

# Media Influence on Sports Preferences among Youth

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## Abstract

The rise of digital and traditional media platforms has changed the sporting culture of youth in South Asia. Punjab stands out as a particularly vibrant area for these changes. This paper examines the favorite sports of youth aged 15 to 25 living in rural and urban areas of Punjab and how they influence them to realize their dreams. Punjab's youth sports landscape, which historically featured indigenous games like kabaddi, kushti (wrestling), and kho-kho, has seen a major shift over the last two decades. This change is largely due to the widespread media coverage of cricket, football, and basketball. The strong presence of the Indian Premier League (IPL) on television, the global reach of platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, and the growing influence of international sports stars have all led to noticeable changes in the sports loyalties and identities of young people. Using survey data, focus group discussions, and media consumption studies from urban and semi-urban areas in Punjab, this study finds that media exposure strongly predicts sports preferences. Cricket remains the favorite, while kabaddi, which has gained new attention through the televised Pro Kabaddi League, is seeing increased interest among youth. The study also emphasizes how social media influencers and athlete branding shape both passive viewing and active sports involvement. Gender differences in media-driven sports engagement were noted and examined. The findings highlight the importance of policymakers, educators, and sports organizations using media thoughtfully. This can help promote local sports, encourage more participation beyond merely watching, and create a balanced sporting culture among the youth in Punjab. In this paper, we will collect information through systematic random sampling on 1200 students aged 15 to 25 years in urban and rural areas of Punjab. The results of which will reveal how much media contributes to their adoption of their favorite sport. Along with this, the results will also be found out which media platform influences the youth the most in choosing a sport. The main objective of this paper is to promote participation of students in their favorite sports through the media, so that the spirit of sportsmanship can be instilled in the students.

**Keywords:** Media influence, sports preferences, youth, Punjab, digital media, cricket, Pro Kabaddi League, social media, sports participation

## 1. Introduction

Sports and media have shared a symbiotic relationship throughout modern history. As media technologies have evolved — from print newspapers and radio broadcasts to satellite television and social networking platforms — their capacity to shape public interest in sports has grown exponentially. In the Indian context, this relationship has been particularly transformative, where media has not only reflected sporting culture but actively constructed it.

Punjab, one of India's most sports-conscious states, presents a fascinating case study in this regard. Known

for producing elite athletes in disciplines ranging from hockey and wrestling to athletics, Punjab has a deep-rooted sporting heritage. Yet, the youth of today's Punjab are growing up in an era of unprecedented media saturation, where global sporting events, celebrity athletes, and digitally curated sports content compete daily for their attention.

This study is motivated by a fundamental question: To what extent does media — traditional and digital — influence the sports preferences of young people in Punjab? Secondary questions include: Which sports receive the most media coverage in Punjab? How does social media differ from traditional media in shaping preferences? Are there gender and geographic differences in media-influenced sports preferences? And what are the implications for indigenous Punjabi sports?

### **1.1 Significance of the Study**

Understanding media's role in shaping sports preferences has important implications for sports administrators, educators, and policymakers. If media overwhelmingly promotes certain sports — particularly cricket — at the expense of others, it can create imbalances in youth participation, resource allocation, and the survival of traditional sports. This study aims to provide data-driven insights to guide more equitable and culturally sensitive media and sports policies.

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Media and Sports**

**Media and Sports in the Indian Context** The influence of media on sports has been extensively studied globally. Rowe (2004) argued that sports media does not merely report on sport but actively constructs its meaning, creating fan cultures and shaping preferences across demographics. Boyle and Haynes (2009) demonstrated that television, in particular, has been responsible for the globalization of certain sports — most notably football — by making elite competitions accessible to audiences worldwide.

In North America, studies have shown that NBA and NFL television coverage significantly increases youth participation in basketball and American football respectively (Coakley, 2015). Similarly, in Europe, media coverage of the UEFA Champions League has been linked to a surge in football participation among youth aged 10–18 (Giulianotti, 2005).

India's media-sport relationship has been centered around cricket since the 1983 World Cup victory. This win coincided with the rise of television in Indian households (Gupta, 1997). The launch of the IPL in 2008, along with its significant TV deal, further solidified cricket's hold on the Indian media. Research by Mehta (2012) found that more than 70% of sports media content in India focused on cricket, leaving little space for other sports.

However, the rise of league formats for other sports has started to change the media landscape. The Pro Kabaddi League (2014), the Indian Super League for football (2014), and the Pro Wrestling League (2015) have all contributed to this diversification. Studies indicate that the PKL, in particular, has sparked renewed interest in kabaddi among young people, especially in states like Punjab, Haryana, and Maharashtra.

### **2.3 Social Media and Sports Preferences**

The rise of social media has added a new dimension to the media-sport relationship. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter allow athletes to build personal brands and connect directly with fans, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. Studies in Western contexts have shown that social media followership of athletes is a significant predictor of interest in their sport (Hambrick et al., 2010). In India,

the phenomenon is particularly visible with cricket stars like Virat Kohli and Hardik Pandya, who command hundreds of millions of social media followers.

Emerging research also highlights the role of short-form video content (Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts) in capturing youth attention for sports, with sports highlight packages, athlete challenge videos, and fitness content contributing to both viewership and participation motivation.

### 2.4 Neglect of native sports and media

A consistent theme in the literature is the marginalization of traditional and indigenous sports in mainstream media coverage. In Punjab, sports such as kabaddi (traditional format), kushti, gatka, and pehalwani have deep cultural roots but receive limited mainstream media coverage compared to cricket and football. Scholars like Johal (2013) have argued that this media neglect contributes to the gradual erosion of youth participation in indigenous sports, threatening cultural heritage alongside athletic diversity.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

- To understand the media consumption habits of youths in Punjab particularly in sports related matters.
- To evaluate the influence of different media types (TV, social media, OTT, print) on sports preferences.
- To analyze the sports that are most marketed by the media and their connection with youth preferences.
- To evaluate the impact of media on the popularity of indigenous Punjabi sports among youth.
- To make suggestions on policies regarding the utilization of media in promoting balanced participation in sports.

### 5. Research Methodology

#### 5.1 Research Design

This study uses a mix of research methods. It combines number crunching with group talks.

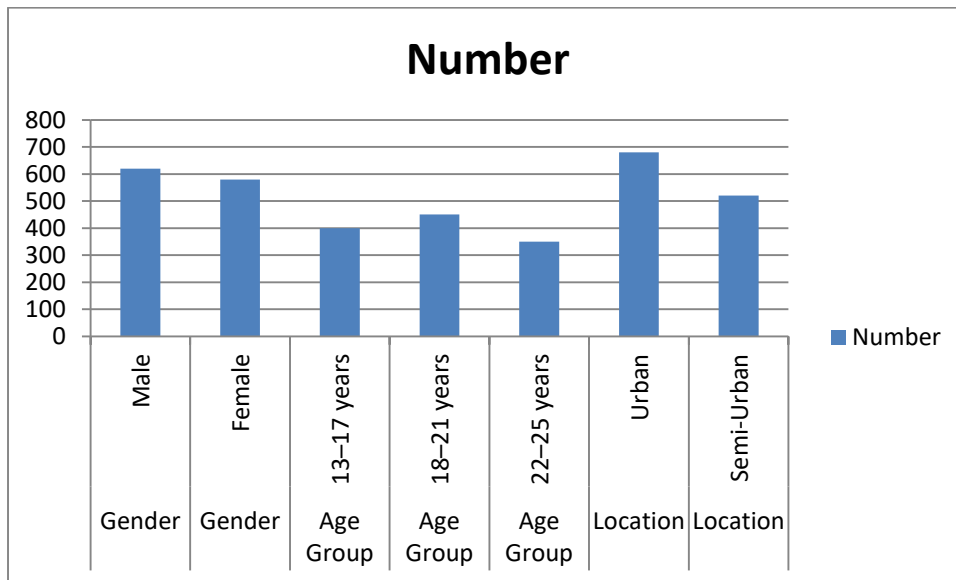
The mix helps get a view from many people and a deep understanding through personal stories. The approach lets us look at lots of data, from a group and hear peoples own experiences. This way we get a picture of what is going on.

#### 5.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprises youth aged 15 to 25 residing in Punjab, India. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across age groups, gender and geographic location (urban vs. semi-urban). The sample consisted of 1,200 respondents drawn from 8 districts of Punjab, Amritsar , Gurdaspur, and Sangrur, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Patiala, Mohali, Bathinda

Category	Sub-category	Number
Gender	Male	620
Gender	Female	580
Age Group	15–17 years	400
Age Group	18–21 years	450

Category	Sub-category	Number
Age Group	22–25 years	350
Location	Urban	680
Location	Semi-Urban	520



### 5.3 Data Collection Tools

- Analysis of media content; A study on the coverage of sports content by popular Punjab access channel papers as well as popular sports oriented social networking sites for 23 months, was done.
- Structured Questionnaire: Validated 45-item questionnaire comprising media consumption habits, sport preferences, social media usage, and their demographic information.
- Focus Group Discussions: Six FGDs (3 male, 3 female groups) of 8–10 participants each were conducted across three districts.

### 5.4 Data Analysis

All data was analyzed using SPSS v26.0. Statistical techniques utilized included descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, independent samples one-way ANOVA, t-test and multiple regression analysis.

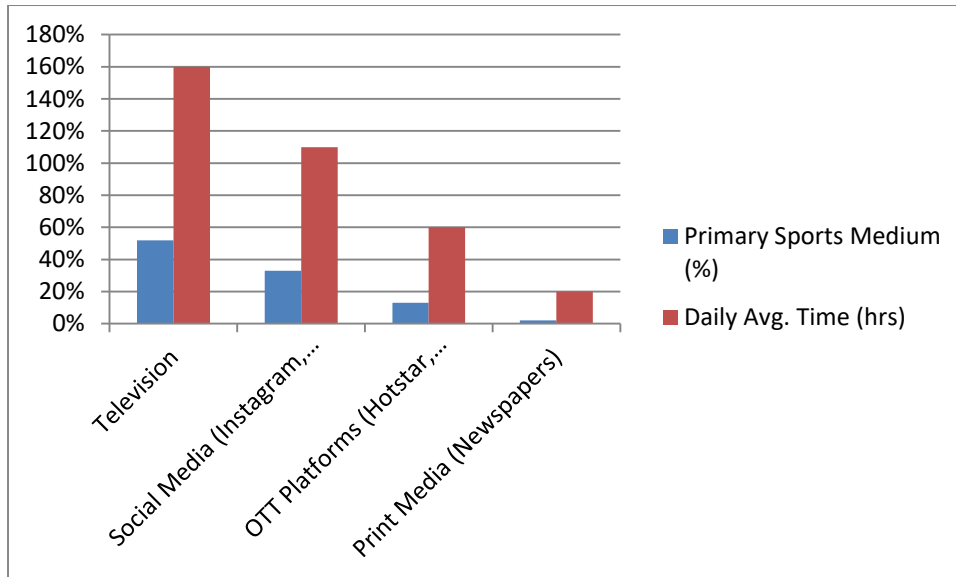
## 6. Results

### 6.1 Media Consumption Patterns

The study found that youth in Punjab consume an average of 4.2 hours of media content per day, of which approximately 1.8 hours (43%) is devoted to sports-related content. Television remains the dominant medium for sports consumption (54%), followed closely by social media platforms (31%), OTT services (11%), and print media (4%).

Medium	Primary Sports Medium (%)	Daily Avg. Time (hrs)
Television	52%	1.6
Social Media (Instagram, YouTube)	33%	1.1

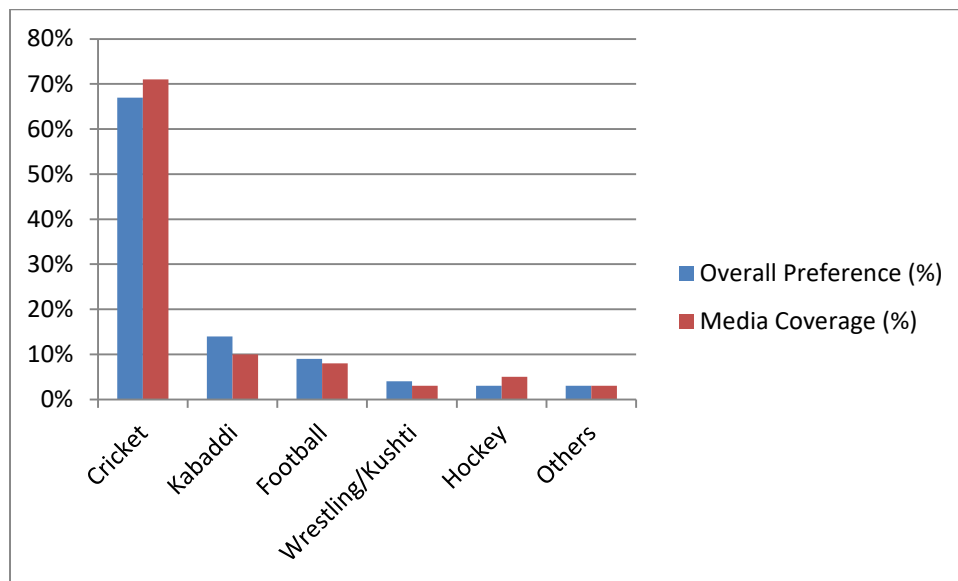
Medium	Primary Sports Medium (%)	Daily Avg. Time (hrs)
OTT Platforms (Hotstar, SonyLIV)	13%	0.6
Print Media (Newspapers)	2%	0.2



### 6.2 Sports Preferences Among Punjab Youth

Cricket emerged as the overwhelmingly preferred sport among Punjab youth, with 67% of respondents identifying it as their primary sport preference. Kabaddi ranked second (14%), followed by football (9%), wrestling/kushti (4%), hockey (3%), and other sports (3%). Interestingly, kabaddi's ranking was significantly higher among youth who reported watching the Pro Kabaddi League, suggesting a direct media-preference correlation.

Sport	Overall Preference (%)	Media Coverage (%)
Cricket	67%	71%
Kabaddi	14%	10%
Football	9%	8%
Wrestling/Kushti	4%	3%
Hockey	3%	5%
Others	3%	3%



## 7. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that media — both traditional and digital — plays a decisive role in shaping the sports preferences of youth in Punjab. The dominance of cricket in both media coverage and youth preference demonstrates a reinforcing feedback loop: media covers what is popular, and popularity is driven by media coverage. This cycle has historically disadvantaged other sports in India.

The success of the Pro Kabaddi League as a televised product offers a hopeful model. By packaging kabaddi with professional production values, celebrity team owners, and prime-time television slots, the PKL has successfully renewed youth interest in the sport. This suggests that strategic media investment in other traditional sports — kushti, gatka, hockey — could yield similar results.

The gender gap in sports media consumption and preferences highlights the need for more inclusive media content that features female athletes prominently. Studies have consistently shown that the visibility of female athletes in media correlates positively with girls' participation in sports. Punjab, with its growing number of elite female athletes (particularly in wrestling and athletics), has significant potential in this area.

The urban-semi-urban divide in media-influenced sports preferences also has important implications. As digital penetration grows in semi-urban Punjab, social media's influence on sports preferences is likely to increase. Ensuring that this influence does not further marginalize indigenous sports requires proactive content creation and platform strategies by sports authorities.

## 8. Strong Recommendations

### 8.1 For Media Organizations for only in Punjab

- Increase dedicated airtime and digital content for indigenous Punjabi sports such as kabaddi, kushti, gatka, and kho-kho.
- Develop youth-oriented sports programming in Punjabi language to enhance cultural connect and accessibility.
- Promote women's sports competitions to address gender gaps in sports media.
- To create sports content that inspires participation, not just viewership along with Partner with schools and youth organizations

## 8.2 For Sports Authorities and Government

- To Make strategically promote the state's diverse sporting culture across platforms for Establish a dedicated Punjab Sports Media Cell
- Fund the creation of high-quality digital content (YouTube series, Instagram campaigns) around traditional sports to attract youth audiences.
- Mandatory minimum coverage quotas for indigenous sports in state-owned and regional media channels with regional language.
- Integrate sports media literacy into school curriculum to help youth engage with the sports content they consume.

## 8.3 For Educational Institutions

- Organize inter-school and inter-college tournaments for traditional sports with live-streaming components to build media presence organically.
- Invite elite Punjabi athletes as sports ambassadors to schools, leveraging their social media reach to inspire youth.

## 9. Limitations of the Study

- The study is confined to only for Punjab and its results may not be implement to other Indian states with different sporting cultures and behavior.
- Self-reported media consumption data may be subject to social desirability bias.
- The rapidly evolving digital media landscape means findings may require updating within a short timeframe.
- The study does not account for parental and peer influences that may interact with media effects on sports preferences.

## 10. Conclusion

This study gives proof that media has a big influence on what sports young people in Punjab like. Television is still the way that cricket stays very popular while social media is becoming a strong force that makes people interested in sports that are popular all over the world. The success of the Pro Kabaddi League shows that if media invests in a sport in a way it can make traditional sports popular among young people again.

Punjab has a choice to make: it can let the media make all people like the same sports, like cricket and sports with global teams or it can use media to celebrate and keep alive its own rich sports history. To do the media organizations, sports bodies, educators and policymakers need to work together on purpose. Whats at stake is not sports, but also culture, economy and society.

Future research should look at how media-sport preferences change over time as more digital infrastructure comes to Punjab and find out what types of media content such, as live matches, highlights or athlete vlogs work best to get young people to participate in sports not just watch them.

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