

Channels prepare the pitch to face the cricket onslaught

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It's the season for back-to-back T20 cricket action. Close on the heels of the conclusion of Asia Cup, has come the ICC T20 World Cup, which commenced from March 8. Meanwhile, Season 9 of the Indian Premiere League will commence from April 9, 2016.

With so much cricket action lined up, channels in other genres, especially general entertainment, movies, youth, are gearing up to woo and retain eyeballs through a slew of new shows as well as more intriguing twists in the storylines of ongoing serials.

Adgully sought the views of a cross-section of industry experts to know how cricket will impact the content strategy of channels, the role that digital platforms will play, advertiser response and more.



Viewership erosion during cricket season

When asked whether any significant erosion of viewership is expected during this year's cricket season, Rathi Gangappa, COO, MediaCom, agreed that going by past years' experience, there was likely to be a drop in GEC viewership due to cricket. At the same time she said, that this also depended on the target audience that one was looking to address. "While we currently have only 10 days of data to reflect upon, we will wait to have more data before we can comment on the trends this year," she said, adding, "Having said this, GEC channels are gearing up for this cricketing season with their strategies and content line-up."

Amol Mohan Das, Client Leader, Motivator, too felt that there would be a loss in viewership, but it would be toned down this year compared to the previous years. "If I have to look at the ICC T20 World Cup that is currently going on, it is being aired during the prime time, so obviously it is going to hurt the GECs. But not so much that someone will have to take the heat. So, from a planner's perspective, from an advertiser's perspective, whoever is not on this cricket, they will manage to control their GRPs," he opined.

Divya Radhakrishnan, MD, Helios Media, on the other hand, remarked, "No, this isn't the first time that tournaments have come in back to back...cricket has managed to find its own audience base, which doesn't overlap as much with GECs."



Speaking about the South markets, especially Tamil Nadu, Shankar B, CEO, Fourth Dimension, pointed out, "As you are aware, Tamil Nadu is going to polls in a couple of months. If you are talking about erosion in viewership or erosion in numbers in terms of revenue, then erosion in revenues I don't think there is any problem with GECs and news as a genre, as with elections due, we are making decent money, when I am generally talking about all the players in Tamil Nadu."

He further said, "In terms of erosion of viewers if you are talking, this was always the case. If you look at the Tamil Nadu market, it has always been a cricket friendly market. What we have done in terms of GEC content is there aren't any big investments made at this point in time on increasing content, etc. As far as IPL is concerned, this year, the absence of Chennai Superkings from the IPL 9 line-up probably play a deterrent in the minds of consumers in Tamil Nadu."

According to Sunjoy Waddhwa, CMD, Sphereorigins, "I think right now channels are not worried about IPL. But with the current phase, I don't think there is any launch scheduled. By and large as per my knowledge I don't think there is any new show launch."



Giving a production house's perspective, Waddhwa said, "It's more nine years now since the launch of IPL. During the first few seasons, we treated IPL like competition because of the novelty of the format. But now, nine years down the line, the excitement is more for the initial first two weeks and the last two weeks. So as such there are no content changes that we are looking specifically for in our shows."

Abhimanyu Singh, CEO & Founder, Contiloe Pictures, felt that with the number of channels and the increased requirement for content, it was imperative to launch shows during IPL too. "Moreover, cricket goes beyond IPL and during the year you have many cricket series that impacts viewership. And launching shows during cricket tournament is now a reality," he added.

For Sharat Dhall, President, Yatra.com, cricket always brings a sense of excitement amongst Indians and this T20 World Cup is no different. He remarked, "People are planning to travel across cities for key matches, driving down to smaller destinations such as Mohali as well as undertaking longer trips for the India-Pakistan game, where we have seen a jump of 267 per cent in bookings for budget accommodation in Kolkata for the upcoming weekend. Budget accommodation is clearly the top choice across all destinations, and we are expecting a surge in last minute bookings as well for the matches."