

Emerging Trends in Sportswomen's Visual Representation in Pakistani Newspapers

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In Pakistan, women's sports face significant marginalization, as the realm of athletics is predominantly viewed as a male domain, relegating women to the status of unwelcome participants. As a result, women face restrictions in engaging in sports, stemming from societal and cultural limitations that render their participation a source of social stigma. This study aims to explore the sociological ramifications of the diverse reporting strategies employed by sports journalists in their coverage of women's sporting events in the *Dawn* and *The Nation* newspapers. Dyer's semiotic model provides the theoretical framework for the analysis conducted in this study regarding the visual representation of sportswomen in selected Pakistani newspapers. The data consists of thirty one pictures analyzed under five themes. The research has revealed that by highlighting the athletic prowess of sportswomen, both newspapers have effectively contested traditional feminine norms and stereotypes. The cultural and social assumptions have been critically examined and contested by Pakistani newspapers through the commendable representation of sportswomen. The research advocates for the cultivation of a sports media environment that accurately depicts the professional journeys of sportswomen, which could significantly contribute to reshaping societal views on women's sports.

Keywords: women's sports, visual representation, conventional femininity, subversion

In the course of human history, sports have served a multitude of purposes, ranging from providing entertainment to the masses to honing martial abilities. Engaging in sports enhances physical well-being, fosters social interactions, and elevates self-worth, alongside a myriad of other social, physical, and psychological advantages. Historically, sports have been predominantly associated with men, while women have often been regarded as outsiders within the sporting arena (Karthika & Nair, 2018). In cultures where female responsibilities are primarily limited to the private sphere and where public participation is restricted, engagement in sports can serve to challenge these limitations and facilitate the assumption of new roles for women within their communities (Huggins & Randell, 2007). But transgressing such boundaries is the biggest challenge for such women. Apart from its positive outcomes, sports had been a platform for disruptive behaviors including racism, violence, homophobia and gender bias. In the contemporary era of globalization, gender equality is widely recognized as being important for the emancipation of society. Women have gained authority and power in multiple spheres such as public and political arenas. Since the obstacles that formerly kept them from engaging in fields that were considered to be the domain of males have been removed, they now have greater opportunities for advancement. However, unequal treatment of women continues to exist in a number of areas, including social, economic, and academic life. Inaccurate media representations of women, men's domination in senior positions, and women's lower pay than males are all examples of ongoing inequality. Women's participation in sports has increased dramatically over the years yet they are still not given same treatment by media as their male counterparts receive. They are still represented in traditional ways as objects of beauty as focus is laid upon their appearance, looks, clothes, and their personal lives. The way that women are portrayed in the media also reflects cultural preconceptions that are notably inaccurate, leading to the diminishing of female athletes' achievements. There is institutionalized

oppression which is more covert, sneaky oppression rooted in ideology rather than overt discrimination, which adds to women's ongoing under representation (Scraton & Flintoff, 2013). The under representation of women in sports news implies that their contributions and participation is deemed insignificant and trivial. Newspaper media serves as a significant institution that reflects, reinforces, and perpetuates the culture, politics, and specific social environment in which it functions. The significance for a linguist lies in determining the degree and scope of its insights regarding its contributions to societal character (Khan & Ihsan, 2017). Given the significance of mass media in the spread and propagation of particular ideologies and discourses, the current study has made an effort to investigate the gendered discourses disseminated by the selected Pakistani newspapers.

Rationale of the Study

According to earlier researches reviewed in this study, it is observed that sportswomen are either underrepresented or misrepresented since their private lives and beauty are highlighted; and they are perceived as less athletic by not focusing on their competence, skill and expertise which must be evaluated to judge their professional value. The growing involvement of women in sports suggests an anticipated improvement in their representation in media, reflecting the societal transformation occurring in the 21st century. Given how important the media is in influencing public opinion, it is fascinating to see how gender is portrayed in newspaper's sports sections particularly in pictures and the kind of discourses they promote, as they have broad national and global ramifications. A deeper analysis of sports journalism's discursive practices uncovers the social beliefs that underlie all forms of injustice and inequality. These discourse practices serve ideological goals and because of its enormous influence on public opinion, journalistic writing is a crucial genre to research. Sports coverage is greatly influenced by social ideas, so it's important to look closely at it to uncover any hidden biases or beliefs. For this purpose the current study has been conducted to analyze the quality of visual portrayal of sportswomen in Pakistani newspapers.

Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyze how and in what ways sportswomen have been represented/projected in pictures of the selected Pakistani newspapers.
2. To find out whether, how far, and in what ways the traditional concept of femininity has been reinforced or challenged in the images of sportswomen in the selected Pakistani newspapers.

Research Questions

Q.1- How and in what ways sportswomen have been projected in pictures of selected Pakistani newspapers?

Q.2- How far and in what ways the traditional notion of femininity has been reinforced or challenged in images of sportswomen in the selected Pakistani newspapers?

Method

This study conducted a qualitative analysis of sports images featuring sportswomen in Pakistani newspapers *The Nation* and the *Dawn*, two leading English-language newspapers in Pakistan, provide the sports sections from which data was collected from their websites; Urdu dailies were excluded from this analysis. The selection of these two newspapers as a representative sample was based on their status as the most extensively read and distributed English newspapers in the country in the year 2019 when the current research was planned and designed. The readership of *Dawn* was 524, 953 per week, and the daily circulation of *The Nation* was 142000 according to the report of Pakistan Media Landscape (2022). The sports sections of both newspapers encompass leading stories, headlines, reviews, and analyses of sporting events in Pakistan and globally. This paper has been extracted from a PhD research for which the data had been collected from alternate days over a span of three years from 2017 to 2019, focusing mainly on major sports events. Due to the limited scope of this study, it was not possible to include all images (150 images) in this paper; a representative sample had been created by analyzing thirty one images for the year 2019 only. The images were divided into two categories namely: traditional portrayal of sportswomen and sporty portrayal of sportswomen. Since the present study is concerned with sporty representation of sportswomen only, the representative data has been selected only from the data of representation of sporty women. There

were ninety five (95) images under the category of sporty representation of sportswomen out of which thirty one (31) images had been selected to create a representative sample. The images of the sporty representation of sportswomen were subcategorized into five themes. These images had been selected due to their greater visibility (high frequency), popular sports (cricket, gymnastics, and tennis), and prominent placement (large size of images, central position on the page). The data had been analyzed under five themes which were the most recurrent themes in the picture bank. The themes had been derived deductively based on their recurrence in the picture bank. The analysis of pictures had been carried out according to Dyer's semiotic model (1982) and which involves both denotative and connotative analysis of images. The analysis exclusively examined photos, while captions were omitted due to their absence in *The Nation* newspapers. To maintain uniformity and consistency across the selected newspapers, only photos had been examined. Furthermore due to the limited scope of the research, it was not possible to cross examine the textual data or the headlines accompanying the images. In the current research the denotative analysis focuses on appearance, manner and activity; while connotative analysis reveals the hidden gender ideology that various signs and symbols support by examining the contextual, cultural, and social implications that signs carry in the Pakistani society. The connotative analysis reveals the broader sociocultural ideologies and discourses embedded in the images of sportswomen.

Significance of the Study

Given how important the media is in influencing public opinion, the current study has attempted to investigate the projection of sportswomen in the images of selected Pakistani newspapers since it is fascinating to see how gender is portrayed in newspaper's sports sections and the kind of discourses they promote, as they have broad national and global implications. The study challenges the widely held claim that Pakistani media is conservative in its treatment of gender as emphasis is laid upon traditional attributes of men and women. The analysis reveals a new picture of Pakistani media that has shattered all stereotypes and has presented a realistic picture of sportswomen. This new trend in portrayal of sportswomen lays bare the transformation taking place in Pakistani society where women have transgressed all traditional boundaries and have achieved enormous success in all domains of life including sports.

Theoretical Framework

Dyer's semiotic model has been adopted to examine how gender is portrayed in images. The study of the sign systems used to transmit meanings other than spoken words is known as semiotics. Signs and symbols employed in a communication system might have denotation, connotation, and contextual meanings, among other meanings. Distinct signs and symbols have distinct meanings in every country and culture. Both the sender and the recipient of a message must understand the denotative and connotative components of signs in order for communication to occur effectively. Dyer's model examines nonverbal cues through two distinct levels: denotation and connotation. Denotation involves detailing the appearance, actions, and characteristics of the objects and individuals depicted in the image, while connotative analysis explores how specific signs and symbols reinforce and promote an idea or belief by connecting the description to broader societal norms. The first component of denotative analysis is appearance, which conveys age, gender, size, and body structure; the second is manner, which includes facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and attire; and the third is activity, which includes posture, body language, props, and setting. In order to uncover the hidden ideology that various signs and symbols support, connotative analysis entails investigating the cultural, contextual and social meanings that these symbols hold in each society.

Literature Review

Women have historically experienced discrimination and oppression at the hands of institutionalized patriarchal social norms. Consequently, in the 19th century organized feminist movements evolved to confront the misogynistic ideology and reforms were made to elevate the status of women. Gender equality has been acknowledged as being just as important to overall human equality in recent years as racial equality. Women in contemporary society are better able to lead independent lives than their predecessors who were unaware of the concept of gender equality, thanks to gender studies. The way gender issues are portrayed in Pakistan conforms to the prevalent sociocultural standards. By portraying women as weak and subservient, media in Pakistan's patriarchal society uphold conventional gender beliefs. It usually conveys

the idea that women are valued for their overall beauty and shape, while men are valued for their intelligence and charisma. The female body is often central to visual representation and has been depicted in numerous ways for various purposes. According to Butler:

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic...the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well (1988, p. 522).

Their bodies are usually fragmented with focus on body dimensions. Women are frequently depicted as jovial and impulsive, while men are frequently shown as solemn and distant (Zia, 2007). In the media, exploitative and disparaging portrayals of women have persisted unchecked due to the absence of a truly gender-sensitive attitude and understanding of women's issues by society (Mansoor, 2013). By depicting women as nothing more than objects of beauty—beautiful without intelligence—gender stereotypes are thus perpetuated; and the objectification of women's bodies serves a capitalist purpose. Women's advancement and better living conditions are hampered by the media because it upholds patriarchal ideologies that restrict opportunities for women. Society's opinion of women is distorted by the emphasis on the female form, and as a result, irrational expectations are created. This makes it harder for societal acceptance of women who are more self-assured and gregarious rather than docile and subservient. Due to the socially formative nature of discourse, the way gender is portrayed in the media reflects broader cultural values and conventions. A number of studies (Mansoor, 2013; Tahseen, 2018 Zia, 2007) conducted on representation of gender in media have come up with similar results. They have all come to the conclusion that the media perpetuates prejudices about women, which restricts their ability to advance socially and economically. Media acts as a barrier to the enhancement of women's living conditions and advancement by perpetuating patriarchal ideologies that constrain women's opportunities. The emphasis on the female body skews societal perceptions of women, leading to the formation of unrealistic expectations stemming from this misrepresentation. As a result, society finds it challenging to accept women as confident and outgoing rather than submissive and obedient. The representation of gender in media mirrors broader cultural values and norms. However, a different perspective emerged when Messner and Cooky et al., (2021) conducted a longitudinal analysis that detected evolving patterns in the coverage of women's sports over the years 1989, 1993, and 1999. It has been noted that female athletes are predominantly trivialized and sexualized by the media in television broadcasts during these years. In 2014, they noted an apparent endeavor to portray women's sports narratives with respect, avoiding insults and overt gender stereotypes. It was observed that the narratives of most women were conveyed by commentators with significantly less verbal dynamism and enthusiasm than what normally defined the narratives of men's sports, and this trend continued till 2019. The study suggested that women's sports narratives be presented similarly to men's, characterized by excellent technical quality and articulated through enthusiastic, vivid, and engaging commentary by the announcers. The study concludes that the majority of sports news and highlight programs predominantly feature men's sports tales, whereas women's sports events are largely overlooked. All studies mentioned above affirm the fact that media portrays an unrealistic and biased picture of women belonging to different spheres of society. Stakeholders despise their accomplishments and either underrepresent or misrepresent them, exposing the patriarchal worldview that permeates all of our society's institutions.

Pakistani Sportswomen as Resisting the Patriarchal Norms of Womanhood

“Women in Pakistani patriarchal society are taken as carriers of culture, tradition, and most importantly the honor of families. This is why, in the process of identity formation of a family, men have complete control over women’s sexuality” (Khan & Qadir, 2024, p. 64). In recent years, sports have served as a catalyst for societal shifts. Evidence indicates a reduction in racism, a narrowing of gender gaps, and a challenge to socioeconomic class injustices within sports contexts. The traditional concept of femininity is undergoing significant transformation, as women have successfully overcome various challenges and excelled in numerous physically demanding sports in recent years. Pakistani women persist in participating in sports, despite historical challenges, driven by a commitment to represent their country through athletic

accomplishments. "From fencing to weightlifting, from mountaineering to figure skating, Pakistani women have proven themselves to be fierce competitors, defying stereotypes and expectations and have become an inspiration to many"(Ahmad,2023). Their remarkable achievements in sports have engaged the nation and dismantled cultural barriers within Pakistani society. To encourage women's sport in the country, sporting events are now regularly held at the national level. Nonetheless, the circumstances are dire in various regions of Pakistani society, particularly in tribal areas, where the concept of women's participation in sports is virtually nonexistent. The survival of women in Pakistan's conventional tribal areas, characterized by prevalent honor killings, depends on their compliance with social norms and expectations. One of the exceptions is notable squash player, Maria Toorpkae Wazir from Waziristan, who disguised herself as a boy to pursue her dreams and had been playing squash for sixteen years with the moniker Changghis Khan. Another inspiring figure is Diana Baig, a football and cricket player from Hunza, Gilgit; for all women battling their own struggles in patriarchal cultures. She persisted in pursuing her goal of representing her nation internationally in spite of Gilgit's lack of a playground for females and the lack of any role models. For women in Pakistan, swimming is a socially inappropriate sport, particularly because of the cut and exposed style of traditional swimwear, which can go against social norms. Until 2000, Pakistani women were prohibited from participating in international swimming competitions due to cultural and religious prohibitions. Notable swimmers Kiran Khan and Rubab Raza have won various national accolades for their achievements and represented the nation with honors in various international swimming competitions. It takes strength to go against outmoded social conventions that define what women should do, and these women have the courage to question stereotypes about women. Similarly women who attempt to participate in mixed martial arts in Pakistan must overcome the stereotype that it is a male-dominated sport. In addition, Pakistan lacks female combatants, tournaments, and government support, and there aren't many mixed martial arts gyms for women. Nonetheless, Pakistani women have gained international recognition by showcasing their abilities and expertise across various platforms. Despite opposition from her community for practicing mixed martial arts, Anita Karim, a native of Hunza, Gilgit, has competed internationally on numerous occasions in mixed martial arts. Entering a male-only sport like mixed martial arts has never been easy for women like Pakistan's first female karate champion, Kulsoom Hazara from Quetta, Balochistan. Despite the fact that the Hazara community in Quetta is one of the most persecuted in Pakistan, some people, like Kulsoom Hazara and Nargis Hameedullah, are shining brightly as they overcome all the difficulties they face. For many Hazara women, karate is a way to rebel against and break free from the constraints they face. Similar to martial arts In Pakistan, Kabaddi, a tag-wrestling sport, is primarily played by men. Kabaddi is played in various South Asian countries around the world and was first popularized in the Punjab regions of India and Pakistan. Historically, women Kabaddi players have faced criticism and even ridicule for participating in a macho sport, and men have been the only ones allowed entry to the hallowed Akharas. However, they have persisted, maintained a positive attitude, and received recognition for their perseverance and hard work. Hazeema, Sadia Abdul Khaliq, and Fareeda Khanum are well-known Pakistani women Kabaddi players. Another well-known athlete is Naseem Hameed, also known as the "Queen of Tracks," who is the fastest woman in South Asia and earned a gold medal in the 2010 South Asian Federation Games. Similarly, Samina Baig, a mountaineer from the remote Pakistani region of Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan, was taught by her brother Mirza Ali and became the first Pakistani woman to climb Mount Everest in 2013. There is a long list of distinguished women athletes who have made a mark in the sports world by their remarkable performances and it is not possible to mention all of them here. In short, all of these sportswomen have shown tenacity and resolve by exercising their agency to play sports, and with the support of their families, they have been able to pursue their passions. The aforementioned discussion also clarifies that being a sportswoman is not an easy task for a woman, as it involves numerous obstacles and difficulties in a patriarchal culture. Owing to the lack of any extensive research on gender representation, particularly in Pakistani sports media; and also to the dominance of patriarchal ideology in Pakistani society that does not ascribe equal status to women, the current study aims to thoroughly examine the way sportswomen are represented in the Pakistani newspapers.

Results

The present study analyzes the representations of sportswomen in pictures of Pakistani Newspapers and aims at revealing the implications of this portrayal. Although it is generally acknowledged that there should be gender equality but there is discrepancy between what is said and what is done in real life situations. According to researches reviewed in this study (Tahseen, 2018; Zia, 2007; Mansoor, 2013), even while women participate widely in all aspects of life, they are still portrayed in a conventional manner, and the media does not immediately embrace their new role as athletes/sportswomen. We can learn more about the profoundly embedded gender-based social norms and systems that permeate Pakistani culture by studying how sportswomen are portrayed in visuals, since images are packed with cultural messages. This section contains analysis of thirty one images taken from selected newspapers; and the study has found that Pakistani newspapers portray a different image of sportswomen which is contrary to traditional coverage of women's sports. The sportswomen are represented as excelling in sports and marking a new history by their incredible achievements across the globe. The pictures analyzed here show a positive view of Pakistani culture, where women have overcome all obstacles and disproved the antiquated beliefs that women are less competent and inferior. The analysis of images of sportswomen shows them to be active, competent, strong, dominant, and powerful which is contrary to traditional beliefs. Since it is not possible to discuss every picture here, only representative images are analyzed based on their greater visibility (high frequency), popular sports (cricket, gymnastics, and tennis), and prominent placement (large size of images, central position on the page) in the selected newspapers.

There are two methods for developing themes in accordance with the principles of thematic analysis. One is inductive, while the other is deductive. The inductive technique entails formulating themes and subsequently analyzing the data, while the deductive approach involves deriving themes from the gathered data. The present study employed a deductive approach for thematic analysis by establishing themes based on their frequency in the assembled picture bank.

The analysis is given below under five themes:

Theme 1: Portrayed in Sports Setting

Theme 2: Sportswomen in Sports Action

Theme 3: Portrayed in Sports Attire

Theme 4: Non-Objectification of Bodies

Theme 5: Subversion of Conventional Femininity

The given table shows the frequency of ninety five images for the category of sporty representation, extracted from the picture bank. Due to the impossibility to analyze all ninety-five images in the current study, as previously outlined in the research methodology, thirty-one images were selected based on the criteria of enhanced visibility, prominent placement, and popularity of the sport; these images were qualitatively examined under these themes.

Table

Theme-Wise Distribution of Pictures

Themes	Portrayed in Sports Setting (Theme 1)	Sportswomen in Sports Action (Theme 2)	Portrayed in Sports Attire (Theme 3)	Non-Objectification of Bodies (Theme 4)	Subversion of Conventional Femininity (Theme 5)
Number of pictures per theme	95	87	95	69	95

The above table demonstrates the occurrence of images for each theme. Themes 1, 3, and 5 exhibit a greater quantity of photos, with a substantial amount of images in themes 2 and 4, respectively. The data illustrates the burgeoning trend in the representation of female athletes within the chosen newspapers, as a substantial quantity of images in the archive emphasizes their sportsmanship by depicting them in athletic attire, engaged in sporting activities.

Theme 1: Portrayed in Sports Setting

Theme 1 deals with the portrayal of sportswomen in the sports field, on the playground, in the courts and stadiums. The four images analyzed under this theme show all sportswomen in sports setting while performing in the sports field. The hockey, soccer, and cricket players are shown displaying their athletic skills in the selected images while wearing their sports uniforms. The selected newspapers have adopted constructive approach by focusing upon the athleticism of sportswomen instead of representing them in non-sports contexts, an approach which is widespread in different news media.



Dawn, May 23, 2019



The Nation, May 14, 2019



Dawn, February 3, 2019



Dawn, February 12, 2019

It can be seen that the selected Pakistani newspapers have not highlighted their personal lives by covering their family situations or social gatherings; rather they are shown, in competition with other players in the sports field. The purpose of representing women players in non-sport setting is to highlight their traditional roles and to throw into the background their sports accomplishments. Gender depiction in popular media usually fails to capture the variety of social reality. Harmful gender stereotypes are reinforced when women are represented as hyper sexualized objects or as having only traditional roles like caring for others or having romantic interests (Seluman et al., 2024). These photographs demonstrate that Pakistani media have dismantled prejudices around women by portraying female athletes as capable, establishing that women's sports hold equal significance to men's sports. If media reinforces the athletic identity of sportswomen by projecting them in realistic manner, it could lead to the elevation of sportswomen's status in the public; and their sport would also be taken seriously by the people, leading to the acceptance and propagation of women's sports in the country. The analysis of images shows that the selected Pakistani newspapers have attributed great importance to the contribution of sportswomen to the sports world by representing them in truthful and realistic manner.

Theme 2: Sportswomen in Sports Action

Theme 2 focuses upon sportswomen shown in action in the sports field. It contains analysis of eight images of sportswomen who are shown engaged in athletic activity. Their representation in the competitive arena, as evidenced by the images, reflect an authentic and affirmative depiction of their abilities. This stands in stark contrast to the conventional portrayals of sportswomen, which often emphasize physical appearance over athletic prowess. These images suggest that the athletic prowess displayed by an individual on the field

holds greater importance than superficial aesthetics, thereby challenging the prevailing stereotypes of women perpetuated in media narratives



Dawn, April 6, 2019



The Nation, September 28, 2019



Dawn, March 29, 2019



The Nation, February 10, 2019



Dawn, February 2, 2019



Dawn, February 3, 2019



The Nation, May 13, 2019



The Nation, May 16, 2019

It is quite a significant finding that all images analyzed under theme 2 show sportswomen as powerful, self-assured, and resolute, which challenges the conventional view of women as timid, weak, and subservient. The photos depict them as strong contenders, showcasing their athleticism. In a departure from the stereotypical depiction of sportswomen as fragile objects, these images showcase their skills as they compete on the field. Their bodies are stretched out, and the effort they are exerting is evident in their facial expressions. Pakistani women are generally perceived as weak and limited to household responsibilities and

these images stand in sharp contrast to this notion as the athletes are shown to be dominant, self-assured, and determined who will stop at nothing to win. These images also highlights how, unlike earlier eras when women were prohibited from pursuing male-dominated professions, Pakistani society has changed to encourage women's involvement in sports. Furthermore, it illustrates how Pakistani newspapers prioritize athletic ability over sportswomen's appearance and beauty, reflecting the liberal attitudes toward women's standing that is pervasive in Pakistani media. These photographs convey a very positive image of Pakistani society in general since it shows that sports have ceased to be the exclusive province of men; and that sportswomen are represented positively by the media. It is interesting to note that contrary to general assumptions about women, they are no longer to be taken as weak and emotional, but they are shown to be strong and forceful, which is a subversion of cultural stereotypes associated with women.

Theme 3: Portrayed in Sports' Attire

Theme 3 focuses upon the attire of sportsperson in four images analyzed here. It can be observed that all sportswomen are wearing their sports uniform and the fact that the uniforms worn by all players provide full coverage to their bodies is a reflection of the sociocultural norms that dictate the appropriate dress for women.



The Nation, February 7, 2019



Dawn, April 4, 2019



Dawn, April 6, 2019



The Nation, September 18, 2019

In addition to making history in sports, the photos shows that Pakistani women are staying true to themselves by designing their sporting apparel to reflect cultural standards. Every single player's is sporting typical sports attire; but, they have also personalized their outfits to reflect the customs and cultural values of their own communities. Some individuals are attired in loose trousers and shirts that obscure their body dimensions. The female contestants in this picture have also conformed to local traditions regarding appropriate attire for women. The given images prove that sportswomen in Pakistan, who face patriarchal society that is shaped by religious and cultural views, must embrace feminine values to a certain degree if they want to be accepted. The sportswomen in this picture preserve their athletic identity by wearing their sports uniform gracefully. They are not treated traditionally as objects of beauty, and are not portrayed as fashion icons or models, necessitating adherence to societal dress codes to uphold their athletic status and

safeguard their public image. Sportswomen are not taken to provide visual pleasure to men as their poses are not suggestive or seductive, which is a realistic projection of their sports identity.

Theme 4: Non-Objectification of Bodies

A general perspective about women is that they are always objectified as sportswomen are frequently being objectified by the media by focusing upon their looks, body, fashion and glamour. Theme 4 runs counter to this stereotypical projection of women players and rather highlight the non-objectification of sportswomen in the selected Pakistani newspapers. The analysis of seven images under this theme highlight the sports identity of women cricketers by showing them in sports setting, wearing their sports dresses, winning awards, and show casing their talent in the field.



The Nation, October 26, 2019



Dawn, October 27, 2019



Dawn, January 1, 2019



Dawn, April 23, 2019



Dawn, August 29, 2019



Dawn, September 28, 2019



Dawn, October 24, 2019.

It can be seen that none of the images has focused upon their looks or glamour as the players wear no makeup or jewelry to emphasize their femininity; rather they have maintained their professional look by dressing up formally. They are not presented as show girls or sexual beings as the camera does not focus on their specific body parts but the emphasis is laid upon their sports performance. All images show them wearing their loose sports dresses that have covered their body fully. Their sports outfit and their appearance reinforce their athletic identity. The images do not portray them to be seductive or attractive to men; rather the images highlight their sportsmanship and show them to be promising women cricketers, displaying their skills in cricket. Since images are more influential in shaping perception and attitude, portraying sportswomen in un-athletic manner trivializes their achievement and makes their sport seem less important than men's sport. Such a projection plays an important role in the sustenance of patriarchal ideology that devalues women and does not ascribe them equal status and respect along with men.

Theme 5: Subversion of Conventional Femininity

Theme 5 deals with the subversion of traditional femininity in eight images being analyzed and it shows all women players to be strong, competent, challenging, skillful and dominant. Previous researches show that women are represented in stereotypical manner weak, emotional, subservient, less skillful and it has been observed that male players are usually shown to be embodiment of sportsmanship, to be highly talented and skillful, while female athletes are shown to be less skillful and emotional (Vezzali et al., 2023). However, the current images highlight their athletic ability and skill as they are shown competing in the field and achieving their targets.



The Nation, May 23, 2019



Dawn, May 23, 2019



The Nation, May 9, 2019



The Nation, February 14, 2019



The Nation, October 31, 2019



Dawn, June 20, 2019.



Dawn, October 31, 2019



Dawn, November 3, 2019.

The analysis of all above images shows that sportswomen are depicted in authentic settings which can have a strong impact on prospective athletes. The projection of sportswomen in realistic manner serves as an impetus to future athletes as they get encouraged and motivated when they see their role models to be appraised and acknowledged for their contributions. Since media is an efficient tool for disseminating information, it should not adhere solely to gender ideologies by reporting the women sports in biased manner. The selected Pakistani newspapers have truly represented sportswomen as symbols of power, strength, excellence and endurance; and have awarded them the respect and recognition they deserve.

Conclusion

The portrayal of gender in sports photography is a significant subject that mirrors wider cultural perspectives on gender roles. Research demonstrates that female athletes are usually depicted in traditional manner in sports photography as the emphasis is often on their physical attractiveness and femininity rather than their athletic prowess. The pictorial representation of gender in sports news in the United States has been extensively studied. It has been found that notwithstanding the considerable accomplishments of female athletes, they persistently receive diminished media attention compared to male sport stars. Similarly, sports photography demonstrates considerable biases in gender representation in UK news media (Juliet, 2024). However, the current study exposes a different trend regarding the sportswomen's portrayal in Pakistani

newspapers. The analysis of each photograph in this paper reveals the transformation occurring within Pakistan, a nation steeped in traditional patriarchal, religious, and cultural norms. Since the data has been taken from e-newspapers that have global readership, the analysis reveals that a progressive, realistic, non-objectified portrayal of Pakistani sportswomen has been found in the selected Pakistani newspapers. They have presented a realistic portrayal of women athletes by projecting them in sports setting and by focusing upon their athletic skills. It also contradicts the findings of previous studies which claim that false notions of femininity have been propagated by media by showing women belonging to politics, sports and other professions as objects of beauty. The initiative taken by Pakistani newspapers to underscore the accomplishments and talents of sportswomen is commendable, as it contributes to a more positive perception of women's sports. Their achievements have been commendably acknowledged. They are depicted in authoritative and influential positions, thereby inspiring aspiring sportswomen to pursue their athletic ambitions. These images effectively challenge the prevailing notion that women are inferior or less competent than men, as they have all etched their names in history by excelling as remarkable athletes across diverse sports disciplines. However, the fact that they are also represented in realistic way as more skillful and athletic directs our attention to the ideological transformation taking place in Pakistani society. The current study brings it to light that the contemporary trend in media is positive as women are presented as dominant, strong, leading and powerful which is a contradiction to traditional concept of womanhood in Pakistani society. Whereas in Pakistani society, majority of women still find it challenging to participate in sports, the newspapers have contributed significantly in projecting a progressive image of sportswomen as women of power, determination, and strength. Their representation encourages prospective sportswomen to join sports as they are treated respectfully and realistically by the media. In the context of society where traditional gender roles are changing, the positive representation of sportswomen adds to this ideological transformation in Pakistani society.

The qualitative findings of this study are supported by quantitative data bank as the frequency of images per theme has been elaborated in the Table 1. The results of the current study align with the longitudinal research conducted by Pope, Allison, and Petty (2023) on the FIFA Women's World Cup from 2015 to 2019 in UK print media, which indicates a significant increase in media coverage of women's football, characterized by consistent respectful representation. The coverage was pertinent to the task; there were no pieces that objectified female athletes, as the focus was instead on their talent and competence.

As previously noted, the media significantly influences public perception of sportspersons, thereby shaping societal views of them. Should the media persist in emphasizing their sports' achievements and depicting them favorably, it will contribute to altering public perceptions of women's involvement in sports, thereby motivating more women to engage in athletic activities. The media bears the responsibility to transform society's adaptation to male sports coverage, and the media system must implement measures to address this issue. All media personnel responsible for reporting on gender issues must receive urgent training and heightened awareness on these matters. This include reporters, authors, proprietors, editors, free lancers, advertising agencies, news agencies, and others focused on gender issues, facilitating their comprehension, recognition, acknowledgment, and representation of the multifaceted positions women occupy in society. Enhancing the representation of women in print media and challenging conventional gender norms can be achieved by utilizing female journalists and feminist media outlets. In the media sector, positions should be allocated by employers only based on competence, enabling qualified women to progress to executive and editorial posts. It is essential for unions, media organizations, and other stakeholders to participate in educating media workers on responsible and ethical reporting practices. The media bears the responsibility to transform society's acceptance of male-dominated sports coverage, and the media apparatus must implement measures to address the issue.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study has not examined all venues or sources of sports discourse, given its constrained scope. The research has gathered information from merely two leading Pakistani newspapers i.e. *the Dawn and The Nation*. In addition to newspapers, a wealth of information exists across social media platforms, online sports magazines, blogs, and various other websites; however, it was impractical to examine all of this

data for the current study. Furthermore, owing to limitations of the scope of current research paper, the data examined is also limited; a more comprehensive investigation may be conducted by broadening the scope of data. The study also facilitates further research on other media platforms heavily utilized for sports event reporting, including sports commentaries, sports magazines, sports boards' websites, and social media platforms.

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