

# A Critical Analysis: Building Brand Loyalty through Inclusive Representation in Indian Women's Football

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## Abstract

Women football in India has never been large and the situation is typified by structural inequities and absence of visibility which hinders growth. However, the recent development to inclusivity, diversity, and equitable representation has transformed women football into a competitive and a social change experience. This paper talks about the brand loyalty and the dynamics of brand loyalty in the women football game and how the authentic representation, the sponsorship practices and use of digital interaction contribute to the change of the perception of the audience and how the deeper relationship among fans is developed.

This discussion supports the fact that the traditional threats such as bad media coverage, inequality among sponsors, discrimination in relation to genders, continue to haunt the sustainability of the sport. At the same time, change is being pushed by new opportunities of global advocacy, policy interventions and grassroots development. The value of being genuine and just is now a major factor to fans as they are now attaching loyalty to the performance of the sport and the society behind the team and the players themselves. In this case, brand loyalty is not based on transactional relationships, but on emotional and cultural relationship, based on symbolic consumption, community feeling, and shared survival narrative.

In addition, the study also reveals that commercialization can also be utilized positively to ensure the maximization of fan interest and sponsor retention in women football provided it is properly balanced with authenticity. Experiences in cases indicate that monetary contribution as well as social contribution may be encouraged based on ethical sponsorships, equitable allocation of resources as well as media reports. The outcomes ensure that women football is a powerful force in transforming the gender role in sport, and simultaneously building on a more powerful sustainable brand equity.

To sum up, women football in India has the potential of overcoming all the odds and becoming a representation of empowerment and culture. Through the alignment of strategies with inclusiveness and fairness, the stakeholders have the potential to create long-term brand loyalty that contributes to the development of the sport, as well as the promotion of the gender equality in society.

**Keywords:** Women's football, brand loyalty, inclusivity, sponsorship, fan engagement.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Women's Football in India: A Historical Context

The Indian Women Football History is described as being marginalized and existing. Men football penetrated into the tourism through tournaments such as the Santosh Trophy and I-League but women football was an exception during the decades. Only in the second half of the twentieth century did it witness increased popularity among structured women competitions, and they are usually inappropriately established (Nair & Eapen, 2021). Despite such advances as the creation of the Indian Women's League in 2016, the visibility and presence have been kept at a disadvantage. The historical neglect is also significant because it demonstrates how the gender bias has contributed to both the engagement and the representation in the Indian sporting culture.

#### Visibility Gap to Branding Potential

The question of representation in sport does not only concern the presence of the athlete in the field but also the manner in which players are represented in the media, sponsorship and in organizational discourses. Cooky, Messner, and Musto (2015) showed that sports by women around the world have received an inappropriate level of coverage that usually has a dismissive approach towards performance. This trend has been observed in India where only few women football match can be broadcasted as compared to those on cricket or men football. This invisibility limits the work of women football in developing fans. However, the difference also indicates an untapped branding potential. When women football is incorporated in the narrative, it can attract more people, and under representation would be the chance to develop the brand.

#### Inclusive Representation as a Strategic Tool

Brand loyalty occurs when consumers associate with the values and stories that an organization has to

say. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) postulate that long-term loyalty is all about consumer-company identification. In the case of women football in India, inclusive representation, which is including diversity in geography, classes and gender, generates this identification. Fink (2016) goes further to suggest that sexism in sport is usually ingrained within structural practices and, therefore, proactive inclusivity is necessary and not optional. Emotional appeal Branding that centers on the stories of the players of under represented states such as Manipur or Odisha can create a sense of emotional connection to make sure that viewers perceive themselves in the sport. These non-discriminatory practices enable football brands to go past tokenistic approaches to meaningful relationships

#### Building Brand Equity through Inclusivity

Keller (2013) points out that positive associations, trust, and authenticity are the qualities of strong brand equity in branding theory. The fans will experience more long-term attachments when they feel that a sport represents justice and inclusion. With inclusive representation in terms of Indian women football marketing, this sporting and social movement can establish itself. This boosts the credibility of the sport itself as well as the brands that opt to be associated with it. Foregrounding sponsors have much higher recall and purchase intentions, and Sarpong and PraiseGod Zungu (2025) confirmed that sponsorship along with positive values became much more influential in driving consumer loyalty.

#### Global Lessons for the Indian Context

The positive changes through inclusive branding are witnessed in other countries. A good example is the U.S. Women's National Team, which has been able to attribute its concepts to gender equality and diversity, which has led to high rates of loyalty and commercial success (Coombs and Osborne, 2022). In the same manner, European leagues demonstrated that empowerment and multiculturalism campaigns

get the audience more engaged. These exemplars around the world show that inclusiveness is more than a moral obligation, but a strategic requirement. In the case of India, this strategy of modifying such models to suit Indian diverse cultural fabric may offer women football the credibility and devotion it now lacks.

### **Towards a Critical Analysis**

The visibility, inclusivity, and brand loyalty are inseparable issues in the context of the development of women football in India. The existing gaps in representation have both threats and opportunities. This paper puts women football in a strong position in the convergence of sports, culture, and consumer behavior by critically examining the way the concept of inclusive representation can transform branding strategies. In the following sections, the researchers review the available literature, develop the objectives, and give a conceptual methodology to investigate how inclusivity can establish a sustainable brand loyalty in the context of Indian women football. This research paper aims at critically discussing how inclusive representation, equitable sponsorship and genuine branding behaviors would help to create long-term brand loyalty in Indian women football. The study will bring out information on how the sport is developing, its sustainability through the three areas of fan engagement, commercialization, and key performance indicators.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **By Sarpong & Zungu (2025): Sports Sponsorship, Brand Image, and Purchase Intentions toward Sponsors' Products**

Sarpong and Zungu (2025) also surveyed the role of sports sponsorship as a stimulus on brand image and purchase intentions with a specific focus on the psychological connection between perception of the audience and consumer loyalty. Their results suggested that any successful sponsorship

campaigns are not only about a visibility but also about the creation of trust and the feeling of credibility on the conditions of inclusive representation. When applied to women sports, the research showed that the effect of sponsorships associated with women football was higher when they expressed equality, diversity, and empowerment values. This affiliation also made the audiences like the sponsoring brand and the sport, which created a stronger brand loyalty. In the case of Indian women's football, where the corporate support is still weak, in the study, the authors draw attention to the opportunities of so-called responsible sponsorships to redefine the attitudes of viewers and their buying behavior. Through sponsorships, which demonstrate inclusive representation football clubs and governing bodies are able both to create fan loyalty and to attract sustainable investment.

#### **By Wang, Shen, Li & Liu (2025): Factors Related to the Success in Women's Football - A Systematic Review**

Wang et al. (2025) carried out an extensive systematic review to determine the macro, meso, and micro-factors that lead to successful women football in the world. The macro level, i.e. the policy support, government investment and organizational structures, were discovered to be very vital in determining the opportunities of female players. At the meso level, the existence of powerful clubs, talent development initiatives and comprehensive marketing tactics contributed majorly to the improvement of visibility. Lastly, on a micro level, performance, and recognition were directly determined by the motivation of athletes, the environment of their training, and social support. The review emphasized that sustainable growth of women football could not be realized without all the three levels being tackled concurrently. To the case of Indian women football, the paper offers practical suggestions: the changes in the infrastructure of grassroots, the enhancement of leagues, and the rise of inclusion of the football in media campaigns can

cumulatively produce stronger fan loyalty. It is a multi-level strategy that will make women football a competitive and viable product.

**By Budhraj, Schneider, Tinoco, Khanna & Matheson (2025): “Change Needs to Start at Home”: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Girl Athletes’ and Coaches’ Experiences of Body Image in New Delhi, India**

Budhraj et al. (2025) examined the contextualised experiences of girl athletes and their coaches in New Delhi, and the ways body image issues touch on sports participation. The analysis found out that female athletes are often subjected to pressure to address socially constructed concept of femininity which tends to conflict with physical requirements of competitive sport. Another issue that was emphasized by coaches was the problem of functioning between the performance requirements and the expectations of the society. These pressures are factors that lead to self-doubt, less involvement, and in some cases to early withdrawal of sport. The research pointed out that such harmful discourses can be undone by the involvement of women athletes in sporting activities in their inclusivity based on the power and resilience of these women, and their diversity. The significance of creating empowering media presence that is normalized within athletic organizations and glorifies athletic performance can be noted in the case of Indian women football under the focus of this research paper. By re-crafting the social image of women in football, it is possible to get more audiences and create more valuable fan loyalty according to the tenets of authenticity and inclusivity.

**By Brice, Thorpe & McNamara (2025): Sportswomen, Social Media, and Gendered Affective Labor: An Analysis of Two Teams at the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup**

In 2023 FIFA Women world Cup, Brice et al. (2025) investigating the role of social media in the establishment of the visibility and emotional work of

female athletes. The paper has unveiled the fact that the social media sites are a two sided tool, as on one end they bring the athletes into the light and offers an opportunity to connect directly with fans on the other hand, they exert pressure of self-promotion and accessibility of emotions. Women athletes are forced to occupy their spaces with gendered channels of affective labor, such as being likable and relatable, which can reinforce stereotypes even in ways that they are becoming more inclusive. In the example of online and especially women football in India the findings reveal the prospect and the difficulty of using the online channel to generate brand loyalty. By being strategic in adopting inclusive narratives, i.e. focusing on athletic performance and not gender requirements, clubs and organizations are able to build authentic fan bases. This fairness of social media publicity with symmetry is critical in imprinting long-term loyalty among the diverse audiences

**By Symons, Duncan & Storr (2025): Challenging the Status Quo of Sports Media: How Fans Use Independent Media to Cover Women’s Sports and Advocate for Change**

Symons et al. (2025) investigated the rise of autonomous media houses as the other platforms of coverage of women in sports. The researchers found that even female athletes do not have sufficient representation in the traditional media, whereas independent creators, the projects of fans and the digital media have emerged in the attempt to break the trend. These standalone outlets do not only offer regular coverage, but also foster inclusiveness, in which fans obtain an opportunity to get a glimpse of real stories. The findings suggest that fans do make one of the key stakeholders in the reorganization of the media in that they demand transparency and accountability. The opportunity to deploy online activity at the grassroots, such as fan pages, podcasts, and online campaigns, to bypass the traditional gatekeepers and develop loyal groups as evident in Indian women football is pointed out as well by the same study. By identifying with the independent

media, which facilitates inclusivity, women football will be able to enhance representation and brand loyalty, making it an establishment of its cultural and business representation.

**By Şahin, Soylu, Toktaş & Köse (2024): The Impact of Media Representation on Female Athlete Identity and Self-Perception**

The study by Şahin et al. (2024) investigated the effect of media representations on the perception of female athletes and their identification in the community. In their analysis, they found that representing women athletes with the most dominant gender stereotypes, which include the focus more on appearance or femininity rather than on performance, has a harmful effect on the confidence of the athlete and respect of the audience. Conversely, where representation is done on the basis of skill, strength and achievement, it generates good self-identities to athletes and enhances their legitimacy to the fans. This dualism brings into focus the role of media discourses as not only shaping the opinion of the masses but also the sense of self and career of athletes. The implication of this when it is used in relation to the case of Indian women in football is much greater: positive and performance-based media coverage can make players more confident and guarantee them the fan base. With the paradigm of objectification translated into the paradigm of empowerment in the media framing, it will enable the women football not only to improve its position culturally, but also in its brand value, which in turn will enable it to contribute to the long-term game following as well as the overall social acceptance.

**By Harris & Trussell (2024): Studying Professional Women Footballers: A Reflexive Commentary on Being Benched from Recruitment**

Harris and Trussell (2024) provided a reflexive commentary of the methodological and ethical concerns that they encountered during investigating professional women footballers. Their article

enlightened me on the issue of barriers of access, organization gatekeeping and cultural bias that is more likely to restrict the ability of the researcher to deal in the same level with female athletes. This marginalization is an extension of a broader marginalization trend of women football being marginalized both in the research as well as the press. It is worth noting that in the paper, the exclusionary measures have been identified as devaluing of female athletes and reproducing structural forms of inequalities. In Indian women football case, they are especially relevant, as the sport is less popular due to the low interest and research of the institutions. According to Harris and Trussell, such methodological issues must be identified so as to come up with authentic narratives of the game of women football. Through the promotion of inclusive representation in both scholarship and practice, improved avenues of fan identification and loyalty to the sport can be developed and hence enhance its marketability and social value.

**By Das, Kumar, Dixit & Vivek (2023): The Missing Gender: Examining the Barriers to Women's Participation in Sports in India**

Das et al. (2023) examined the challenges that women in India have not overcome throughout history and been unable to participate in sports fully. The lack of adequate funding, inadequate facilities and anything with low institutional support, and the lack of culture such as gender stereotyping, safety issues and social norms were some of the structural issues observed in the study. Combined, these barriers form a feeling of invisibility of female athletes, and constraints the establishment of a long-term career. The research highlighted that such exclusion does not only impact directly on sports people but also has a consequence on the social view in regard to the role models that young women can consider. This is an existential suggestion of the Indian women football: without these institutionalized barriers being dismantled, there will be less ability to create inclusive representation

and brand loyalty. Women players in the football institutions can also be empowered through gendered barriers by ensuring that they get visibility and influence the fans to watch football more, thus the game will be strengthened in the cultural and business sector.

**By Mogaji, Badejo, Charles & Millisits (2021):  
Financial Well-Being of Sportswomen**

Mogaji et al. (2021) examined the economic status of female athletes, the impact of economic insecurity on their involvement and career advancement in sports. This research found out that fewer sponsorship deals, disparate payments and unorganized financial assistance are some of the factors that make female athletes more vulnerable than their male counterparts. Such an economic imbalance usually discourages the long-term interest in sports and decreases the popularity of women athletes in the professional world. With women football, these inequalities are manifested in the form of poor fan appeal, as economic mismanagement does not allow musicians to perform at high standards of performance or maintain the attention of the public. The paper has highlighted the importance of making sure that athletes are financially stable by offering equalized income, formal agreements and sponsorships as crucial to the survival of the athletes, as well as creating a sense of loyalty among the fans who require professionalism and sustainability within their respective teams. In the case of Indian women football, the solution to financial inequality is the key to creating sustainable representation and long-term brand loyalty.

**By Channabasappa & Kumar (2021): Sports Facilities and Sport Performance in the Soccer Sports Between Male and Female College Players: A Comparative Study**

Channabasappa and Kumar (2021) have conducted a comparative study between the male and female college soccer players regarding the sports facilities and the level of performance. The study observed a

high disparity in the accessibility of infrastructure, training programs and institutional support that had a first-hand role in determining the performance outcome of female athletes. The female players lacked better facilities and well-structured programs as compared to their male counterparts and, therefore, had limited time to adapt. This is injustice which is a subset of a more profound structural bias in sports, which curtails the growth of women football. The Indian situation of these inequalities is mirrored in the situation of the young female footballers who are aspiring to acquire support and investment structures. The conclusion, that this implies that unless facilities and developmental avenues even, women football will not be given the competitive advantage that would allow them to lure fans and make them gravitate to them. That is why, these gaps are not just significant regarding performance, but also needed in building football as a viable and unifying brand between women in India.

**By Bagchi (2020): Study on the Broadcast of Women's Sports in India**

The article by Bagchi critically analyzed the situation with the broadcasting of women sports in India and demonstrated the invisibility of female athletes in the mainstream media on a systemic level. It was found that men of cricket and football have muscled their way to the media slots, on the other hand women sports do not have consistent exposure as their sport is sidelined. Such a lack of representation undermines the conversion of fans into identification and the emotional investment, which are the pre-conditions of brand loyalty. According to Bagchi, the lack of fair broadcasting means that women football in India will never get ahead of sponsors and fans. The results show that media inclusivity is not only symbolical but the key to the market development as the faithful fan groups are built because of recurring exposure and positive stories. This directly applies to the case of Indian women football where the inclusion of media representation can establish a sustained level of loyalty and change the attitudes of

the people.

**By Vybav, Raghvendra, Schlenker & Barse (2015):  
Slum Soccer: Female Empowerment through  
Football**

The article by Vybav et al. (2015) focuses on female empowerment via football as a means of transformation in marginalized communities using Slum Soccer as a case. The study has shown how the organized football programs have offered secure places to women and girls that enable them to have the confidence and leadership, and get social recognition where gender inequality has been entrenched. It is important to note that the football was not only playing but also a field that revealed the personal traits of people as well as shattered the stereotypes concerning the role of women in sport. The results are important to India where cultural aspects often disinterest females in engaging in athletics, a fact that further supports the real essence of football as an inclusion factor. With the prism of football as the means of empowerment, the organizations are able to create rather strong narratives that would attract not only fans and sponsors, but also communities. It is these types of narratives that reinforce the emotional bonds hence forming the foundation of brand loyalty that are rooted on the principles of equity, resilience, and feeling that one is a part of something greater.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To examine the role of inclusive representation in shaping brand loyalty in Indian women's football.
- To analyze the influence of sponsorship practices, commercialization, and authenticity on fan engagement and long-term loyalty.
- To evaluate key performance indicators (KPIs) reflecting the development of Indian women's football.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study is guided by the following research questions that emerge from its stated objectives:

1. How does inclusive representation influence brand loyalty in Indian women's football?
2. What is the impact of sponsorship practices, commercialization, and authenticity on fan engagement and long-term loyalty?
3. Which key performance indicators (KPIs) reflect the development of Indian women's football.

**DISCUSSION**

**Success Factors in Women's Football**

Wang, Shen, Li and Liu (2025) conducted a systematic review to establish the factors that are essential in determining the success of female football. Their findings highlight the interplay of the institutional support, the formation of the infrastructure, and the attitude of culture towards women athletes. Despite the review highlighting a number of international settings, it elicited that long-term investment in grassroots football and professional pathways remain core in the development of women football. The findings are highly trendy in India where the national women football ecosystem is still struggling with funding gaps, poor infrastructure, and volatile grass root support. No systematic talent development programs that contribute to slowdown in growth of the sport therefore reducing its ability to generate frequent fan loyalty. It follows that structural conditions directly influence the potential of women football to build long term brand loyalty other than performance. It is worth noting that the knowledge offered by Wang and colleagues (2025) reveals that the representation should not be a token representation but rather the systemic disparities in terms of facilities, opportunities, and training environments.

## **Commercialization, Authenticity, and Fan Engagement**

Based on this structural explanation, Winell, Lundberg, and Nilsson (2025) investigated the outcomes of perception of commercialization and authenticity, in connection with fan engagement in men and women elite football leagues in Sweden. Their research has established that women football fans were more inclined to attend the matches when they thought that it would be more authentic, community based and not commercialised as compared to that of the men. This comes as a big eye opener to India that when it comes to women football, is still an unrefined infant as an entertainment product and not a commercialized product. The relative lack of commercial intrusion is a quality that brings an opportunity to produce authentic stories that appeal to the fans, who seek honesty, inclusivity, and representation. However, Winell et al. (2025) also caution that commercialization out of control will lead to a scenario where the focus audiences are driven away when they undermine the perceived authenticity of women football. As such, the compromise of commercialization of female football and preserving the pure image of the game should be the Indian situation. This is the harmony that leads to brand loyalty because loyalty is normally pegged on the purity of the sport.

## **Generational Shifts in Perceptions of Women's Football**

Among these points of view, Giachino, Valenti, Bonadonna, and Bollani (2024) studied the perception of women football by young generations. Using the evidence of the youth cohorts in their study they found there was a growing openness and interest towards women sports activities which were influenced by the social distribution of norms about gender equality and representation. The younger fans are not passive consumers who only use digital media and grassroots events to interact with women athletes and social activism. The discovery is

especially applicable in the case of India where there is a huge percentage of the population below 30 years and becoming more exposed to the discourses of gender inclusivity in sport worldwide. Giachino et al. (2024) imply that when football played by women is positioned as a representation of the power and cultural development, it may make a strong force in young minds, establishing a sense of emotional connection that would turn into a permanent loyalty. The problem posed to the representation of Indian women in football is that in implementing the strategies to achieve gender equality, which are youth-driven, it must be perceived by the fans as an aspirational and authentic sport.

## **Branding in Women's Sports**

The literature review on branding in women sporting activities offered by Mills (2019) demonstrated that female athletes and female teams are mostly challenged by serious obstacles in creating brand visibility when compared to their male counterparts. The review observed that the sports by women are often relegated in mainstream media resulting to poor brand awareness and commercialization. At the same time, Mills (2019) also emphasized that a strong differentiation can be generated by niche branding strategies, including making women sport more community-based, inclusive, and values-focused. This is an important insight as far as Indian women football is concerned. Instead of trying to imitate the branding approaches of men in cricket or men in football, the women football could focus on its own advantages: inclusiveness, grassroots stories, and the reflection of different social groups. Through the positioning of women football as both entertainment and a social cause that leads to equality, there will be a possibility of building a loyal following that believes that the sport is symbolically relevant to their values.

## **Symbolic Consumption and Brand Loyalty**

Rincón, Barbosa, Mateus, and Saavedra (2023) have come up with the idea of symbolic consumption as

an unconventional predictor of brand loyalty in the football industry. Their analysis revealed that fans also tend to maintain high levels of brand loyalty not only based on the way a team performs but based on the interpretations which are attached to following a club like identity and belonging and pride in culture. When applied to the Indian women football, this implies that rather than winning matches, loyalty will be created by making women football a cultural image of empowerment and gender equality. To illustrate, by purchasing merchandise or subscribing to women footballers through social media, people are not just purchasing a sport but also the overall concept of inclusivity. Such symbolic relationship can develop more hardcore and lasting types of brand loyalty, particularly in India where sport fanaticism usually overlaps with cultural and political inclination. Symbolic consumption can be a force of loyalty by enculturation of women football in the context of social change.

### **Sponsorship, Gender Equity, and Retention**

With sponsorship as a key factor that helps to keep women sport alive, Jensen and Smith (2024) examined the gender equity factor in connection with retaining sponsors in women sport sponsorship. They conducted a quantitative study, which revealed that equality has a more visible practice and sponsorship is more likely to be renewed when companies pursue the objectives of corporate social responsibility. This applies very well to the case of India where women football sponsorship is still in its early stages of development and mostly the shadow of men cricket which dominates. Inclusive representation will enable women's football to project itself as a socially responsible investment opportunity among the brands who want to be associated with gender equity. Further, the research proposes that sponsors will find it difficult to pull out the plug after they see that the sponsor is authentic and committed to equity. This forms a virtuous circle: when a team is more represented, it builds a better connection in sponsorship, leading to the increased visibility of a

brand and consumer confidence, which strengthens the loyalty of fans.

### **Rights, Technology, and Inclusion in Women's Sports**

Danielsson and Abdel-Haq (2024) discussed the concept of the right to work based on the technological and human rights by stating that the novel technologies modify the concept of access and equality in the field of profession and even sports. In their arguments, they point out that inclusivity in sport does not simply imply the aspect of involvement with impact of accessibility but equitable accessibility to facilities, preparation and presentation in the light of the more widespread technological and cultural revolution. Such a point of view is crucially crucial in the case of the Indian women football. Inequity of payment and absence of media coverage are some of the systemic barriers that most players find hard to deal with. The use of technology can bridge these gaps and expand them both in digital platforms and broadcasting innovations. When leveraged to their benefit, it can make female footballers more visible and develop relationships with the fans. However, when it is not shared equally, it may enhance injustices. The structure offered by Danielsson and Abdel-Haq (2024) is, therefore, a challenge to the stakeholders of Indian football to ensure that digital and organizational tools will be employed to ensure that rights are secured and more equitable representation will be given, and this will ultimately lead to trust and brand loyalty.

### **Athlete Branding and Sponsorship Influences**

As a way to understand the commercial relationships between athletes and their sponsors, Petrie (2025) discussed the inspiratory factors underlying sponsorship of female snowboarders. This research has pointed out how female athletes are usually judged not only based on their performance but also by their marketability, character and brand fit. Although this creates the

issue of commodification of players, it also indicates that female sports have the chance of developing distinctive ways of branding. To illustrate how the players can become brand ambassadors outside football, in the Indian women of football scenario, players like Bala Devi and Aditi Chauhan have already led to prove that an athlete can become a brand ambassador off the field. The information provided by Petrie (2025) would imply that the success of sponsorship will depend on the ability to present women footballers as the embodiment of resilience, inclusivity, and role models. This twofold approach to focusing on both the athletic performance and personal branding could be the powerful commercial ecosystem of women football and also can establish emotional points of contact with fans. Loyalty to the player and the sport intensifies when the fans believe that the athlete is not only a skilled player but that he/she shares similar values.

### **Media Narratives, National Identity, and Representation**

The doctoral research by Ward (2023) concerning women in sport media and Australian policy offers a valuable opportunity to look at how the media can influence the national identity by means of sport. Ward also emphasized that sports media not just duplicates cultural discourses, but also invents them to determine how women athletes are perceived and valued. This can be applied to the Indian situation where cricket is the central topic in national sports and, therefore, women football have a long way to go to be featured in the media. Nevertheless, when it is pictured, it can rebrand women footballers as the centers of India in the sporting world. One such can be the introduction of regional talent and the linking of women football with empowerment stories, or narratives, which can transform the perception of the general population in a very large scale. The conclusions drawn by Ward (2023) highlight the point that not only is equitable media representation visible but it is what forms the discourse that is appealing to national identity and pride. This

construction process narrative is very vital in the case of Indian women football in the realization of fans who will perceive the game outside of the entertainment- as a form of culture whose long term investment is justified.

### **Identity Construction and Mega-Events**

Ege (2020) examined the identity-building related to the preparations of Qatar hosting the FIFA world cup in 2022. The study brings out the use of mega-events to construct national identities and gain international legitimacy. Though women football in India is yet to attain the magnitude of such mega events as the world cup, the study has good lessons to offer. Constructive inclusive narratives of gender, empowerment and modernity can be built through national and regional tournaments, like the Indian Women League. As a way of rebranding the image of women football in India as an instrument of creating a global image of sports in India, stakeholders can empower the cultural importance of the sport as well as the loyalty of the fans. The symbolic strength of representation in this kind of tournaments may turn into a foundation to build a brand, as Qatar did with the world cup to rebrand its identity.

### **Sport Marketing Evolution and Women's Football**

Moradi (2023) provided a three-method summary of 2012-2022 research studies on Sport Marketing Quarterly highlighting the development of the marketing strategy in the sporting industry. The report has established that digital interactions, inclusivity and consumer-oriented stories are increasingly becoming popular as the basic marketing trends. These lessons can be directly applied to the context of women football in India as the digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and grassroots activism are now playing an essential role in bridging the gap left by mass media. Moradi (2023) claims that the loyalty does not build upon the match-day experiences anymore, but it is built upon the continued interactions with numerous channels.

This transformation provides the Indian women football with an opportunity of adopting new marketing practices that focus on inclusiveness and authenticity, which strengthen the emotional bond between fans and the sport.

### **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Global Sport**

Thibodeaux and Sabiston (2024) explored the contribution of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) programs in structure of Olympic Games. Their primary idea is the importance of integrating the principles of inclusive practices into the institutional framework of sport not as the addition to the long-term sustainability but as its constituent element. Applied to the situation involving the Indian women football the EDI frameworks would entail that the athletes who represent the marginalised groups and the different geographical location have equal opportunity to train, be sponsored and be featured in the media. Such an inclusion brings together the loyalty of fans who subsequently are likely to attend in support of sports that reflect their diversity and value. It is moral and strategic in the brand development aspects as Thibodeaux and Sabiston (2024) prompt us to recall that inclusiveness in sport is both moral and strategic in building the fanbase as well as offering an equality and inclusion story.

### **Social Media Toxicity and Women's Sport**

Finally, the author Piché (2023) explored the problem of toxicity regarding the discourse of women sport on social media. The paper has highlighted the situation of over exploiting female athletes on the internet because it undermines their confidence and their perception in the eyes of the world. This applies a lot to India where female footballers have to cope with cultural stigmatization in addition to online harassment. Despite the high opportunities of interactions between fans and athletes on social media, the uncontrollable unhealthy competition is bound to eradicate trust and loyalty. According to Piché (2023), institutional safeguards and preemptive media strategies are used to address the

maltreatment on the internet. With the example of Indian women entertainment, the issue of insecure online technologies, wholesome entertainment experiences, and advocacy via social networks would be mitigated and enable all relevant participants to feel safe. Together, these articles highlight the fact that the practice of women football is at the intersectional level of identity formation, changing marketing trends, institutional incorporation, and digital concerns. These global experiences should be a fine balance in India: letting women play football due to the development of their culture, relying on new marketing concepts and ideas, such as inclusivity, and protecting athletes against online discrimination. When well applied, the strategies would assist to make women football a strong brand that can sustain consumer loyalty in the long term.

### **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of Indian Women's Football**

Verifiable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can also be used to describe the growth of Indian women football in that an evidence-based perspective is given on the growth of the sport. All India Football Federation (AIFF) indicates that over the last few years, the number of registered female footballers has gone up tremendously. In June, 2022 the number of registered female players was 11,724, and in March, 2024 it had reached 27,936 and increased by 138 percent in slightly less than two years (AIFF, 2024a) . This growth is evidence of the effectiveness of grassroots campaigns and institutional investment into women's football yet the number of people who take part is still much less than that of men. The league level still remains the best competitive platform of the country which is Indian Women League (IWL). The IWL had 8 teams in the 202425 season, which continues to provide avenues of professional competition but remains on a relatively small scale, relative to men leagues (AIFF, 2024b) . Although the league is the symbol of structural stability, the lack of their media coverage and sponsorship today still limits their visibility and

commercial potential. The Indian women national team is currently ranked at 63rd position in FIFA Women World ranking (as of August 2025) in the world ranking, and it is following the leading nations in Asia like Japan, Australia and China (Sawant, et al. 2021 ).This ranking though indicative of consistency also shows the gap that should be filled to make India globally competitive.

**Table 1 : Key Performance Indicators of Indian Women’s Football (2022–2025)**

KPI	Indicator / Metric	Data / Trend
Player Participation	Registered female players	11,724 (June 2022) → 27,936 (March 2024)
League Development	Teams in Indian Women’s League	8 teams in 2024–25 season
FIFA Ranking	India Women’s National Team	Ranked 63rd (August 2025)

Source: Self prepared by Author

## CONCLUSION

The paper has valuable theoretical and practical implications on the topic of Indian women football. Theoretically, it proves that sporting performance is not the only factor influencing brand loyalty but inclusivity, authenticity and symbolic values. The analysis offers a quantifiable model by the use of key performance indicators including player involvement, organization of the league, and FIFA ranking to determine sustainability and representation. This reinforces the existing branding theories and makes them applicable to a sporting area that has not been explored much. On the practical level, the results can indicate practical recommendations to various stakeholders. To the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and the policymakers, the increasing number of players registered and the solidity of Indian Women League demonstrate the prospects of additional investment

in grassroots and international exposure. Women football can be seen by sponsors as a chance to match commercial interests with gender equity, and, therefore, social credibility and consumer loyalty increase. The media companies need to deal with the disparity in limited television airtime and the increasing digital interaction, and the fans and communities can look at the sport as a means of empowerment and culture transformation. All these implications bring to the fore the fact that women football is a potential developmental priority as well as a sustainable brand equity building platform. This paper has critically examined how inclusivity, sponsorship and authenticity have influenced brand loyalty in Indian women football. The discussion showed that sport performance is not an only determinant of loyalty but is highly determined by the values of representation, community identity and symbolic consumption. Application of balanced commercialization and ethical sponsorship became the key drivers of long-term fan interest. The data-driven aspect that this study brought into this discussion was through the incorporation of key performance indicators. The number of registered female footballers surged up in 2022-24, the Indian Women League has eight teams in operation, and the national team is ranked in the 63 rd position in FIFA, but these two aspects reflect both optimistic growth and persistent difficulties. These signs show that institutional structures are also in the right direction, although more sponsorship, global media coverage, and competitiveness are crucial. On the whole, the level of football among Indian women is in the state of transformation. When better institutional commitment, inclusive approach, and specific investment have been established, the sport can become a sustainable brand and at the same time, it will promote gender equality and change cultural views of sport in India.

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