

ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL
Available Online: https://assajournal.com
Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026.Page#.8787-8812
Print ISSN: 3006-2497 Online ISSN: 3006-2500
Platform & Workflow by: Open Journal Systems
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24098597

Framing Gender in South Asian Sports Journalism: A Comparative Content Analysis of Dawn and The Hindustan Times

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Abstract
The topic of gender in sports journalism has continued to be a significant issue in the field of media and communication studies since news reports are used to shape the opinions of people regarding athletic performance, validity and gender equity. Although the involvement and success of female athletes are rising and athletes are becoming more successful internationally, sports media still offer disproprionate coverage to male sport. This paper will be a comparative quantitative content analysis of two privateers prominent English-language dailies in South Asia: Dawn (Pakistan) and The Hindustan Times (India) to explore how they represent gender. One hundred sports news published until June (50 articles in one newspaper and 50 in the other) were coded through a structured coding tool within the period of January 2024. It was analyzed based on the gender and the type of the sport in which the athletes are, the placement of the story in the article, the article-length, the pitch used, the use of images, and the visual aspect. Framing Theory, Gatekeeping Theory and Gender Schemas Theory were the frameworks to conduct the study on factors affecting media coverage on male and female athletes including the editorial practices. Coverage patterns were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the differences between genders and the effects of newspaper affiliation were tested using inferential statistics, ANOVA and multiple regression. The results show that there is an inequitable trend on sports coverage in reporting in terms of male athletes, as 69% of the total number of news stories were about male athletes vs. 18% of the stories reporting about female athletes. In the two newspapers, cricket was the most addressed and in terms of editorial coverage, male athletes were given much more editorial attention than female athletes with more coverage, more eminent display and higher placement. Despite slightly higher coverage of female athletes compared to Dawn, The Hindustan Times nevertheless proved to be much similar to the latter that shows gender inequality trends. The paper concludes that gender bias in the South Asian sport journalism is manifested more by unequal visibility as well as editorial prioritization and not by direct negative frames. This research can be used in sports communication, comparative journalism, as well as gender and media studies, as well as provide useful

suggestions on how to make sports journalism more equal by providing one of the few comparative studies in terms of news operations of the Pakistani and Indian elite newspapers.
Keywords: *gender representation, sports journalism, content analysis, framing, gatekeeping, newspapers, South Asia, Dawn, The Hindustan Times, media representation.*

Introduction

Sport is not just about physical competition, but a significant social and cultural institution that societies create to help form identity, bargain with national pride and cement group values. The sports journalism is the focus of the latter process since it is the determinant of which athletes, competitions, and achievements gain popularity amongst the audience and how they will be perceived by the latter. Sports media bring about social perceptions of sporting excellence, gender roles, legitimacy and status (through editorial selection, narrative framing, and visual representation, Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025; Pathak, 2024; Sikka and Thomas, 2023). Representation through the media thus does not only influence the viewpoints of athletes but also the attitudes of the wider society of its participation in sport.

Although there has been massive advances in the involvement and success of women in international sport, the press reporting remains rife with gender imbalances. Studies continuously reveal that the sports activities of men are more reported than those of women in newspapers, televisions, and online (Boczek et al., 2022; Eastman and Billings, 2000; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025). Men athletes tend to feature in headlines, photographs, featured page position and analytical stories, but women athletes are usually more likely to get episodic attention (associated with major international events or remarkable wins). This imbalance is not only in the coverage but also in the length of stories, their positions, visual emphasis, a particular theme, and language of evaluation (Romney and Johnson, 2019; Schmidt, 2017). These trends legitimize men as the main type of athletic competition and the women as secondary or special.

Sports journalism is also biased in terms of gender as seen in visibility as well as in the manner the athletes are depicted. Treatment of female athletes is often structured around the image that it is about beauty or motherhood, emotion, or self-sacrifice, as opposed to the focus on sporting prowess and winning (L ̂pez & Harris, 2021; Mishra, 2022; Pathak, 2024). Male sportsmen, on the contrary, are generally put in the context of power, dominance, authority, strategic cleverness, and professionalism. Such differences in representation are strong supports of traditional gender stereotyping, as they directly relate athletic competence and masculinity and vulnerability and grace or domestic identity with femininity (Mishra, 2022; Romney and Johnson, 2019). They are not purely symbolic representations due to the fact that media presence is a key factor that determines sponsorship, commercialization, institutional backing, audience consumption, and the dream of young athletes (Sengupta, 2023).

The perpetuation of these inequalities can also be linked to the structural nature of sports journalism. Male journalists, editors, and commentators have controlled the sports newsrooms and the cultures in these newsrooms have tended to favor male competitions and male views (Boczek et al., 2022; Schmidt, 2017). In the context of no overt discrimination, newsroom practices, career, corporate interests, and perceptions of audience demand might effectively replicate the inequality. De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers (2017) claim that cultures of the newsroom and male-centered visions can be maintained with professional practices; Boczek et al. (2022) demonstrate that the lack of women in the ranks of sports journalists does not diversity in news stories. Gender

inequality in sports journalism must instead be depicted as a structural and cultural issue as opposed to just being caused by personal prejudice.

The scholarship internationally also holds that these images of inequalities have not been erased by significant changes in the media technologies. Initially, there were first-time systematic biases in favor of the sports of men in broadcasting (Eastman and Billings, 2000), and then there was research that found these disparities on newspapers, online journalism, and digital sports (Boczek et al., 2022; Romney and Johnson, 2019) as well. Despite the fact that women have become even more actively involved in competitive sport, it is not reflected in the media coverage (Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Lpez and Harris, 2021; Sikka and Thomas, 2023). This sustenance indicates that technological change on its own has not undermined the institutional and cultural suppositions in favor of the sport of men.

Such apprehensions gain particular relevance in South Asia whereby sport has been strongly intertwined with nationalism, group identity, celebrity culture, and emotion of the masses. Pakistan and India have similarities in terms of being colonial societies, have robust newspaper cultures, and their sporting cultures are highly commercialized in which cricket as a sport prevails. There, media coverage is largely centered on the competitions of men, which further supports the notion that prestigious and nationally significant sport is an area dominated by men (Chowdhury, 2021; Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025). The sporting performance of women hence tends to get even less and a haphazard idea of accolade even as they continue to experience success internationally.

India has seen evidence of the extent of this imbalance. The Ormax Sports Audience Report revealed that the proportion of female athletes in the overall popularity of sports received a insignificant amount, and once again, a male-centric discourse in the Indian sports media is prevalent (Grewal and Kaul, 2024). The same was evidenced by the BBC Research (2020) which revealed that women sport was less perceived as competitive and less entertaining than a male sport. These perceptions are perpetuated and amplified through media coverage, which dedicates more repetition and analytical focus and visual space, to male events, and the coverage of female athletes can be redirected to focus on beauty, family life, personal sacrifice, or extraordinary conditions, instead of athletic performance (Banerjee, 2022; Pathak, 2024).

Similar trends are witnessed in Pakistan. Ishaq and Noorulain (2025) discovered that the top newspapers (such as Dawn) gave much better coverage to sports of men as compared to women competitions. Contest, performance, and success were often the general themes of male athletes, but emotional or social themes were often portrayed with female athletes. These representational inequalities and institutional imbalance do act together with institutional imbalance in the Pakistani journalism, such as under-representation of women in sports newsrooms and less-adoption of gender-sensitive editorial policies (Women Journalists Association of Pakistan & Freedom Network, 2024). Qureshi and Haider (2023) also suggest that the absence of female sports journalists also leads to male biased story selection, sourcing and framing.

Despite the existing studies that have proven that gender inequality still exists in sports journalism, research gaps still exist. The current research has been dominated by research on single countries, single sporting events or single facets of representation, like the amount of coverage or textual framing. In comparison to the literature on the subject, there are only a few studies that have concomitantly considered frequency, story placement, article

length, visual representation, tone and framing among top newspapers in Pakistan and India. Few comparative data on how powerful English-language newspapers working in the adjacent yet different media systems form the presence and relevance of male and female athletes can also be found. This comparison is useful as it may help differentiate the trends within the region on a broader scale as opposed to editorial practice which is specific to a newspaper.

It is against this backdrop that the current research paper compares and content analyzes Dawn and The Hindustan Times through sports news that was issued during January to June 2024. It looks at the coverage of male, female, and mixed-gender athletes; the positioning of stories, length and tone of the article, as well as the visual representation; whether newspaper affiliation correlates with male or female gender representation patterns. Combining quantitative measurements of visibility, with qualitative aspects of representation, the research offers a specific evaluation of gender bias in sports journalism in South Asia. It further provides some practical suggestions to journalists, editors and media houses to facilitate a more fair and inclusive sports journalism

Statement of the Problem

This paper has illustrated that even with tremendous progress of women in participating and achieving in competitive sports; sports journalism evidently demonstrates enduring gender inequalities in the number and quality of media coverage. It is clear that male sports are more visible, featuring, and are placed in superior editorial positions than female ones, where they are frequently delegated to the periphery in terms of coverage, placement, and gendered representations of looks, personal lives, or feelings of emotion, instead of abilities and sporting success (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2021; Hardin et al., 2006; Everbach, 2018; Pope, 2023; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025; Grewal and Kaul, 2024). The patterns, in addition to promoting the traditional stereotyping about gender roles, affect the attitudes towards the legitimacy of the sports, the opportunities associated with the sport, the institutional support of the sport, and the visibility of sports among women in general.

In spite of the fact that gender representation in sports media has already been considered as a subject of numerous scholarly studies, previous research works have been predominantly based only on particular countries, sporting events, or individual facets of the media coverage. There is still relatively less focus on cross-national studies focusing on various gender representative indicators all at once such as: frequency of coverage, place of story, space, visual salience, tone, framing. Engagement in this weakness is more pronounced in South Asia whereby Pakistan and India have close sporting cultures, colonial cultures and media cultures, but exist under different political, institutional, and editorial landscapes.

To date, there is no systematic comparative research of major newspapers in the two countries that restricts insights into whether gender differences in sports journalism are macro-regional tendencies or editorial choices at the newspaper. As a result, there is a lack of empirical research on the way in which influential English-language newspapers create the visibility, relevance, and portrayal of male and female athletes on the various scales of news content. This gap needs to be bridged to contribute to the research of comparative sports journalism and to inform more balanced editorial decisions and gender-sensitive journalism cultures of South Asia journalism

Research Gap

Despite previous studies on gender representation in sports journalism in Pakistan, India, Europe and North America, the current body of literature is disjointed in many key aspects. Much of the past studies have been specialized on a particular country, on a single newspaper, on one sporting event or on one aspect of representation including how often it has been covered, how the text has been framed or how it has been represented visually. Very little research has employed such an integrated method that would look at quantitative measures of prominence, such as coverage frequency, placement of stories in the newspaper, length of articles, space, and use of images, and such qualitative areas as tone, framing, emphasis of themes, etc.

This has been constrained especially in the South Asian set-up. Sporting cultures, strong newspaper and traditions, and prevalence of cricket make the similarities between Pakistan and India; however, the media system is designed in different editorial, institutional and national contexts. Irrespective of these similarities and differences, little cross-national research has used a direct comparison of the coverage of top English-language newspapers in both countries of male and female athletes. Consequently, it is unstated whether the recorded gender differences are as a result of wider regional journalism conventions or editorial policies of particular newspapers.

This gap is observed in the current study by relatively comparing both Dawn and The Hindustan Times by a framework that integrates both quantitative indicators of visibility and prominence and qualitative indicators of the tone and framing. Through an examination of two powerful newspapers in adjacent South-Asian countries, the research makes contributions to comparative media and sports communication studies and offers a deeper and more comprehensive perspective on how gender bias is constructed in the text, image and editorial planes in sports journalism.

Research Objectives

1. To contrast the range and extent of coverage on sports in Dawn and The Hindustan Times devoided to male and female athletes.
2. To analyze variations in how sports news is placed, allocated space, utilized visuals as well as framing between male and female news.
3. To find out the similarities and differences in the gender representation in Pakistani and Indian sports journalism.
4. To determine the significance of newspaper affiliation on the gender representation trends

Contribution of the Study

The research presented in this study is a contribution to the existing body of knowledge on comparative sports journalism through a systematic content analysis framework study on two popular South Asian newspapers to enable a cross-national comparison. It builds upon the current body of work by adding quantitative markers on representation to qualitative aspects of framing to provide a more in-depth perspective on gender bias in sports journalism (Bernstein, 2024; Claringbould et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2017). The results offer evidence that can support media scholars, editors, journalists, and policy makers who want to ensure equitable training of sports and enhances of inclusive media practices in South Asia.

Literature Review
Gender Representation in Sports Journalism

Gender representation has been one of the most studied topics on sports communication since sports media do not only act as informational conduits but as potent institutions that generate social meaning about gender, identity, success as well as sport legitimacy. However, instead of being observers, media entities play an active role in deciding which sporting events should be given attention, the success of sport stars is ushered, and the way sport stars are portrayed to the masses. Sports journalism helps to construct the social notion of masculinity and femininity, as well as impact the beliefs about the similarity in the competence and sport-related success (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2021; Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Pathak, 2024; Sikka and Thomas, 2023) through the selection, the process of framing, and visual representation. Gender representation is thus being perceived as a matter of media power question as opposed to being a matter of numerical unbalancedness.

Extensive international research has consistently shown that sports media still prioritize men sport in sports journalism in various ways regardless of the way sport is covered because of the fastest increase in involvement of women in national and international competitions. Comparable analyses made in newspapers, television programs, magazines, and internet sites have repeatedly indicated that male athletes invariably enjoy much more exposure as manifested in increased frequencies of coverage, placing of headlines higher on pages, more analytical reporting, and higher visual presence (Eastman and Billings, 2000; Bruce, 2015; Boczek et al., 2022; Cooky et al., 2021; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025). Their sporting performance however is more likely to be covered by sporadic news linked to their outstanding performances in a particular sport event, Olympics or other major international sport events as opposed to regular and routine coverage. The presence of such inequities indicates that the sport portrayed by women remains in a marginal status in the mainstream sports journalism, even though there have been significant gains in athletic performance and global acknowledgment.

The scholars also claim that the concept of gender inequality cannot be captured using only the quantitative approach to media coverage since the concept also includes the idea of qualitative creation of athletes via language, imagery, and emphasis in the narratives. It has been shown that female athletes are more significantly pictured with personal traits, beauty, interactions with family, emotional life aspects or inspirational stories, and male athletes are mostly characterized by sport achievements, tactical skills, authority, strength, competitive nature, and career success (Hardin et al., 2006; Lpez and Harris, 2021; Mishra, 2022; Pope, 2023; Romney and Johnson, 2019). These representational variations uphold classic gender practices as they introduce sport power, masculinity to be linked with men, and femininity to supportive power or to being a motherly or idolizing role. Therefore, media discourse helps to establish the normalization of men sport as the standard to the achievement of women sport.

Unequal representation is more than a symbolic acknowledgement as media visibility has a direct impact on commercial sponsorship of sports, institutional investment, community involvement, and athletic development opportunities. As Sengupta (2023) points out, publicity via media contributes to the commercial attractiveness of athletes and sporting events through exposure to advertisers, sponsors, and the spectators, and prosecuting economic benefits that add to existing inequalities. Likewise, Cooky et al. (2021) argue that a lack of media coverage decreases people's knowledge about women in sport, decreases viewership, and continues to make

assumptions about its comparative significance. Therefore, inequality in media coverage not only mirrors the existing inequities, but also acts as a catalyst to their propagation in the sporting ecosystem as a whole.

Although considerable progress has been achieved through advocacy for gender equality and Despite the significant gains that have been made due to the push to have gender equality and more women engage in elite sport, recent research has indicated that there have been no proportional changes in media representation. Longitudinal studies reveal that the positive changes in the sporting participation of females have typically been greater than the positive changes in media presentation, which shows that structural inequalities in sports journalism are still entrenched (Bruce, 2015; Boczek et al., 2022; Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Sikka and Thomas, 2023). All of these findings outline the possibility that gender coverage must be explored in a comprehensive framework wherein we take into account both quantitative predominance of media coverage, as well as the qualitative mechanisms by which journalistic discourses generate sporting legitimacy in a comprehensive manner. This methodology offers more insight into the role of sports journalism in reproduction or change of gender relations in modern society.

Framing and Stereotyping of Female Athletes

Although a lack of equality in the rankings of the most seen female sports journalists and athletes is one of the aspects that signify the existence of gender inequality in sports journalism, scholars tend to say that the presentation of sportspeople is of equal significance as a frequency of their mention. Media framing influences the perception of the audience by giving specific elements of the reality more focus and less to another, thus affecting the perception of sporting accomplishments. Instead of mere reporting of sporting events, journalists however create narratives that give meaning to sporting performances in the use of language, headlines, visual representations, choice of source and emphasis of the thematic concern. As a result, the level of gender biasness is not merely limited to the number of media coverage but also enshrined in the interpretative frames of male and female athletes (Bruce, 2015; Entman, 1993; Hardin et al., 2006; Pope, 2023).

Much of the literature shows that male and female athletes are regularly set up in contrast to the use of narrative. The figures, especially males, are the most predominantly represented symbols of strength, competitiveness, leadership, tactical intelligence, resiliency and professional excellence. Technical statistics, strategic choice, coach performance, and sport success are typical metrics used to analyze their performances, which support the notion that male sport is the model of sport excellence (Romney and Johnson, 2019; Mishra, 2022; Schmidt, 2017). On the contrary, the discourse of female athletes often includes a story about physical attractiveness, womanhood, emotionality, family interactions, motherhood or personal sacrifice, where the discourse about sporting competency is often replaced by the discourse about personal identity (Hardin et al., 2006; LSincepez and Harris, 2021; Pathak, 2024; Pope, 2023). This framing implicitly assigns the female athletic performance as an extraordinary or marginal instead of ordinary performance of sporting prows.

Another significant gender stereotypical mechanism in sports media is visual representation. The images that accompany the sports stories of men tend to portray a time of competence, bodily activity, strategizing, or even celebration of victories, supporting discourses of athletic strength and achievement. On the other hand, photographs in the coverage of female sports are more frequently oriented to great beauty, emotion, ritual, or non-sport contexts and as a result, the skill of the sport is even less conspicuous (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2021;

L ́pez and Harris, 2021). The earlier studies also discovered that female athletes are often given smaller photos and fewer action shots and less prominent on the page as compared to their male colleagues and thus have a limited symbolic and editorial presence in the sports pages (Boczek et al., 2022; Grewal and Kaul, 2024). The visual selections are not simply aesthetic choices, but editorial frames that create perceptions to the audiences of the validity and significance of the sport of females.

Language also largely features in formulating gendered meanings. Research has shown that male athlete reports are much more likely to use performance-based vocabulary such as strength, dominance, discipline, strategy, and competitiveness, but female athlete reports are more likely to contemplate descriptive lexis that related to beauty, grace, emotion, and personality (Mishra, 2022; Romney and Johnson, 2019). Women who demonstrate impressive sport performance and success may encounter journalistic coverage that focuses on their personality and personal history, marital affiliation or encouraging life stories instead of sports performance and competition (Pathak, 2024; Pope, 2023). And these forms of linguistic represent only the reinforcement of the old gendered practices since, in this way, athletic skill being a masculine trait and personal identity, which characterizes female athletes, is implicitly separated.

Theorists also argue that such pattern of framing are not accidental or individual but would be found deeper in the culture and institutions. Framing requires the habits of newsrooms, professional beliefs, organizational interests, and larger societal interpretations of gender roles (Entman, 1993; Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). This is because sports journalists tend to exist in commercial settings in which editorial judgement is made on the basis of assumptions on what the audience likes, what will market and what sporting events are commercially viable. Subsequently, increased editorial investment made on the men competitions establishes further beliefs that the male sport is naturally more newsworthy, whereas already small coverage of female sport diminishes the amounts of public attention and commercial prospects even further (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2021). Such a circularity of the relationship shows that, on the one hand, media framing is a reflection of existing inequalities but also on the other hand, it leads to their reproduction.

Framing has especially great impact in South Asian cultures, where media discourses often overlap with a wider range of cultural norms relating to gender, family life, and civil engagement. In Pakistan and India, female athletes who compete typically mediate the social demands and sports careers, and so, the media coverage serves as a significant platform on which conflicting notions of femininity, nationalism, and sport identity are produced (Chowdhury, 2021; Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025). Despite the fact that women athletes who succeed have been breaking down old stereotypes in international competitions, media discourses have still shown that, to a certain extent, gendered framing is still evident in interpretations of their achievements in the media. Comparative examination of these framing practices, then, can be critical to the realization of whether gender biases is a matter of similar regional journalistic culture or regional editorial priorities in leading newspapers.

Together, the literature shows that not only do the levels of gender inequality in sports journalism go beyond those of visibility; levels of inequality also pertain to levels of interpretive practices in which athletes are portrayed. Framing has more effects than just on what audiences are aware of in sports but also on how audiences assess the legitimacy, competition among the athletes and their social importance. This approach also serves as a valuable conceptual base of the current research, which investigates the variation on how the articles of Dawn

and The Hindustan Times frame, tone, visually present, and prioritize the women athletes. The incorporation of both quantitative measures of media presence and the qualitative aspects of framing will help the study to offer a deeper insight into gender representation in the sports journalism in South Asia.

Structural and Institutional Factors Influencing Gender Representation in Sports Journalism

Together, the literature shows that not only do the levels of gender inequality in sports journalism go beyond those of visibility; levels of inequality also pertain to levels of interpretive practices in which athletes are portrayed. Framing has more effects than just on what audiences are aware of in sports but also on how audiences assess the legitimacy, competition among the athletes and their social importance. This approach also serves as a valuable conceptual base of the current research, which investigates the variation on how the articles of Dawn and The Hindustan Times frame, tone, visually present, and prioritize the women athletes. The incorporation of both quantitative measures of media presence and the qualitative aspects of framing will help the study to offer a deeper insight into gender representation in the sports journalism in South Asia.

The gender makeup of sports newsrooms is one of the very commonly mentioned structural positions. Traditionally, sports journalism is one of the most occupied types of the media industry, and women have been and still are underrepresented in numbers as a reporter, editor, commentator, photographer, and decision-maker (Boczek et al., 2022; Schmidt, 2017). Despite the fact that the number of women journalists has grown in the past decades, even in sports departments, the roles of leaders are still taken by men. This unbalance affects editorial priorities, the choice of stories, sourcing practices, and definitions of newsworthiness, as it tends to give men competitions a leg-up in sports coverage, leaving more divergent views to be represented in the editorials (Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017). Consequently, the newsroom cultures, however, can reproduce the existing gender norms inadvertently by engaging in the regular work routines and not because of deliberate discriminatory actions.

These institutional inequalities are also strengthened by editorial gatekeeping. The editors play the key role of gatekeepers with an ability to decide what should be covered, how stories are given priority, and the space given to various sporting competitions. Selection of headlines, photos, location of the stories in the paper, the length of the articles, and presentation of the visual information all have a direct effect on the recognition and perceived significance of the athletes. Studies have always shown that there is a bias towards the coverage of sport by men since it is seen as an area that would draw more audiences, commercial concern, and news (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2017). The effect of such assumptions is a vicious circle whereby much coverage of male sport promotes more people to take interest thus provides the opportunity to continue to use this as an excuse to continue to cover the actual sport that men do.

Business interests are also a major factor that contribute to sports coverage. Media companies work in competitive economic contexts whereby editorial decision-making is impacted by readership, revenue (advertisement), sponsorship, and online interactions. The sports with more audiences and a larger commercial background are often more covered on the media since they yield a higher profit (Boczek et al., 2022; Sengupta, 2023). Media houses usually assign inadequate resources to their reporting because of historical events that tend to focus more sponsorship, broadcasting rights and commercial investments on men events. This market sense is

furthering the further sidelining of women sport, whether in terms of sporting success or global competitions, and indicates how economic values meet editorial ones to perpetuate representational disparities.

Sports news is also constructed on institutional practice and professional rules and conventions. When journalists are coming up with news, they tend to do so based on the well known sources, through the authorized bodies, governing bodies, coaches, and even sporting organizations. Since these institutions, in turn, have traditionally been predominantly male, the array of information which journalists have access to tends to favor competitions and views of men (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014; Vuyst and Raeymaeckers, 2017). The burnished use of known sources, surfaced news values, and traditional forms of reporting also tend to normalize the dominance of men in sport as the standard focus of sports journalism and restrict access to diversifying coverage and purses to alter the status quo in representations.

Such processes of institutionalization manifest specifically in the case of South Asian media systems, where sports journalism is a field of operation that exists at the point of commercial challenge, nationality and cultural demands. In both Pakistan and India, most of the media investment, sponsorship and attention is devoted to cricket making it the most dominant sport in the two countries. In this context, the life of men in the sport of cricket is overly covered with editorial materials, often without having to offer the same opportunities to the competitions of women and other sports (Chowdhury, 2021; Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025). More so, the ways that newsrooms are structured in the two countries still reflect the gender inequalities in the rest of the society, such as a lack of women in leadership roles and comprehensive sex-sensitive editorial guidelines (Women Journalists Association of Pakistan & Freedom Network, 2024; Qureshi and Haider, 2023). These institutional features imply that gender representation patterns are not just a result of journalism but of the organizational settings of which these journalism decisions are a part.

Collectively, the literature shows that gender inequality in sports journalism persists due to interrelated, institutional processes that include newsroom make-up, editorial control, commercial interests, and routines of the profession and media cultures. These aspects affect the volume of coverage given to male and female athletes but also the manner in which sporting performances are defined, given eminence, and assessed. These structural influences are thus critical towards understanding trends of gender representation in Dawn and The Hindustan Times. It equally offers a vital connection between the descriptive claims of media exposures and theoretical lenses which clarify how the journalistic organizations generate and reproduce gendered messages in sports discourses.

Sports Journalism in South Asia: A Comparative Perspective

In South Asia, sports journalism is placed in a unique place due to the fact that it is intimately connected with the notions of nationalism, cultural identity, political symbolism, and entertainment commerce. Contrary to most of the Western settings where sports reporting is actively engaged in the coverage of individual sports or sports professional leagues, sports news in Pakistan and India is more commonly constructed out of the field to represent the national discourse and even national rivalries or national identities (Chowdhury, 2021). In this case, cricket takes over the center stage of sports talk in both nations and also works as a cultural organization that plays the role of displaying national pride, political mood and national emotion. Thus the editorial judgements about sports

coverage are not only a question of journalistic values but also of commercial values, the expectations that the audience is living with, and the symbolic importance that they ascribe to sporting events.

Even though both Pakistan and India have similar colonial pasts, media traditions and sporting cultures, media systems in these two countries have different political, institutional, and organizational environments. In both states, there are well-established English-language-based newspapers, which are significant in influencing the discourse and agenda-setting as to sports journalism. Newspapers like Dawn in Pakistan and The Hindustan Times in India are considered as some of the powerful opinion leaders whose editorial choices expand beyond covering the events and creating a story of national success, sporting identity, and national memory (Chowdhury, 2021). Their coverage thus offers a proper background on the analysis as to whether gender coverage is a mere reflection of general practices in the local media or editorial priorities.

According to the existing literature, the issue of gender inequality is still apparent in sports media in both countries, but the levels and specificities of inequality differ. Studies in India show a consistent pattern that media focus tends to be on men involved in cricket and other male dominated sports competitions as their female counterparts are progressively achieving international success. The reduced editorial coverage, lesser visual prominence, and less analytical coverage of women in sports still is relatively little, and coverage often only becomes visible in the international tourism (Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, or Asian Games) (Banerjee, 2022; Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Pathak, 2024). In addition, research has found that when there is a female Indian athlete in the news, the coverage focuses on inspirational life stories, or personal sacrifice or remarkable performance of a given sport instead of prolonged acceptance of professional sport games (BBC Research, 2020; Grewal and Kaul, 2024).

Similar trends have been traced in the sports journalism in Pakistan. The available evidence on the evaluation suggests that mainstream newspapers dedicate much more content to covering sporting events by men and comparatively less is the content given to female athletes (Ishaq & Noorulain, 2025). Discussions about female athletes are often defined by the increased prominence, thorough scrutiny of performance and increased attention to competition and success in comparison to the male athletes, and the emphasis on emotionality, sociality, or personal aspects is more likely to be written about female athletes. These representational differences are additional and supported by institutional factors. Researchers have reported persistent underrepresentation of women in Pakistani news houses, especially when it comes to reporting on sports and making editorial choices, as well as application of gender-sensitive newsroom policies (Women Journalists Association of Pakistan & Freedom Network, 2024; Qureshi and Haider, 2023). These formal features imply that media representation does not just depend on editorial contents but the organizational cultures that dictate the journalistic practice, as well.

Although there are these similarities, direct comparative studies on sports journalism in Pakistan and India have been done to a comparatively atypical extent. A lot of the literature on media representation studies it in a single national setting, and it is hard to ascertain whether the inequalities observed are accurate to a more encompassing South Asian editorial tradition or a country-wide editorial culture. Further, earlier literature has often put an emphasis on single dimensions of representation including; the number of coverage, textual framing without incorporating two or more indicators including; story frequency, page placement, article length, visual representation, tone and framing into an analytical framework. Therefore, the current literature offers a partial insight into the dynamics of constructing gender in South Asian sports journalism.

The other constraint is in reference to the comparative analysis of the elite English-language newspapers. Even though Dawn and The Hindustan Times are commonly known to be the influential agenda-setting newspapers within the countries of operation, not much research has been done to systematically compare the techniques between the two when it comes to gender representations in sports coverage. This type of comparison is especially useful since the two newspapers may be located in different editorial traditions, institutional forms and media landscape, but still, work within the same regional sports cultures. A comparative analysis thus provides a chance to identify the difference between gender patterns in the region and editorial practice specific to newspapers and thus inks a new branch of current sports communication studies.

The current research considers such limitations through conducting a comparative content analysis of Dawn and The Hindustan Times in 2022-2024. In contrast to the past studies which have focused due to the analysis in one or a two-country study or a depiction of only a handful of indicators of media coverage, the current study uses an integrated methodology of analyzing the coverage in terms of quantitative elements such as frequency, prominence, story placement, space allocation, and visual representations alongside qualitative evaluation of the framing and tone. The study makes a contribution to the literature of comparative journalism, gender and media studies as well as sports communication by comparing two influential newspapers in different neighboring media systems. More to the point, it offers empirical data as to whether gender disparities in the sports journalism can be defined as a product of more general South Asian media culture or editorial priorities of separate newspapers.

Together, these articles in the literature survey shown through this chapter indicate that gender inequality in sports journalism is not fading away despite an increase in participation and global sporting performance by women. Past studies have already determined disparities in media presence, framing, and institutional procedures, as well as the role that newsroom culture, business imperatives, and gender expectations of society play. Nevertheless, there are considerable gaps in comparative South Asian research, namely, with regard to the combination of analysis of major newspapers in Pakistan and India. These still pending questions form the basis of the current research and rationalize the use of theoretical lenses that have the potential to explain the creation, prioritization and construction of images and images of female and male athletes by media institutions. In this regard, the next section outlines the theoretical framework in the analysis of gender representation in Dawn and The Hindustan Times.

The studied literature proves that gender inequality in sports journalism is a multidimensional issue that does not vanish notwithstanding significant advancement of women involvement in and performance at the competitive sport. In various geographical settings and media outlets, past researches have repeatedly found that, among athletes, male athletes are more likely to get editorial coverage, more coverage, and a more positive representation than their female counterparts. The examination of such differences includes the number of coverages as well as the position in the page, the length of the story and the visual emphasis, the focus on a particular theme, and the word frame work which means that gender bias is not covered by purely the numerical difference but by a greater number of processes of media representation (Bruce, 2015; Boczek et al., 2022; Cooky et al., 2021; Eastman and Billings, 2000; Romney and Johnson, 2019). Altogether, these papers are able to prove that sports media are an influential factor that creates gendered conceptions of athletic competence, legitimacy, and recognition.

The literature also explains that an unequal representation is upheld through interrelated structural and institutional processes. The choice of sporting events to cover and the presentation of athletes are influenced by newsroom composition, editorial gatekeeping, commercial interests, professional habits, and the dominance of news values (Schmidt, 2017; Shoemaker and Reese, 2014; Vuyst and Raeymaeckers, 2017). Gender differences must therefore not be presupposed as single editorial choices but the product of wider organizational cultures and socio-cultural standards that still favor male sport. Higher studies have also shown that media framing immerses gender stereotypes by highlighting athletic competence and competition among the boys in the coverage on male athlete and linking female athletes to appearances, emotions, roles in families, or extraordinary personal stories (Hardin et al., 2006; L pez y Harris, 2021; Mishra, 2022; pathak, 2024; Pope, 2023). These representational patterns confirm the prevalent representations of masculinity and femininity and shape the social understanding of sporting legitimacy.

Scholarship within South Asia also suggests the same: Sports journalism shapes the wider patriarchal order and cultural norms. Research in both Pakistan and India provides consistent results on the increased visibility of men competitions (especially cricket) and relatively low and minimal reporting on women sport (Banerjee, 2022; Chowdhury, 2021; Grewal and Kaul, 2024; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025). Nevertheless, although these contributions are significant, the literature in the region is still fragmented. The bulk of literature has focused on particular countries, particular sport events, or different aspects of representation independent of one another, e.g., textual framing or frequency of coverage. Therefore, available information can only give a partial meaning to the problem of gender construction in various media systems in South Asia.

An analysis of past studies indicates that there are some major gaps. To begin with, there has been a relative paucity of studies that have conducted cross-national studies of sports journalism in both Pakistan and India because these two countries share some similarities and differences, which include their media systems, sporting cultures, and journalistic traditions. Second, the literature has mostly concentrated on quantitative measures of representation or qualitative research on the topic of framing and few studies have combined both methods in a competitive model of analytical application. Third, although existing literature has reported gender differences in media coverage, very little has been done to explore at once frequency of coverage, the location of stories, length of an article, visualization, tone and framing in leading English language newspapers. Lastly, the aspect of newspaper affiliation as a possible determinant of gender representations has not been well studied in comparative sports news media studies.

The current paper discusses these shortcomings by presenting a comparative content analysis of Dawn and The Hindustan Times over the 2022-2024 timeframe through an integrated approach that takes into account quantitative metrics of media presence along with the qualitative approach of framing and representation. The research that analyzes several aspects of sports reporting in two of the largest English-language newspapers expands the current body of research that considers only individual countries and presents data on whether the perceived gender imbalances are representative of the patterns in the region, or they are newspaper-specific editorial decisions. By so doing, the paper has provided to sports communication, comparative journalism and gender and media studies as well as useful information to journalists, editors and media organizations that aim at fostering more fair and diversifiable sports reporting.

Theoretical Framework

This current research paper will use an integrated theoretical approach that incorporates Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Gatekeeping Theory (White, 1950; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009), and Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) in order to establish the construction of gender representation in sports journalism. Each theory on its own explains a different phase in the process of news production and representation; they can be used together to form a complete picture of the role of editorial choices in determining the visibility of South Asian newspapers, the framing, and the perception of male and female athletes.

The Gatekeeping Theory offers the initial explanation level as it views work in news production as a selective process and elimination. Institutional gatekeepers, such as editors and journalists are involved in deciding what sporting event they cover, which athletes they cover, the editorial space, and their placement in the newspaper (White, 1950; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Such decisions directly affect fame and publicity of athletes and thus describe the quantitative aspects discussed in this paper, such as coverage frequency, placement of stories, length, space on a page, headline placement, and space. According to the theory of unequal representation, not equal proportions of representation could begin at the orients of the editorial choice, much earlier than the audiences receive the news published..

After stories are picked in publications, Framing Theory describes the process of how they are put together and the way to interpret them. Entman (1993) defines framing as the process of choosing some elements of the reality and rendering them more salient to add the preferences to certain definitions, interpretations, judgments and stories. In the context of sport journalism, framing is not only related to reportage of results but also how those results are framed in terms of language, tone, visual coverage, emphasis on particular themes, and even narrative format. As a result, the current analysis implements the Framing Theory to understand whether the news outlets, started by Dawn and The Hindustan Times, depict male and female athletes differently, based on differences in news tone, focus, evaluative language usage, and visual elements. With this theoretical approach, the study is able to discuss both differences in the amount of coverage and differences between the meanings of sporting achievements.

Whereas the Gatekeeping Theory provides a reason as to why some stories are given attention and the Framing Theory provides an explanation of how such stories are portrayed, the Gender Schema Theory provides the answer to why gendered tendencies of representation remain in place. Bem (1981) believes that people perceive social reality in terms of culturally acquired cognitive schemas, which specify socially acceptable features of masculinity and femininity. The schemas affect perception, evaluation, and communication and tend to work unconsciously in institutions. In the case of sports journalism, GenderSchema Theory indicates that journalists and editors can generalize and mirror the larger social expectation by creating stories about male athletes that highlight ideas of power, control, athleticism, and dominance and by supporting female athletes through stories that focus on feminine appearance, emotions, roles as mothers, or extraordinary success. Traditional gender ideologies are established through such recurrent representations, which unify unequal patterns of media visibility.

A combination of these 3 theories can be used to give a holistic conceptual description of the current research. The editorial logic that governs the selection and priority of sports news is called the Gatekeeping Theory; the

ways news is narrated and visualized is called Framing Theory; and the socio-cultural assumptions on which these editorial and representational strategies may be based is called the Gender Schema Theory. Collectively, these theories define a consistent analyzing framework on the basis of which the gender representation can be discussed as an institutional and discursive process, instead of just a numerical unequal representation in the news.

In line with this, the research frames the concept of newspaper affiliation (Dawn and The Hindustan Times) as institutional settings whereby editorial decision-making takes place. This set of categories with codes such as coverage frequency, location of the story, length of the story, visual prominence, tone, framing, and thematic emphasis echoes the visible forms of the gatekeeping and framing action, whereas the patterns of representations are analyzed with the Gender Schema Theory. Such an integrated framework thus suits the purposes of the research objectives, coding tool, technique of analysis of content and interpretation of results and facilitates a standard analysis of gender representations in South Asian sports journalism.

Research Questions

RQ1

How do Dawn and The Hindustan Times differ in the amount and prominence of sports coverage devoted to male, female, and mixed-gender athletes?

RQ2

How are male, female, and mixed-gender athletes represented across different sports in Dawn and The Hindustan Times?

RQ3

How do the two newspapers differ in their textual and visual representation of male, female, and mixed-gender athletes?

RQ4

Are there statistically significant differences in gender representation between Dawn and The Hindustan Times?

RQ5

To what extent do newspaper affiliation, athlete gender, sport type, story placement, article length, tone, image use, and image gender predict patterns of gender representation?

Research Hypotheses

H1: The difference in gender representation in sports journalism content of Dawn and The Hindustan Times has statistically significant differences.
H2: The patterns of gender representation in newspapers are significantly predictive of newspaper affiliation, after adjusting for athlete gender, sport type, and the position of the story in the newspaper, the length of the article, tone, and the use of images, and gender of these images.

Methodology

Research Design

The research was conducted in the form of a quantitative comparative content analysis where the gender representation in sports journalism was observed in two major English-language newspapers of South Asia: Dawn (Pakistan) and The Hindustan Times (India) and the issues they covered in 2019. Although having some disagreements, content analysis can be perceived as a rational and objective approach to the analysis of communication through quantifying and interpreting textual and visual material (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). It allows researchers the opportunity to examine manifest and latent features, including frequency and placement of stories and the tone and representation.

The comparative research design was also used as the study aimed to establish similarities and differences in gender representation in the newspapers known to work in relative sporting cultures, but with different media systems. The design will enable a comparison of editorial practices and patterns of representation in Pakistan and India.

Population of the Study

Universe was all sports news items that were published within sports news of Dawn and The Hindustan Times within the study period. Only those news items about sporting events and sporting personalities were to be considered. The study left out the editorials, opinion articles, ads, and duplicates of reports, and non-sporting articles.

Sampling Strategy

Since the target population included a high number of sports stories, the constructed week sampling deployed resorted to the representative sample and reduced the impact of temporal bias (Hester and Dougall, 2007; Riffe et al., 2019). They were randomly picked Mondays through Sundays to form constructed weeks which preferentially represented normal newspaper coverage.

This sampling process resulted in a final sample of 100 sports news articles, 50 of the articles in the Dawn and 50 articles in the Hindustan Times.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was the individual sports news story. A standardized coding instrument was used to code each article once. In the case of the photographs that were analyzed along with the story, the picture was examined as a part of a series.

Coding Scheme

On the basis of the earlier research of the field of sports journalism and gender coverage (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2021; Hardin et al., 2006; Romney and Johnson, 2019), a structured coding sheet has been created.

The coding variables included:

Newspaper
Date of publication
Athlete gender
Sport type
Story placement
Article length
Tone of coverage
Image use
Gender represented in images

These variables included the visibility of athletes, as well as the character of their representation.

Data Collection

The digital archives of Dawn and The Hindustan Times were searched and found sports news articles. The selected articles were chosen based on the developed week sampling schedule and the information was allocated specific identification numbers prior to coding.

Reliability and Validity

The coding tool was created based on the existing literature on content analysis to guarantee content validity (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017).

Intercoder reliability was assessed through independent coding of a pilot sample by two trained coders. Agreement was evaluated using Cohen's Kappa, which demonstrated perfect agreement ($\kappa = 1.00$), indicating excellent reliability.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics was used to analyze the coded data.

The patterns of gender representation were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations.

Cohen Kappa was used to determine the intercoder reliability.
A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse general differences in the gender representation.

This was followed by a multiple linear regression analysis to establish whether patterns of gender representation were significantly determined by newspaper affiliation bearing in mind other predictors of gender representation such as athlete gender, sport type, story placement, article length, tone, image use, image gender.

The results were explained based on the Gatekeeping Theory, Framing Theory, and Gender Schema Theory.

Results

A total of 100 sports news articles in Dawn (Pakistan) and The Hindustan Times (India) were analyzed (50 articles of each newspaper). The gender, type of sport, location of story, and length of covering, tone of coverage, usage of images and the gender of athlete presented in image were coded in each story. Results are discussed concerning the research questions, and hypothesis testing.

Descriptive Findings

In general, male athletes prevailed in the coverage of the sports, they covered 69 out of all the stories published, but female athletes constituted 18 and mixed-gender stories 13. Cricket was most reported (57 percent), then number two was hockey (17 percent), football (15 percent) and tennis (11 percent). In the majority of cases, the stories were published on the sports pages (73%), and had a neutral (46) or a positive (43) tone. Pictures were used to accompany 67 percent of the stories with male athletes being much more represented than female athletes.

Table 1

Descriptive Distribution of Sports Journalism Indicators in Dawn and The Hindustan Times

Variable	Category	Dawn	The Hindustan Times	Total
Athlete Gender	Male	36 (72%)	33 (66%)	69 (69%)
	Female	8 (16%)	10 (20%)	18 (18%)
	Mixed	6 (12%)	7 (14%)	13 (13%)
Sport Type	Cricket	31 (62%)	26 (52%)	57 (57%)
	Hockey	6 (12%)	11 (22%)	17 (17%)
	Football	7 (14%)	8 (16%)	15 (15%)
	Tennis	6 (12%)	5 (10%)	11 (11%)
Placement	Sports Page	37 (74%)	36 (72%)	73 (73%)
Tone	Neutral	26 (52%)	20 (40%)	46 (46%)
Images	Male Images	21 (42%)	24 (48%)	45 (45%)

Note. Values are reported as frequency (percentage). Apply APA table borders (top rule, header rule, bottom rule) in Word before submission.

Hypothesis Testing

H1. The gender representation of the sports journalism material of Dawn and The Hindustan Times differ statistically significantly. One way ANOVA showed significant differences, $F(6, 693) = 49.12$, $p < .001$. Thus, H1 got extended.
H2. The affiliation of newspapers is an important predictor of gender representation patterns when the chosen variables are taken into consideration. The multiple regression revealed clearly that the overall model was insignificant, $F(7,92=0.69$, $p=.680$, $R\ 2=.050)$; nevertheless, the only significant one was newspaper affiliation ($B=1.245$, $SE=.368$, $t=3.386$, $p=.001$). Based on this, H2 was partly supported.

Summary of Findings

The results reveal that gender prejudice in the chosen news outlets is subtle in how they are chosen to be edited, covered or not covered, the importance of the issue, or how they are promoted or not promoted using photographs. Though the Hindustan Times gave a little more visibility to female athletes as compared to Dawn, both the newspapers were largely male oriented.

Discussion

The current research project explored gender coverage in the sports journalism of Dawn (Pakistan) and The Hindustan Times (India) by analysing content comparatively in sports news of publication in the first 6 months of 2024. The study aimed to measure the degree to which coverage of sport events show gender bias through looking at the most frequent coverage (frequency) of such events, the type of sport, the position of the story on the newspaper, the length of the article, the tone, and visual appearance in two of the major English-language newspapers in South Asia. On the whole, the results indicate that despite the rather neutral and research-based approaches to the reporting of news maintained by both newspapers, sport journalism has been skewed to favor male athletes in the sense of visibility, prominence, and appearance. These conclusions substantiate the thesis that gender discrimination against individuals in sports media is manifested in the work of media editors and prominence rather than in the use of openly discriminatory language.

The descriptive results indicated that almost every seven sports stories covered male athletes with less than a fifth of the total coverage being in the case of female athletes. Such imbalance occurred in both the newspapers with Dawn having a slightly better male orientation than The Hindustan Times. These results align with the international research that describes the ongoing overrepresentation of men sport even in the face of increased participation and success of women athletes (Bruce, 2015; Boczek et al., 2022; Cooky et al., 2021; Eastman and Billings, 2000). They also support the latest evidence in South Asia that women sport is still receiving a significantly lesser coverage of editorials compared with male competitions (Grewal & Kaul, 2024; Ishaq and Noorulain, 2025). These findings thus indicate that the problem of growing female involvement in competitive sport to proportional media coverage is yet to be achieved.

This analysis also proved that the cricket sportively dominated the coverage of sports in both newspapers. Cricket stories took more than a half in the sample stories though it was hugely outnumbered by other sport stories, which include hockey, football, and tennis. As most of the cricketing narratives focused on male players, the case of commercial and cultural hegemony of cricket seems to promote gender disparities within sports journalism. In

a similar vein, the previous research also states that the editorial agenda in South Asian media is highly conditioned by the popularity and financial importance of the sport of cricket (Chowdhury, 2021; Grewal and Kaul, 2024). The current results build this argument further by indicating that sport type and athlete gender work jointly to affect editorial coverage, such that male cricketers receive disproportionate coverage.

Another dimension of gender representation came out to be the editorial prominence. Male athletes were more frequently given longer articles, featured high in sports pages, and featured in other sports page photographs. Even though there were not no stories on female athletes, they tended to have a less dominant editorial role. The results of the study are consistent with the previous studies indicating that the popularity of media affects the level of audience recognition, sponsorship chances, and perceived legitimacy of sport performance (Bruce, 2015; Lopez and Harris, 2021; Romney and Johnson, 2019). There should be, therefore, unequal representation which should not be interpreted in antagonistic numbers of the published stories but in the way such stories are put forward.

One of these outcomes is related to the tone of reporting. Unlike some of the previous studies that reported a tendency of having overtly gendered sports journalism, this current study observed that the majority of the reports on both male and female athletes were neutral or more positive than negative reports. This is an indication that overt linguistic bias might be waning among mainstream newspaper journalism. Nevertheless, the fact that we do not see any verbally negative statements cannot be believed as the signs of gender equality. Rather, inequality seems to be set towards editorial choices in the selection, placement and visual focus of stories, as opposed to the evaluative language discrepancies. The same conclusion is made by recent global scholarship claiming that structural inequalities have taken the place of overt instances of gender stereotyping in modern sports news coverage (Boczek et al., 2022; Cooky et al., 2021).

The above conclusions are reinforced by the inferential analyses. Based on the results of the analysis, the one-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences among the sports journalism indicators analyzed as a part of the research and supported that the trends in gender representation varied significantly in the analyzed content. This observation confirms the initial hypothesis of the study and it also shows that gender imbalance cannot be explained by random variation but it is a systemic element of sports coverage. The regression model did not have the same result. Though the regression model across the board was only found to account a small percentage of the variance and was not found to be significant, newspaper affiliation was found to be the only significant lucrative. This observation shows that there were small differences in editorial practices between Dawn and The Hindustan Times, but these differences could not change the overall trend of male-dominated sports coverage. Together, these examinations indicate that although the representation is to an extent affected by the organizational context, the presence of gender inequality is a widespread characteristic in both newspapers.

The theoretical framework which has been integrated in this study makes good sense of findings. According to the Gatekeeping Theory, the choice of the sporting events and athletes getting media coverage is made by editors and journalists (White, 1950; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). The fact that the majority of athletes featured in the media are men confirms that editorial gatekeeping still sympathizes men sport or at least games that are considered commercially or nationally viable. Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) goes on to point out that although the reporting takes a neutral form, the repetition of the emphasis on male sport makes the media coverage create a narrative of sports excellence whereby male athletic excellence becomes the status quo of sporting

achievement. Another sociocultural reason is possible in relation to the Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) which argues that the assumptions about masculinity and athletic ability, which are deeply embedded may still influence journalistic practices. Collectively, the theories demonstrate how influences on editorial selection, editorial framing, and even larger cultural expectations integrate to recreate the gender inequalities in sports journalism.

The comparative aspect of the study also makes its contribution to the scholarship of sports communication. Despite the differences in political and institutional and media surroundings in Pakistan and India, the same trend in gender representation was observed in both the newspapers. The fact that women athletes have been slightly better represented in The Hindustan Times is an indicator that there are differences in the editorials, but the differences are relatively minor. This observation suggests that gender inequality in sports journalism is a trend that indicates more than a region journalism standard but rather individual practice at this organization. Therefore, these initiatives to enhance gender equality in sports media must involve structural reforms that go beyond single newspapers.

The work contributes to the literature in a variety of ways. It offers one of the limited comparative analyses of gender representation in major newspapers in English of Pakistan and India, includes a comprehensive content analysis framework that involves quantitative and qualitative indicators, and proves how well the incorporation of the Gatekeeping Theory, Framing Theory, and Gender Schema Theory in one analytical framework can be explained. These contributions broaden the field by not only offering evidence on gender representation in sports journalism but also enhancing theoretical perspectives on gender representation in South Asia.

Practically speaking, the results indicate that media organizations should be more inclusive in terms of editorial policy. The rise in reporting of women sporting activities should not be an isolated journalistic measure but become a usual trend in journalism that should not be limited to high profile tourism games. As editorial prominence, fair visual coverage, and more involvement of women in sport reporting and leadership positions in newsrooms could lead to a more balanced sports journalism. Not only would this increase media coverage of female athletes, but it would also lead to more sponsorship and appreciation of them, among institutions.

In general, the research says gender disparity in South Asian sports journalism continues to exist more due to the variations in the visibility, editorial prominence, and visual portrayal than due to blatently discriminatory coverage. Despite some signs in more inclusivity being noticeable, especially in The Hindustan Times, sports coverage in the two papers remains dominated by male athletes. To get the changes in gender equity in sports journalism to meaningful awareness, therefore, entails adjusting the editorial routines, newsroom practices and institutions cultures which still reward the privilege of men sport.

Conclusion

This paper has explored gender portrayal in sports journalism of Dawn (Pakistan) and The Hindustan Times (India) by comparing the content of sports news regarding these topics (January-June 2024). The study examined the prevalence of gender bias in two major English language newspapers in the South Asian media covering in the context of gender bias in the domain of media coverage through the lens of coverage frequency, the type of sports covered, the location of the stories, the length of the articles, the tone of the articles, and how the media covers the stories in question.

The results show that gender inequality is still a characteristic feature of sports journalism in both the newspapers. There was a significant amount of editorial coverage of male athletes in comparison with the coverage of female athletes in almost all measures of representation. They were used more often in news reports, held more high-profile editorial space and were given considerably higher levels of visual coverage. Sports coverage still focused predominately on cricket during the study period, which again supported the vested focus on editorial coverage of men in sport. Despite the fact that Dawn covered female athletes with a little bit less emphasis compared to The Hindustan Times, both of the newspapers showed practically the same overall tendency in terms of their coverage, indicating that gender inequality may not indicate any specific violations or peculiarities of the organization.

A valuable input of the work is that the modernity gender discrimination is expressed mainly in terms of unequal visibility and editorial presence, as opposed to blatant discriminatory terms. The relative reports of neutrality and positive news coverage show that clear textual bias has diminished but still, inequality in selection of news, eminence and use of images favor male athletes. In turn, gender imbalance in sports journalism is best viewed as a structural/institutional problem entrenched in everyday editorial culture.

The work also adds to theory by incorporating Gatekeeping Theory, Framing Theory, Gender Schema Theory as one analytical model. The results show that editorial choices about who has become visible reflect editorial frames about how the visibility of their achievements is interpreted and the larger gender schemas are still at work to make representations about athletic competence and legitimacy. Combining these views, it is possible to have a holistic explanation of why gender inequity persists in South Asian sports journalism.

In practice the results highlight the importance of media outlets having more inclusive editorial practices to offer long-term and fair coverage of women sport. Making female athletes more visible needs to go beyond major international events and be included in regular sports coverage. Further evenhandedness in story selection, more editorial up itself, fairing in the way of visual presentation and merging of women in sport coverage and, above editorial leadership, would help ensure a more inclusive media practice. Conclusively, gender equality in sports journalism can only be guaranteed through institutional, editorial, and sustained scholarly intervention in the role and place of media in forming the collective ideas of sport and gender among people.

Limitations of the Study

The current study has some limitations even with the contribution even though it has them, which must be taken into account when analyzing the results.

To begin with, only two English-language newspapers were used in the study, namely Dawn and The Hindustan Times. Despite the fact that both of the newspapers are one of the most influential in Pakistan and India, the results cannot be applied to all the print, broadcast, digital and social media platforms functioning in the region.

Second, sports news published in the last six months (January 2024-June 2024) were subject to the analysis. Though this time is representative of standard sports news coverage, it might not adequately reflect how media

coverage responds when there is a large-scale international sports event, in which case, female athletes tend to get a temporary boost in visibility.

Third, the research was based on a quantitative content analysis. Even though this method allowed comparing the level of gender representation in various indicators on a systematic scale, it did not study the process of the editorial decision-making of the journalists and the way the audiences interpret the sporting coverage. In its turn, the paper will define trends of representation without interpreting the motives of editorial choices or the implications of the editorial impact on the views of readers.

Fourth, the operationalization of framing considered visible indices including location of the story, tone and visualization. Further qualitative methods, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, or linguistic framing analysis, might be more appropriate to clearly see how gender ideologies are reproduced in sports journalism in subtle ways.

Lastly, four key sports namely cricket, hockey, football and tennis were analyzed. Different portrayals of media in other sporting fields can also be exhibited and are consequently subject to independent study.

Irrespective of these constraints, the research offers ample comparative data on gender representation in two major South Asian newspapers and adds to the burgeoning body of literature on gender and sports communication.

Future Research

This study has some findings that lead to some suggestions in regards to future research.

To begin with, subsequent research must widen the research focus to include more newspapers, television stations, online news websites, and social media sites. These comparisons would give a better insight into gender representation in the present-day media ecology.

Second, a longitudinal study with several years would help the researchers to observe the level at which the growth of female sports participation and success at the international level increase media visibility and representation and help to sustain changes.

Third, qualitative research in form of interviews with editors, journalists and sports reporters can be used as a supplement to content analysis where it is able to answer questions about the newsroom routines, professional norms and organizational determiners of editorial decision-making in sports coverage.

Fourth, future studies ought to inform the view of sports journalism by conducting surveys, experiments or implementation of focus groups. This sort of study would give a useful insight into the way media representation patterns influence the way people view athletic competence, role models and gender stereotypes.

Lastly, the intersectional approach should be employed in future scholarship to focus on the way gender interacts with other aspects of individuality such as ethnicity, disability, age, socioeconomic status, nationality, and religion.

This study would offer a more profound insight into diversity and inclusion in sports journalism and would add to more extensive theoretical frameworks of media representations.

In sum, future research ought to go beyond recording gender inequalities to trying to understand how it is produced and maintained by the institutions, cultures and the business. The evidence base of the research to create more equitable and inclusive sports journalism practices will be further enhanced by comparative studies across the media system and journalistic situations.

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