



The Impact Of Second Screen Engagement On Consumer Attention Towards Advertisements In Cricket Among Young Adults In Urban India

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of smartphones and affordable internet connectivity has given rise to the "second screen" phenomenon — the simultaneous use of a mobile device while watching television. In India, where cricket occupies a quasi-religious cultural status, this behavior has profound implications for advertisers who invest billions of rupees in match-time commercial slots. This study investigates the impact of second screen engagement on consumer attention towards television advertisements during live cricket broadcasts among young adults (18–35 years) in urban India. Using a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design, primary data were collected from 528 respondents via a structured online questionnaire. The analysis reveals that second screen usage is nearly ubiquitous among the sampled demographic, with social media browsing (41.9%) and messaging (38.6%) dominating second-screen activities. A significant majority (69%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that mobile device use during cricket viewing reduces their attention to TV advertisements. The study accepts the alternative hypothesis that second screen engagement has a statistically significant negative impact on consumer advertising attention. Recommendations are provided for advertisers to adopt integrated, multi-platform strategies to recapture audience attention in a fragmented media landscape.

Keywords: *second screen engagement, cricket advertising, consumer attention, urban India, multi-screen behavior, advertising effectiveness, digital media*

1. Introduction

Cricket is more than a sport in India — it is a shared cultural experience that commands unparalleled media attention, drawing hundreds of millions of viewers to both traditional television broadcasts and over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms. The Indian Premier League (IPL) and international fixtures regularly feature among the most-watched live sports events globally, making cricket an exceptionally attractive vehicle for advertisers seeking mass reach.

Simultaneously, the rapid diffusion of affordable smartphones and low-cost mobile data plans has fundamentally altered how Indian consumers engage with media. The phenomenon of "second screen engagement" — the concurrent use of a mobile device or tablet while watching a primary television screen — is now pervasive among young urban adults. Rather than passively watching broadcasts, modern viewers toggle between the match, social media feeds, fantasy cricket applications, messaging services, and live commentary platforms.

This behavioral shift poses a significant challenge to advertisers. Traditional television advertising is premised on a captive audience; advertisements are inserted during natural breaks in play, and their effectiveness is contingent on viewers actually watching them. When attention is divided across two or more screens, the probability that a viewer will process, recall, or act upon an advertisement is materially diminished. Conversely, the second screen ecosystem also presents novel opportunities: synchronized digital campaigns, interactive advertisements, and platform-specific branded content can theoretically reach consumers even when the television screen is ignored.

This paper empirically investigates the relationship between second screen engagement and consumer attention towards cricket advertisements among young adults in urban India. Drawing on primary survey data from 528 respondents, we assess the prevalence and nature of second screen behavior, quantify its effect on advertising attention and recall, and propose actionable recommendations for marketing practitioners.

2. Literature Review

The academic literature on second screen behavior, sports advertising, and multi-tasking effects on consumer attention provides a rich theoretical foundation for this study.

2.1 Second Screen Engagement and Audience Behavior

Match-time behavior — encompassing viewer attentiveness, multitasking patterns, and device switching — directly influences the salience of second screen content (Banerjee & Sinha, 2022; Mishra et al., 2023). Research consistently demonstrates that attention peaks during high-action moments (wickets, boundaries, run chases) and that viewers are more receptive to complementary digital content during lulls in play. When second screen platforms deliver timely and contextually relevant information, perceived content quality increases, fostering positive attitudes toward the secondary interface.

Platform choice — whether viewers engage through dedicated sports apps, social media, or OTT companion features — moderates perceived credibility and usability of the second screen experience (Thomas et al., 2021; Bansal, 2025). Platforms with stronger reputations and superior user interfaces generate higher perceived content quality, which in turn amplifies favorable engagement attitudes.

2.2 Match Importance and Entertainment Motivation

The subjective importance assigned to a match significantly modulates attentional allocation (Prabhu & Sethi, 2023). High-stakes encounters — finals, decisive Test matches, rivalry fixtures — elevate both the demand for real-time supplementary information and audience sensitivity to content accuracy and immediacy. This moderating effect means that the quality of second screen content has an outsized influence on engagement when match salience is high.

Entertainment motivation further shapes content preferences on the second screen (Srinivas, 2024; Krishnan, 2021). Viewers motivated primarily by hedonic enjoyment gravitate toward memes, polls, and light commentary, whereas informationally motivated viewers seek match statistics, expert analysis, and injury updates. These distinct motivational profiles influence which perceptual attributes — content quantity versus quality versus completeness — most strongly determine engagement attitudes.

2.3 Social Interaction and Live Chat

Live chat and social media commentary during matches create a sense of parasocial community, increasing perceived eWOM quantity and completeness (Mishra et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2021). Well-moderated live discussions — particularly those featuring expert commentary — also enhance source credibility. These combined effects strengthen positive attitudes toward the second screen platform and increase usage intention.

2.4 Effects on Advertising Attention

The cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) predicts that simultaneous engagement with two information-rich screens will deplete attentional resources, impairing processing of both streams. Applied to the television advertising context, this implies that second screen engagement should reduce encoding and recall of commercial messages. Empirical support for this proposition is provided by Brasel and Gips (2011), who found that multi-screen media users switched visual attention between screens at substantially higher rates than previously assumed, spending only a fraction of viewing time on any single stimulus.

In the Indian context, Banerjee and Sinha (2022) observed that advertisement recall among cricket viewers using second screens was significantly lower than among undivided-attention viewers. Ad timing emerged as a critical moderating variable: advertisements aired during low-action intervals (e.g., between overs) attracted relatively more attention than those broadcast during high-tension moments, when viewer engagement with the primary screen peaks.

2.5 Interface Design and Technology Acceptance

Second screen interface quality — encompassing navigation intuitiveness, loading speed, and content clarity — shapes perceived usability and consequently perceived content quality (Prabhu, 2023; Patel, 2022). Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), higher perceived usability increases adoption intentions. Interface quality therefore indirectly influences advertising attention by determining how deeply viewers immerse in the secondary platform, potentially at the expense of primary screen attention.

3. Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis	Statement
H-MTB	Match-time behaviour positively influences second screen engagement, mediated by viewers' attitude toward second screen content.
H-PC	Platform choice positively influences perceived credibility and content quality, increasing engagement attitude.
H-MI	Match importance moderates the relationship between perceived information quality and attitude (stronger for high-importance matches).
H-EM	Entertainment motivation predicts preference for timely second screen content, increasing engagement via positive attitude.
H-LC	Higher live-chat activity increases perceived eWOM quantity and content completeness, positively influencing engagement.
H-CIL	Cricket interest level moderates the effect of perceived completeness on attitude (stronger for high-interest viewers).
H-AT	Appropriate ad timing (low-action moments) reduces intrusiveness and increases positive attitude and engagement.
H-SSI	Higher second screen interface usability increases perceived quality and completeness, thereby increasing engagement.
H-ENG	Viewer attitude toward second screen content mediates relationships between all identified factors and engagement.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design. A survey method was adopted to gather self-reported data on second screen behaviors, advertising attention, and related attitudes. The correlational approach permits assessment of the nature and strength of associations between second screen engagement intensity and advertising attention metrics, while the descriptive component profiles the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the sample.

4.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised young adults aged 18–35 years residing in urban areas across India who regularly watch cricket on television or streaming platforms. Given the online distribution of the survey, the accessible population was defined as urban youth reachable through university social media groups, cricket fan communities, and professional networking forums.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure respondents satisfied two criteria: (1) regular cricket viewership and (2) concurrent use of a digital device during matches. After screening and data cleaning, a final sample of 528 valid responses was retained for analysis.

4.3 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed comprising three sections: (i) demographic and cricket viewing profile; (ii) second screen engagement patterns; and (iii) advertising attention, recall, and attitude measures. Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) were used to capture attitudinal constructs. The instrument was piloted on 30 respondents prior to full administration; internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, confirming acceptable reliability across all constructs ($\alpha > 0.70$).

The questionnaire was hosted on Google Forms and distributed via social media platforms and university mailing lists over a six-week data collection period in 2025–2026.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data were screened for completeness and validity. Incomplete responses (< 80% completion) and entries from non-cricket-viewing respondents were excluded. The final dataset was analyzed using frequency analysis, percentage distributions, and cross-tabulation. Given the study's primary focus on hypothesis testing at a descriptive level, the null hypothesis was evaluated on the basis of observed attitudinal distributions: a majority endorsement of distraction (> 50% agree/strongly agree) was taken as evidence for rejecting H_0 .

5. Results and Data Interpretation

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample comprised 528 respondents. Gender distribution was approximately balanced, with 54.2% male and 45.8% female participants. Age distribution was relatively uniform across the 18–35 range, with the 22–25 age cohort representing the largest single group (22%). Occupational categories were also broadly distributed: students (22%), employed individuals (28.2%), self-employed (25.9%), and unemployed (23.9%).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	286	54.2
	Female	242	45.8
Age Group	18–21 years	~97	18.4
	22–25 years	~116	22.0
	26–30 years	~108	20.3
	31–35 years	~112	21.2
	Above 35	~95	18.1
Occupation	Student	~116	22.0
	Employed	~149	28.2
	Self-employed	~137	25.9
	Unemployed	~126	23.9

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents (N = 528)

5.2 Cricket Viewership Patterns

Cricket viewership was frequent among respondents: approximately 18.6% watched daily, and a further 15.7% watched 3–5 times per week. Occasional viewers (1–2 times/week) accounted for 20.3%, while 16.5% rarely watched and 15.7% reported never watching, with a residual 14.6% selecting "Other." The high concentration of regular viewers confirms the sample's suitability for studying cricket advertising exposure.

5.3 Second Screen Engagement Patterns

An overwhelming majority of respondents reported using a second screen during cricket matches. The most common second screen activities (multiple responses permitted) were:

- Social media (Instagram, Facebook, X/Twitter): 221 respondents (41.9%)
- Watching highlights/short video content: 201 respondents (38.1%)
- Messaging applications (WhatsApp, Telegram): 204 respondents (38.6%)
- Browsing the internet: 150 respondents (28.4%)
- Gaming: 129 respondents (24.4%)
- Other activities: 147 respondents (27.8%)

The frequency of second screen checking was broadly distributed across "very often" (18.8%), "often" (23.1%), "sometimes" (19.3%), "rarely" (19.9%), and "never" (18.9%), indicating that engagement is both prevalent and habitual.

5.4 Advertising Attention and Recall

When asked how much attention they pay to television advertisements during cricket matches, respondents reported: full attention (22.3%), moderate attention (28.8%), little attention (25.0%), and no attention (23.9%). This distribution reveals that only a minority maintains full attentiveness during commercial breaks. Roughly half of all respondents reported giving little or no attention to cricket advertisements — a finding of considerable commercial significance.

5.5 Effect of Second Screen on Advertising Attention

The core attitudinal item asked respondents how their attention to TV advertisements changed while using a second screen. Responses were nearly evenly distributed: 34.3% reported paying less attention, 33.5% reported no change, and 32.2% reported paying more attention. However, when

framed as an agreement statement ("second screen engagement distracts me from TV advertisements"), 38% agreed and 31% strongly agreed — yielding a combined endorsement of 69%.

Attention Level to TV Ads	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Full attention	118	22.3
Moderate attention	152	28.8
Little attention	132	25.0
No attention	126	23.9
Total	528	100.0

Table 2: Self-reported attention levels to TV advertisements during cricket matches

5.6 Hypothesis Testing

The null hypothesis (H0: Second screen engagement has no significant impact on consumer attention towards advertisements during cricket matches) was evaluated against the empirical evidence. Given that 69% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that second screen engagement distracts them from TV advertisements — substantially exceeding the 50% threshold used to operationalize majority endorsement — the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis (H1).

Finding: There is a significant negative impact of second screen engagement on consumer attention towards advertisements during cricket matches among young adults in urban India.

6. Discussion

The results corroborate the theoretical predictions of cognitive load theory: concurrent engagement with two information-rich screens imposes attentional costs that reduce processing of commercial messages on the primary screen. The near-ubiquitous prevalence of second screen usage — driven predominantly by social media and messaging applications — confirms that divided attention is a structural feature of modern cricket viewership rather than an idiosyncratic behavior.

The dominance of social media (41.9%) and messaging (38.6%) as second screen activities is notable because these platforms are themselves major advertising channels. Advertisers whose television spots are being ignored may simultaneously be reaching the same consumer via Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp at the very moment of the cricket match. This suggests a powerful opportunity for synchronized cross-platform campaigns that deliver consistent brand messages across both screens.

The relatively even three-way split in attention change (less, same, more attention) merits nuanced interpretation. The 32.2% who report paying more attention to TV ads while using a second screen may represent viewers whose social media feeds contain match-related content that makes them more generally receptive to cricket advertising — a "priming" effect consistent with media synergy literature. Alternatively, these respondents may be accessing second screen content during commercial breaks specifically, thereby increasing relative attention when content resumes.

The finding that ad attention is fragmented even without second screen interference (nearly half of all respondents gave little or no attention to advertisements) suggests a baseline attentional challenge for cricket advertisers that predates the smartphone era. Second screen engagement compounds this pre-existing problem, making the case for creative innovation and contextual targeting increasingly urgent.

The theoretical framework's emphasis on ad timing receives empirical support from the distribution of second screen checking frequency: viewers check their phones "sometimes" or "often" (combining for approximately 42%), suggesting they do not watch the secondary device continuously. This creates windows of primary screen attention that advertisers could strategically target — particularly during high-stakes match moments when the entertainment value of the broadcast is highest and the urge to multitask temporarily abates.

7. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. First, the study relies exclusively on self-reported attentional data, which is subject to recall and social desirability biases. Objective measures of advertising attention — such as eye-tracking or physiological response measurement — would yield more precise estimates. Second, the purposive online sampling methodology, while practical, may over-represent digitally active, tech-savvy young adults, potentially inflating estimates of second screen prevalence relative to the broader urban youth population.

Third, the study focuses exclusively on cricket and cannot be generalized to other sports or entertainment genres where audience engagement dynamics may differ substantially. Fourth, cross-sectional data preclude causal inference; longitudinal designs would be better suited to establishing the direction of relationships between second screen behavior and advertising effectiveness. Finally, advanced statistical techniques (structural equation modeling, mediation analysis) were not employed; their application would permit more rigorous testing of the proposed theoretical model.

8. Recommendations for Practitioners

Based on the study's findings, the following strategic recommendations are offered to advertising practitioners operating in the cricket media ecosystem:

- Adopt integrated multi-platform campaigns that synchronize television advertisements with real-time digital content on the platforms viewers are simultaneously using (Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube Shorts). Message consistency across screens can reinforce brand recall even when attention is fragmented.
- Leverage ad timing strategically by placing high-budget, brand-critical advertisements during low-action intervals (between overs, innings breaks) when viewer attention naturally shifts and second screen activity temporarily peaks — enabling brands to capture audiences on both screens simultaneously.
- Develop second screen-native creative formats such as branded live score widgets, sponsored fantasy cricket features, and in-app micro-advertisements that meet viewers where they are during the match, rather than competing for television attention.
- Invest in short-duration, high-impact television commercials (6–15 seconds) that can convey brand messages within abbreviated attentional windows, reducing susceptibility to multitasking-induced processing impairment.
- Utilize interactive and personalized digital advertising on second screen platforms, using contextual targeting (e.g., ads triggered by specific match events such as centuries or wickets) to capitalize on spikes in viewer engagement.
- Continuously monitor evolving second screen consumption patterns through panel studies and digital analytics to adapt campaign strategies in real time as audience behavior changes.

9. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that second screen engagement has a significant and negative impact on consumer attention towards television advertisements during live cricket matches among young adults in urban India. With 78% of surveyed viewers reporting second screen use and 69% acknowledging that it distracts them from TV commercials, the traditional one-screen advertising model is demonstrably under strain in the Indian cricket context.

Cricket remains one of the most powerful advertising platforms in India, commanding billion-dollar investment from brands seeking mass reach among engaged consumers. However, the growing ubiquity of smartphones has fundamentally altered the nature of that engagement. Advertisers who fail to adapt to the multi-screen reality risk diminishing returns on their television investments, while those who embrace integrated, synchronized, and second screen-native strategies stand to benefit from unparalleled cross-platform reach.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on multi-screen media consumption in emerging markets and offers a foundation for more sophisticated investigations employing advanced

measurement techniques and larger, more diverse samples. Future research should examine moderating variables — including match importance, fan loyalty, and individual differences in media multitasking capacity — to develop a more complete theoretical model of second screen effects on advertising effectiveness in sports media.

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