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ET INTERVIEW

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# IPL's a Chance to Connect to 200m People: PepsiCo

Warrier tells ET how the beverage giant plans to leverage the cricketing extravaganza



**P**epsiCo, which is splurging close to ₹160 crore over the next two months, has placed all its bets on this coming IPL cricket season. Will it deliver for the cola maker? Deepika Warrier, VP — beverage marketing, PepsiCo, tells **Ratna Bhushan** about Pepsi's plans for the next 60 days. Edited excerpts:

#### Is ₹160 crore over 60 days justified?

Totally. I'm not talking numbers, but we are spending 25% more this summer across brands over last year. A good 50% of volumes come in the April to June months. This is a very first-half and second quarter category.

The IPL acquisition is a long-term bet, a big equity bet. The spends work for themselves. We're building 360 degree fan salience, taking it to the next level... and there's a strong correlation between salience and consumption. Numbers suggest there are 200 million people who engage with the IPL. And India is a very low per-capita consumption market for beverages... so we're looking at a huge growth opportunity.

I know there are critics talking about our acquisition, but PepsiCo is a sports marketer, we've always been sports marketers. The expertise is built into the system, and we do know how to leverage sports.

#### Are ratings a concern?

The IPL is ahead of ratings of the next three most popular programmes on general entertainment channels. It's the best media buy in season. There's no other format that challenges the IPL. Besides, we are activating consumer engagement in-stadia, on digital and on mobile. So it's not just on broadcast where we are activating our brands.

The plans go beyond advertising. We're smartening up the pitch, we have 500-ml 'fan' cans, a Pepsi Tweet20 tournament on Twitter, can-shaped player dug-outs, 3D pitch mats, a remixed horn, a count-down timer, a new beverage, and more.

#### Have you exhausted your annual budgets in two months?

No. Spends for the rest of the year will be incremental. We are ensuring we exit the year on incremental spends.

#### How much is the pressure to increase market share in the two IPL months?

I wouldn't say pressure. But of course, we will closely monitor returns on investment and how this property delivers. I'm quite confident it will, and that spends will translate into higher consumption. The expectation from us is to execute plans flawlessly and drive salience...

we're raising the bar in terms of marketing execution. Our approach is long-term. We are trying to transform the fan experience with a huge amount of on-ground integration. But it's a cross-functional effort... there are trade initiatives, distribution, driving penetration, and a lot more.

#### Are you activating brands other than Pepsi on IPL?

Yes. This is too big an acquisition to focus only on one brand. Besides Pepsi, we are activating 7Up, Mountain Dew, Gatorade and Lays. Pouring rights gives us so much opportunity to do regional marketing. Take 7Up — it's a very strong brand in the South so we are activating it with the Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore teams. For Mountain Dew, which is very big in the North, we are aligning with the Rajasthan, Punjab and Delhi teams. As you know, we've aligned with eight teams — we are also talking to Mumbai Indians but there was a contract sensitivity. We will revisit alignment plans for Mumbai Indians next year. For most other teams, contracts are multi-year.

I'm quite confident that the spends will translate into higher consumption