness to watch</b>
Kabaddi	53.6%
Hockey	46.4%

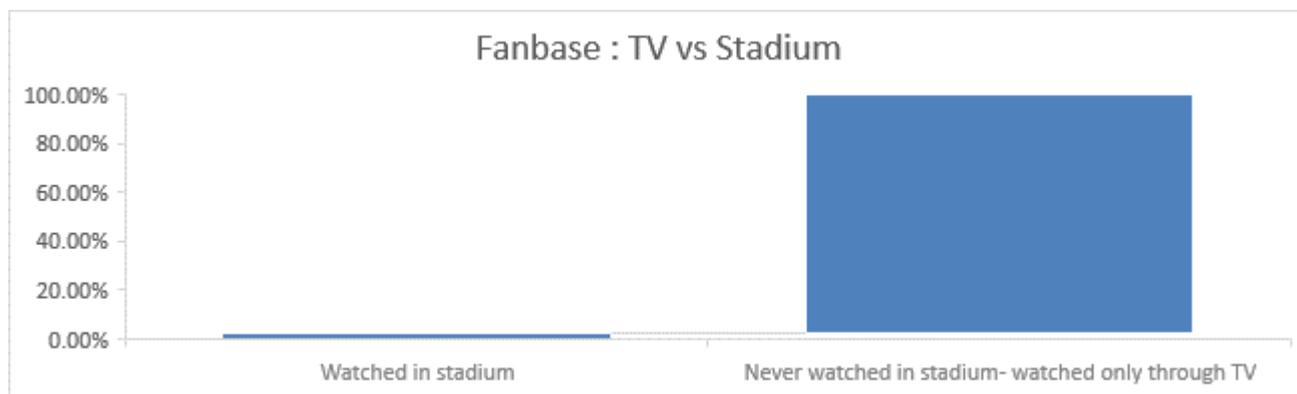


vi) **Match in the stadium:**

To know if the respondents had ever gone to watch any Kabaddi or Hockey match in the stadium, a whopping majority of them denied thus confirming our core observation that Television was their primary source for watching and getting to know about these sports formats. **The future is digital.**

	<b>Kabaddi</b>	<b>Hockey</b>
Watched in stadium	2.7%	4.5%
Never watched in stadium- watched only through TV	97.3%	95.5%

Table-vii:

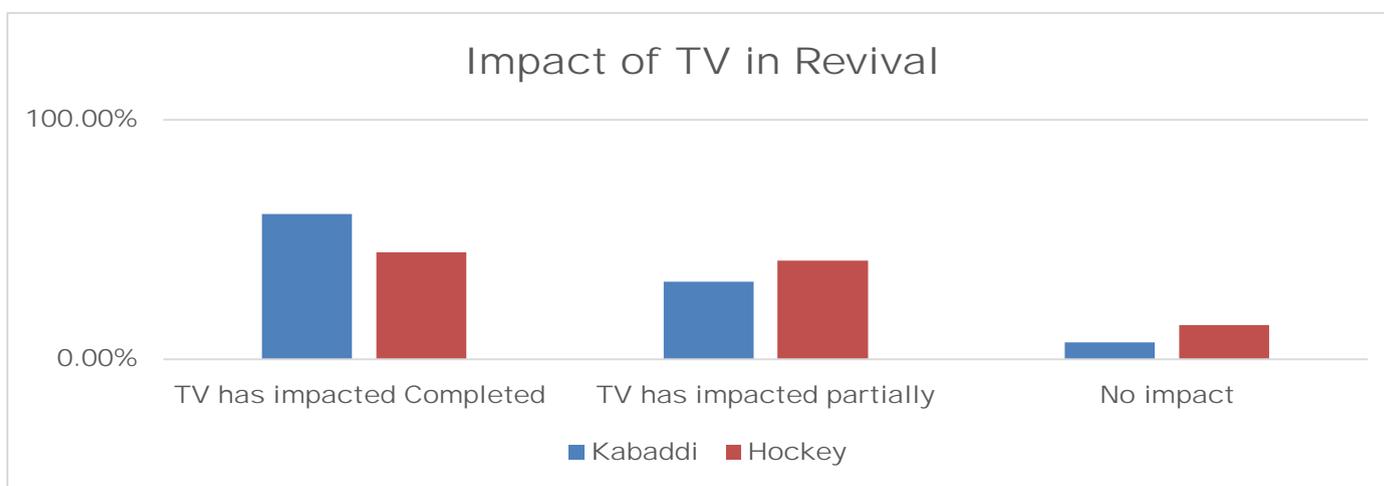


viii) **Role of Television in the revival of the sport:**

Finally, when asked their opinion whether according to them has television helped revive Kabaddi and Hockey as a sports forms or not; close to 93 per cent completely & partially agreed that Television has played a major role in reviving this sports format. Hockey India League (HIL), similarly large number of respondents close to 85 per cent completely & partially agreed that Television has played the major role in reviving Hockey as well.

Table-viii:

	<b>Kabaddi</b>	<b>Hockey</b>
TV has impacted Completed	60.7%	44.6%
TV has impacted partially	32.2%	41.1%
No impact	7.1%	14.3%



**SECONDARY DATA COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:**

Prasad Jawar, J.D. and Parihar, in their research paper Impact of celebrity ownership of Pro Kabaddi teams on interest levels in the sports; which was published in Journal of Management, 5; mentioned how Kabaddi got into the limelight due to celebrity driving its fame in India; not only this the paper also speaks about how celebrity ownership creates an impact on how people view Kabaddi. To be precise, it covered whether people view Kabaddi as a sport or as a mode of entertainment.

Further, an article in Sportswear by subracial on ‘5 reasons why Hockey India League (HIL) is a roaring success mentioned the statistics of viewers of Hockey matches. According to TAM sports report, Hockey India League (HIL) witnessed 1.46 crore viewers in the first six weeks for six matches. The groundwork for the success of Hockey India League (HIL) was laid by the last two leagues, as mentioned in the article. Last year’s World Series Hockey saw 31.36 million viewers who had tuned into the matches.

‘Playa blog’ by Sheryl Thomas, which lists ‘7 most watched sports in India’, ranks Hockey as 6th with 41.4 million viewership in India crediting the Hockey India League (HIL) tournaments for the same; and ranks Kabaddi way up on 4th position with 10.1 million viewers in the first week of Pro

Kabaddi League (PKL) going up to 435 million in 2014 making it the second most followed league in India after IPL.

### *The reason why Kabaddi became more popular:*

The resulted reasons for favored viewership of Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) as compared to Hockey India League (HIL) are as follows: Firstly, Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) broadcasted its giant scale “trial” on multiple channels of STAR India. Be it entertainment channel of STAR or sports channel. This resulted in targeting those audiences who did not consider sports as a mode of entertainment in their day to day lives.

Secondly, Kabaddi being perceived as a rural mud sport was modified and synthetic flooring stage was set. This helped to improve its tangibility. Hitesh Gossain explains further, “The rules of the game were modified to improve the viewer experience. The characteristics which have made Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) a great product is the way it is telecasted. Multiple cameras, slow-motion replays, commentary – both in Hindi and English, newly defined game statistics totally changed the viewership experience. All these factors came together to give the viewers an experience which was truly ‘new and improved’.” Third, the duration of the Kabaddi match is short, the amount of time that the viewer spends on the match is reduced which eventually reduces the cost associated in terms of time; making it easy to achieve the pricing target making it investor/sponsor friendly.

Last but not the least; promotion has been done wonderfully in case of Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) matches. The Indian audience holds strong affinity towards celebrity endorsement and Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) has associations with celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan, Aamir Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, and Abhishek Bachchan who are well-known actors in Bollywood; and sports personalities like Sachin Tendulkar who is a famous cricket player- Thus engaging as well as entertaining viewers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Commercial television viewership, supported by entertaining league formats stands as the primary reason for building awareness and commercial viability for traditional sports in India. Through our detailed analysis we can conclude that even if television improves awareness and increases viewership, it cannot exist in isolation to bring commercial viability to any sports form.

Our research clearly brought forward the point, that both these sporting formats Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) & Hockey India League (HIL); are clearly watched only on television and gained momentum because of the increased television viewership. In an internal comparison between the two sports, Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) stands out a clear winner, as it has emerged from total oblivion to instant stardom post the league format- mostly because of the support of increased television viewership gained by telecast via multiple Star channels.

Primary factors why respondents choose to watch a particular sports form was an easy to follow format, shorter time duration, denationalization of sporting event and further addition of celebrity endorsements and glamour quotient. Thus, PKL enjoyed a supported viewership of over 435 million in 2014 in comparison to Hockey India League (HIL) that lagged far behind with only 41.4 million viewers. Hence, we can conclude that PKL is aggregating to be commercially fitter and more popular than HIL due to its better viewership opportunity gained because of the Commercial telecast of its sporting event.

Commercial television channels are making sports telecast more commercially viable as it has become more revenue-focused rather than reviving or preserving the sport. It has become a tool for commercialization as sports is generating revenue via its sponsors. These reasons are making sports more and more popular in India. Television is also playing an important role in popularizing the sports form by telecasting the league matches, which eventually makes the sport popular & again sponsorship in return. The league formats are further also improving the livelihood for the sportspersons and creating better sporting opportunities on a professional level.

Thus, we can conclude that television viewership if not the sole reason, but has been the main catalyst in bringing Kabaddi to the forefront as a commercially viable sports format, and is gradually giving dormant and forgotten sports forms such as Hockey a new lease of life.

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## ANNEXURE (Questionnaire)

- Do you watch sports on television ?
  - No
  - Sometimes
  - Yes
  
- Are you aware about Pro Kabaddi?
  - No
  - Sometimes
  - Yes
  
- How much did you know about Kabaddi before Pro Kabaddi?
  - Not aware
  - Partially aware
  - Fully aware
  
- Did television help you get aware about Kabaddi?
  - No
  - Partially
  - Yes
  
- If you watch Pro Kabaddi, is it for entertainment or love for the game?
  - Don't watch
  - Entertainment
  - Love for the game
  
- Are you aware about Hockey India League (HIL)?
  - No
  - Partially
  - Yes
  
- Did television help you get aware about Hockey?
  - No
  - Partially
  - Yes
  
- If you watch HIL, is for entertainment or love of the game?
  - Don't watch
  - Entertainment
  - Love for the game
  
- Does television play an important role in updating you about sports?
  - No

- Partially
  - Yes
- If given a choice which sport would you prefer watching on television?
    - Kabaddi
    - Hockey
  - List 2 reasons that will encourage you to watch the sport which you have mentioned in the question above.
- 

- In the past, did you go to any stadium to watch a Kabaddi match?
  - No
  - Yes
- In the past, did you go to any stadium to watch a Hockey match?
  - No
  - Yes
- As per you, has television helped revive Kabaddi as a sport?
  - No
  - Partially
  - Yes
- As per you, has television helped revive Hockey as a sport?
  - No
  - Partially
  - Yes