



Conception of sports as entertainment in Pakistani media and contemporary challenges

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ABSTRACT

Sports in Pakistan have developed from merely competitive local pleasures to a popular source of cultural expression and mainstream media entertainment. Sports, particularly cricket, are a common national experience for millions of Pakistanis, uniting people from all walks of life and serving as their main form of leisure. In Pakistan, the idea of sports as "pure entertainment" meets significant structural and cultural challenges. Sports are not yet widely seen as a stand-alone entertainment sector; instead, they are severely burdened by national identity, political tension, and economic survival, even the media coverage of tournaments like the Pakistan Super League (PSL) have effectively commercialized the game. The "sportainment" explosion is celebrated in media narratives, but it is limited to the elite cricket monoculture. For the vast majority of athletic disciplines, sports are not recognized by the public or the state as a viable entertainment industry or professional route. This study examines the conception of sports as entertainment in Pakistani media and contemporary challenges. Qualitative approach is used for this purpose while engaging sports experts. Findings of the study reveal that although sports are considered key leisure activities, media has promoted additional meaning to it such as commercialism and nationalism in particular. Thus, mediatized sports have become more than simple entertainment consequently affecting the public perception.

Introduction

The term "mass media" refers to the dissemination of information on a larger scale through print, electronic, and social media. The media has been playing a catalyst role for the promotion of sports and unity in a nation. In the realm of sports, the media plays a very significant role. It shouldn't be incorrect that the media has an impact on sports; while it has many positive effects, it also has many harmful ones. These fields include coaching, training, games of all types, and athletes (Nosheen, Shah, & Raza, Role of Media for Promotion of Sports in Pakistan, 2022).

The interaction between electronic media and sports is extremely well-coordinated and robust. Electronic media broadcasts many sporting events internationally, increasing their popularity and fan base (Nosheen, Aslam, & Qurashi, 2023).

In any country, the media plays an important role in shaping and determining the nation's beliefs and values. It is not inaccurate to say that both are dependent on each other. Both cannot be run, especially in terms of funding and popularity. The media refines and polishes a nation's vision and culture, reflecting its moods and names. Until recently, other modern forms of media only allowed for one-way communication (Nosheen, Rashid, Razziq, & Nazeer, 2024).

Several forms of communication, including television and newspapers, have a big impact on sports around the world. The presence of specific sports channels, publications, and agencies dedicated to reporting the country's physical culture and sports development strengthens the media's impact over sports. Furthermore, young people's participation in physical education and sports encourages them to utilize the Internet more actively in order to develop healthy behaviors. It is no accident that several previously unpopular sports have grown in popularity as a result of the newspaper, radio, and television coverage. The sport has achieved significant public resonance as a result of the mainstream media, particularly television. New sources of finance have been developed, and initiatives to promote athletes and advertising have received widespread coverage. With modern media tools, a little-known athlete can quickly rise to the status of number one star. By massing live competitions in different nations and places around the world, the mass media generates communication between spectators and athletes, makes people and fans enthusiastic and happy alongside athletes, and invites them to share their sorrows (Aliyev & Mammadov, 2022).

Sports involve a wide diversity of physical activities and sports, frequently marked by competitiveness and affiliation, aimed to increase physical abilities and skills while bringing enjoyment to participants and entertainment to spectators. These might be solitary team activities. While two teams participate in a competition in some sports, like racing, many players compete in an effort to win. While some sports use tie-breaking techniques to establish a definitive winner, others may even end in a tie. A popular framework for tournament is holding several competitions and selecting a winner to entertain masses. Many sports leagues follow a yearly timetable, including regular seasons and playoffs, to determine a champion (Khuman, 2023).

There are numerous positive aspects to the relationship between sports and the media. It is the media's proficiency to touch the collective public and delight them with their preferred channel about their cherished game. The public can now watch a variety of games and contests on television thanks to television. There are a lot of things that can be seen as exciting spectators. Nonetheless, there are concerns that this trend would eventually go too far, and we could observe in this nation the decline in presence that has been observed in nations like Spain and Italy (Nosheen, Shah, & Raza, Role of Media for Promotion of Sports in Pakistan, 2022).

There are a variety of local entertainment, sports, local entertainment. This paradigm change, sometimes referred to as the "sportainment" phenomena, combines corporate branding, celebrity culture, digital fan interaction, mass media consumption, and high-stakes sports performance. In industrialized markets, sports act as a key sector of the leisure economy, where customers exchange disposable income for escapism, entertainment, and community identification (Mahmood, 2016).

In today's environment, sports are more than just a social or recreational activity. They have successfully moved from entertainment to a full-fledged service industry in which society, governments, market actors, and the general public work together. Stakeholder interests may vary in terms of geographical identification, social well-being, economic activity, and national reputation, as was the case with Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup 2022 (Akmal, Uzair, & Jadoon, 2026).

The development of sports as a form of entertainment in Pakistan offers a very contradictory and disjointed picture. The PSL functions as pure, heavily commercialized entertainment for a short period of time every year. Instead, sports in Pakistan are plagued by two opposing ideologies: existential nationalism and socioeconomic liability. At the international level, matches (particularly against geopolitical rivals such as India) are devoid of entertainment value and treated as tests of national ego, patriotism, and state legitimacy; athletic failure is met with public trauma and outrage rather than simple entertainment devaluation. On the other hand, sports are generally demonized at the grassroots level as unproductive diversions from academic endeavors and financial survival. There is a dearth of empirical research examining whether the Pakistani public actually enjoys sports for leisure or if the development of a true sports-entertainment paradigm is thwarted by ingrained cultural anxiety, institutional corruption, economic instability, and unflexible gender barriers. This study focuses on this lacking literature in media-sports relationship.

Research objectives

Following are the key research objectives;

1. To assess critically how much the Pakistani public views sports as a vehicle for national prestige as opposed to a stand-alone form of leisure and amusement.
2. To examine the role of media in the perception of sports as entertainment among Pakistani public?
3. To identify and study the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional constraints that prevent sports being perceived as entertainment among public.

Research questions

This study attempts to investigate following research questions;

1. To what extent does the Pakistani public perceive sports as a form of casual leisure and entertainment?
2. To what extent media play a part in the perception of sports as entertainment among Pakistani public?
3. What are the constraints in creating perception of sports as entertainment?

Literature review

There are numerous positive aspects to the relationship between sports and the media. It is the media's ability to engage the general public and amuse them with their preferred channel regarding their favorite game. The public's ability to watch various games and matches on television provides increased engagement. It is only because of the media's ability to make sports accessible to a wide audience that it can help viewers, the sick, and young or grownup who have even been uprooted from their hometown (Nosheen, shah, & Raza, Role of Media for Promotion of Sports in Pakistan, 2022).

Prior to the creation and growth of diverse media landscape, which now allows sports managers to generate and spread relaxation while also providing association with admirers, old-style media was the only technique that provides information and amuses clients who are not on the list at a specific sports event but are shown in other programs (Gulam, 2016).

The press played a significant role in the sharing of information among its readers about current local, national, and international events. In addition, television, wireless, and all other forms of live reporting demonstrated their ability by providing live images and interpretations of events as they occurred. The outcomes of this media organization sometimes dedicate time to live images because they are the most crucial factors that excite the fans. However, with the help of electronic media, television and wireless are now serving as the primary keys that give materials more easily as knowledge advances. Because of the expansion of traditional media, its results led to a modern advertising and cardinal collaboration plants costs over billions, with the relationship between sports and media being the midpoint of it (Kim & Park, 2017).

The term "mass media" refers to the dissemination of information via print, electronic, and social media on a larger scale. In contemporary society, the media has been a catalyst for the advancement of athletics and understanding (Chunying & Awan, 2023).

These days, television is a major source of sports viewing in both developed and developing nations. Additionally, all of the live photos are displayed on enormous displays on the ground as massive, brief, slow motion replays of every move. According to the findings of the study, the phenomenon of media consumption of broadcast games has formed a more dissimilar perception of sport than in the past (Chanyang, 2021).

In the mid-1990s, live images of sporting events were broadcast on television and the internet. Thus far, this type of sports dissemination has been limited by personal processors and data transfer rates. Consequently, sports are the most significant media. As a result, television is the most significant medium for sports reporting, showcasing events and providing information about sports (Chakraborty, 2018).

The mass media benefits sports by promoting healthy active lifestyles, motivating people to participate, publicizing a variety of sports and activities, making certain sports more fashionable, introducing new supporters to sport, educating spectators through analysis, and celebrating effort and success. Furthermore, the media may have a negative impact on sports by altering how they are presented to the public; for example, the most popular sports receive a lot of coverage on television and in newspapers. This discourages participation in less popular sports, reinforces disparities by limiting coverage to traditional sports or social groups, discourages activity by encouraging armchair spectators, underrepresents women and disability sports, and lowers spectator attendance at live events. It also undermines people's confidence and careers by showcasing negative values (Kumar, 2018).

Alongside recreational sports' increasing importance, social media has become a crucial component of their marketing. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube provide increased access to information, inspiration, and motivation for sporting activities. Sports organizations, influencers, and individual enthusiasts may encourage more people to lead active lives by using a variety of digital tactics. Social media not only boosts the awareness of recreational sports but also enables the creation of interactive communities that encourage engagement and participation across different age groups (Dimovska, 2025).

Governments employ sports as policy instruments for various internal aims, such as social cohesion, youth involvement and development, health, and civic evolution. Sports are valuable in the international arena for displaying national status, soft power, and diplomatic discourse (Grix & Carmichael, 2012).

In today's digital culture, social media has emerged as one of the most effective instruments for promoting a variety of activities, including sports. Social media enables for real-time updates, allowing journalists and sports organizations to disseminate news as it happens (Farrington, Hall, Kilvington, Price, & Saeed, 2017).

However, there are a lot of possibilities for the internet. Because of the internet, it is now simpler to look up certain events or information on sports by using a search engine. The Internet is mean that can allow the players and sports men to obtain access extremely swiftly and simply without traveling far (Kumar, 2018).

Methodology

This research uses qualitative research technique. Semi structured interviews have been conducted to get the responses of the defined sample of the study comprising 10 sports experts and 7 sports journalists. Responses of the participants have been transcribed under defined themes.

Findings of the study

Sports as the symbol of culture, identity, and nationalism

Sports in Pakistan serve as a major cultural force, a vehicle for national unity, and an expression of identity. Respondents of the study opined that the traditional sports, such as Kabaddi in rural Punjab or freestyle polo during the Shandur Festival, are inextricably linked to regional ideas of manhood, honor, and tradition. These festivals enable small groups to keep and celebrate their own cultural identities while remaining part of the larger Pakistani state. Similarly, such sports are also reflecting the counter force against the monopoly of certain sports, particularly cricket, while adhering to our own identity and cultural anchorage through sports. But the media coverage to such event is kept limited or the media sponsorship is also absent or very limited. Role of national media is crucial in this regard to strengthen the ideology of nationalism promoted through such events. However, when the national cricket team competes, regional identities (Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, Baloch, and Muhajir) are momentarily merged into a single, undivided identity. A national team triumph results in rapid, country-wide collective pleasure, whilst a loss causes shared national anguish. Especially when the encounter is meant against the arch rivals such as India, sports is perceived beyond just entertainment or leisure activity to witness. Experts also opined that cricket against India portrayed as the most explicit form of nationalism among majority of the Pakistanis.

The Cricket Monoculture and the Illusion of Sports Entertainment

Cricket's total corporate and media dominion defines Pakistan's current sports landscape. Respondents of the interview suggested that the literature on sports economics in South Asia shows that the introduction of franchise-based Twenty20 cricket, notably the Pakistan Super League (PSL), substantially reshaped the country's leisure industry. The PSL successfully commodified the game by incorporating it into prime-time television, using large corporate sponsorships, and developing engaging digital fan ecosystems. However, analysts point out that this "sportainment boom" is an outlier. Cricket's hyper commercialization has resulted in a hunger effect in other sports ecosystems. Because corporate capital and broadcast networks selectively target cricket due to its guaranteed high-volume viewership, sports such as field hockey, squash, and football are trapped in a vicious cycle: a lack of media visibility prevents corporate sponsorships, which causes financial insolvency, which leads to deteriorating infrastructure and the subsequent death of consumer interest. Therefore, such bias towards certain sports considerably affect the very concept of sports entertainment. It can be implied that media weightage to cricket plays deceive role in defining the sportainment among the consumers.

Sports Nationalism vs. Escapist Leisure

While discussing the existing comparison and contrast of nationalism and leisure the experts believe that the socio-psychological weight of existential nationalism is a major source of conflict in the perception of sports as entertainment. In industrialized economies, sports are primarily viewed as an elective leisure activity intended at emotional pleasure or escapism. In contrast, sports sociology in Pakistan shows that international athletic events, particularly matches against geopolitical enemies, are heavily co-opted by official narratives to create civic togetherness and maintain ideological superiority.

Sports experts believed that under this perspective, athletic confrontations lose their entertainment value. Fandom evolves from a recreational activity to a high-stakes expression of patriotism. As a result, when national teams suffer catastrophic athletic setbacks, the public response is more than just consumer disappointment or entertainment depreciation; it is marked by communal pain, extreme public outrage, and widespread media moral panics. This suggests that the Pakistani population sees sports primarily through the lens of existential nationalism, rather than casual amusement.

Socioeconomic Reality and the "Unviable Career" Stigma

Respondents of the study also found that the development of sports into a sustainable entertainment industry is hampered by fundamental economic insecurity and deeply ingrained cultural norms. In Western environments, grassroots athletic programs serve as a profitable talent pipeline, supported by academic scholarships and institutional finance, allowing sports to be considered as a legitimate professional route.

In Pakistan, severe domestic economic pressures, inflation, and a lack of grassroots corporate support have positioned sports as a high-risk liability. Middle- and lower-income families place a high value on academic absolutism, steering their children entirely into established areas such as medicine, engineering, and civil service. Sports are culturally regarded as a childhood interest or leisure "distraction" rather than a serious vocation. Because domestic sporting boards (except elite cricket) cannot guaranty a minimum wage, pension schemes, or health insurance, participating in sports is viewed as an economic luxury that the average Pakistani cannot afford. Thus, such circumstances are more likely to decide on the perception of sports among public.

Patriarchal challenges and gender exclusion

Feminist critiques of South Asian sports culture highlight the structural exclusion of women from engaging in and seeing sports as public entertainment. While the PSL has slightly improved female stadium attendance through rigorously policed corporate-VIP seating, the overall reality remains deeply exclusionary. According to the views of the experts conservative sociocultural standards regard public female athleticism as a violation of cultural modesty. This conceptual barrier is exacerbated by a serious physical gap; city planners rarely create secure, gender-segregated training facilities or safe public playgrounds. As a result, women are mostly excluded from the domestic sports and entertainment framework. This imbalance is reflected in media representation: female athletic achievements are rarely broadcast or commercialized, preventing the formation of female sports superstars who could threaten the country's dominant masculine sports entertainment narrative. Such practices limit the inclusion of female consumers of sports based content making it highly patriarchal in domain and nature.

Commercialization and Revenue

Participants of the study believed that while addressing the media-sports relation in these days the concept of commercialization and revenue can never be neglected. The media has not just sponsored sports; it has fully revamped its economic motor. When you look at the multibillion-dollar broadcast rights deals inked by leagues like the NFL, English Premier League, and IPL, you can see that media companies are the key stakeholders now. This increased cash is used to upgrade stadium infrastructure, world-class medical facilities, and sports science, all of which help players extend their careers. However, there is a risk of structural inequity. Media giants are highly selective in collaborating with sporting events. Minor Olympic sports and grassroots youth initiatives receive pennies for every dollar invested in football or basketball. Commercialization generates a top-heavy ecosystem in which the rich become exponentially richer while the developing tiers are left to fend for themselves. Therefore, sports entertainment has become highly commodified where profit outplays the very essence of entertainment.

Similarly, media experts related that from a brand and athlete standpoint, media commercialization has democratized earning power. Historically, an athlete's income was solely based on wages and local endorsements. Today, digital media and global broadcasts enable a player to create a personal brand that extends beyond their team. Stars are now autonomous media companies. The drawback of hyper-commercialization is the commodification of the human aspect. When athletes are treated solely as revenue-generating assets or 'content,' public empathy evaporates. To optimize prime-time TV slots, media deals require unpredictable game scheduling, such as late-night kickoffs or back-to-backs. Experts concluded that these days we are increasingly putting broadcasting revenue ahead of player welfare and physical recovery limits.

Discussion

This study's empirical findings show a significant contradiction between the hyper-commercialized, media-driven "sportainment" scene and Pakistan's socio-cultural, economic, and institutional reality. This discussion focuses on how the illusion of sports as a

standalone entertainment medium crumble when confronted with existential nationalism, economic precarity, and institutional exclusion. The Pakistan Super League (PSL) has effectively created a highly commodified "sportainment" spectacle that serves as pure, escapist enjoyment for a limited time each year. By combining short-form cricket with pop-culture assets, corporate marketing activations, and extensive digital media coverage, the league has successfully opened up a lucrative consumer market. In today's environment, sports are more than just a social or recreational activity. They have successfully moved from entertainment to a full-fledged service industry in which society, governments, market actors, and the general public work together. Stakeholder interests may vary in terms of geographical identification, social well-being, economic activity, and national reputation, as was the case with Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup 2022 (Akmal, Uzair, & Jadoon, 2026).

However, the findings show that this phenomenon is a single, fabricated bubble. Cricket's full corporate and media monoculture has caused a severe effect throughout the broader sports ecosystem. A key finding of this study is the abrupt shift in sports consumption while moving from domestic franchise leagues to international mega-events. While the public enjoys local franchise cricket as a casual, lighthearted pastime, the entertainment value vanishes completely during international matches, particularly against geopolitical rivals like as India. The domestic sports entertainment structure is designed to exclude half of the population. While female spectatorship in upper-class metropolitan venues has increased slightly within corporate-VIP enclosures at major cricket grounds, the larger public sporting realm remains strongly patriarchal and exclusive.

Conclusion

This study critically examined Pakistan's perception of sports as entertainment, revealing a fundamental divide between a highly commercialized, media-driven cricket bubble and a structurally deprived broader athletic ecology. While the Pakistan Super League (PSL)'s multibillion-rupee success reflects a successful structural shift toward a globalized "sportainment" paradigm, empirical and theoretical analysis show that this model is weak, narrow, and deceptive. Outside of elite T20 cricket, sports are not yet widely recognized or operationalized as a self-sustaining entertainment sector.

Instead, the development of a comprehensive sports-entertainment business in Pakistan faces significant socio-cultural, governmental, and economic constraints. At the macro level, the heavy psychological load of existential nationalism deprives sports consumption of its recreational value, as state and media narratives convert international athletic outcomes into zero-sum proxy warfare for national reputation. At the micro level, entrenched systemic economic precarity and a lack of institutional job stability foster a culture of academic absolutism, portraying athletics as a high-risk financial liability rather than a respectable career route. Furthermore, systemic patriarchal exclusions and a serious lack of safe, gender-segregated municipal infrastructure effectively alienate women, leaving half of the domestic consumer base behind.

Finally, until sports are structurally decoupled from hyper-nationalist anxieties and managed as an economically viable sector, Pakistan's sports landscape will remain a monoculture, thriving on the spectacle of cricket while completely marginalizing the entertainment and professional potential of all other sports.

Policy recommendations

- National sports federations must go through extensive structural reforms to eliminate political appointments, cronyism, and bureaucratic paralysis. Federations should be administered by professional sports managers rather than bureaucrats, with guaranteed basic athlete salary, complete health insurance, and defined post-retirement pension structures in place to make sports a culturally and economically viable career path for young people.
- Municipal and provincial sports boards must prioritize the creation of public sporting complexes that are accessible, secure, and gender separated.
- Regulatory agencies such as PEMRA should require domestic sports broadcasters to devote a set percentage of weekly airtime to domestic non-cricket tournaments.

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