

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

OPEN ACCESS

SPORT VISUALS AND THE PRINT MEDIA IN INDIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC COVERAGE IN LEADING NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

This research is focused on the use of sport visuals in the leading vernacular and English newspapers in India. The focus of the paper is a comparison across one decade of the 430 sports visuals from the 672 front pages of eight selected newspapers in 2001 (141 visuals) and 2011 (289 visuals). These newspapers, all Chandigarh (India) editions, were content analyzed and the results revealed a focus on the sport of cricket and an increase in the use of sport visuals across the time span of the study. This increase was both in the number of visuals as well as the size of the visuals, with the most growth found in *The Times of India*. The findings reveal the need for more balanced photographic reporting of sports and this commentary calls for Indian universities to commence with specialized courses and training in sport journalism.

Keywords: Sport visuals, photojournalism in India, sports communication, sport journalism

INTRODUCTION

The newspaper is a medium of news communication which performs the functions of informing, educating, influencing, and entertaining through the use of words and visuals. Sports and the media are two of the most commonly recognized elements of modern society. The importance of sport is evidenced by its continued popularity among individuals from all over the globe. As

Kinkema and Harris (1998) noted, in the United States there are occasions when as many as 10 sporting events are televised simultaneously. This wide enjoyment of televised sport has helped justify and lead to the mushroomed growth of sports channels. In the print industry, newspapers have marked one or two pages for sports coverage, and often all important sports events are used on the front page in Indian newspapers.

Navneet Singh, a senior sports journalist from the leading English daily in India, the *Hindustan Times*, noted this increase in coverage. "Over the past decade, it has been noticed young generation is taking keen interest in sports," Singh said. "Taking cue, leading newspapers in the country has started giving more display to sports stories/pictures on the main page."

Sports pictures/stories break the monotony on the front page, which is generally dominated by politics. An action-packed or colorful visual is supposed to add spice to the page.

The front page is crucial for every newspaper as important news is reported on a daily basis, mostly with supporting visuals. The front page is a major selling point of every newspaper and acts like a window to news inside. It attracts the reader to buy newspapers, while visuals create interest to read further, specifically the story or stories that goes with those visuals.

Visual Communication and Sport Journalism

Visual communication is a process of communication through images. Any form of image that is used to communicate an idea (e.g., a sign, poster, drawing, photograph, television advertisement) can be included in the field of visual communications.

Visual communication is an effective mode of communication, presenting ideas and information which can be read or viewed. Visual communication is primarily represented by two-dimensional images which can include signs, typography, drawing, graphic design, illustrations, colour and electronic resources.

It also explores the idea that a visual note bearing text has the power to inform and educate. Visual communication applies artistic license to communicate thoughts and ideas through sight. People who are skilled in visual communication can work in various fields of communication such as journalism, advertising, web designing and publishing. They use many simple and advanced mediums, materials and techniques – everything from pencils to computers - to get their message across.

Jerome Bruner, a psychologist from New York University, discussed the importance of visuals communication with his research, noting that "people only remember 10% of what they hear and 20% of what they read, but about 80 percent of what they see and do" as cited by Paul Martin Lester in "Syntactic Theory of Visual Communication" [9].

Sports journalism became a rapidly growing field around the globe after World War II. Now, sports coverage is an important part of every newspaper and for many readers it's their basic feed on the breakfast table. Most newspapers today have a separate section for sports, with the office often further subdivided into specialized sections including sports journalists, sports photojournalists and the sports desk. Sports journalists concentrate on reporting amateur and professional sports news and events, while photojournalists take visuals of sporting events. The work of both these vital cogs of the sports section are conceptualized and presented for the reader by the sports desk.

This study is important to understanding the development of sports in India. Through this study, scholars will know about the growth of sports coverage on the front page of leading Indian newspapers between 2001 and 2011. From this study, we

will come to know the changing trends for newspapers sports coverage. We will require the data of newspapers which have published maximum sports visuals and allowed maximum space for sports coverage in 2011 on the front page. This study also helps to know the newspapers' trend regarding the publishing of sports visuals with captions or without captions, and with story or without story visuals on the front page.

Sport Visual Research

Several scholars have examined the portrayals of male and female athletes in newspapers. However, very little research has been done in the field of sports visuals in the newspapers. Cemil and Oguz [21] studied the sports coverage in national dailies of Turkey. A content analysis method was used as the authors examined how much the coverage the newspapers gave to sports, and how sports news was distributed by type, photograph and gender. The sample was taken from the top five papers (*Milliyet*, *Sabah*, *Zaman*, *Hürriyet* and *Posta*) in Turkey. Results indicated that the minimal covered sports branches are wrestling and weight lifting and soccer is most covered sports. Coverage of male athletes was most frequent, while news on female athletes was almost nil. *Zaman* used the most visuals in sports news.

Quantitative analysis methods were used for most of the studies. For example, Billings and Angelini [3] used quantitative content analysis for comparing male and female focus during NBC's coverage of the 2004 Olympic Games, in diving, gymnastics, swimming, and track and field. Per their findings, gymnastics and diving sports were more likely to contain gender biases. Out of the four sports examined, the biggest differences were found in gymnastics.

Bengü Arslan and Canan Koca [1] studied three different Turkish daily

newspapers - *Hürriyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Zaman* - to examine the sportswomen and gender stereotypes. Findings indicated the gendered nature of sport coverage within Turkish newspapers. Male coverage dominated as 87.02% of all sports coverage went to men, whereas female athletes only received 6.05% and 6.93% covering both genders (man and woman). Gender stereotypes of visual representations were found in the *Cumhuriyet* (28.6%) and the *Hürriyet* (11.9%). However, there were no gender stereotypes in the *Zaman*.

Shaun Allen Kohn of the University of Oregon studied men versus women in newspaper sports section photographs under the supervision of Kim Sheehan in 2000. A content analysis of sports section photographs from four newspapers covering a 20-year span starting in 1978 found that gatekeepers attached more salience to male athletes, and presented female athletes in a higher percentage of photos indicating dominance, indicating being dominated, and indicating emotion, when compared to males. Additionally, it was found that the presence of female athletes is increasing in the sports section, though there was still a large gender gap in 1998.

While there have been a few studies on sport visuals in the print media, the objective of the current study was to find out the changes, if any, in the use of sports visuals on the front pages of leading Indian newspapers. The Chandigarh editions of these vernacular and English newspapers were considered for this study. Therefore, the study upon which this scholarly commentary is based is a content analysis of the sport visuals on the front pages of *The Tribune*, *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *Punjabi Tribune*, *Ajit*, *Dainik Tribune*, *Punjab Kesri*, and *Dainik Bhaskar* Chandigarh editions. The newspapers selected for this study were

chosen because they represented the three different languages of the readers (i.e., English, Hindi, and Punjabi) and because of their readership range, popularity, and circulation rates. In order to make a comparison across the decade, the periods examined were the first week of each of the first six months of 2001 and 2011.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How many sports visuals were used in 2001 and 2011 by each newspaper?

RQ2: How much space (area) was given to sports visuals in 2001 and 2011 by each newspaper?

RQ3: How many visuals had captions with them in 2001 and 2011?

RQ4: How many visuals were used with story and without story on front pages in 2001 and 2011?

METHODS

As noted above, the sport visuals on the front pages of eight Indian daily newspapers were examined in this study. The content analysis methodology was adopted to examine the sport visuals published in these newspapers. A total of 672 front pages (editions) were collected for the comparative study of 2001 and 2011. This yielded a total of sample of 430 sports visuals (N=430) from the selected newspapers in 2001(141 visuals) and 2011 (289 visuals). Riffe and Fritag [13] confirmed the importance of purposive sampling technique in content analysis. Per their observation, 60% of all the content analyses in *Journalism Quarterly* from 1971 to 1995 used this sampling procedure.

A coding sheet was prepared and visual content was coded in various categories for collecting the data. This process was done for each edition of all the selected newspapers under study. The author of this research paper previously had 18 years of photojournalism experience and coded all of the sports visuals. For checking coder reliability, Scott's pi formula was used. Fifty visuals not included in the final study were coded twice to get the Scott's Pi reliability value of 0.534 and 80% agreement.

Content analysis is a research technique for objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. In fact, quantitative content analysis is an important tool for studying what is actually in the media, and borrows from survey research. Harold Lasswell introduced the media content analysis method to study mass media in 1927; originally it was used to study propaganda.

Lasswell, Lerner and Pool [8] said "content analysis operates on the view that verbal behaviour is a form of human behaviour, that the flow of symbols is a part of the flow of events, and that the communication process is an aspect of the historical process ... content analysis is a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time."

Sports visuals of all the selected newspapers (2001 and 2011) on page one were examined in terms of quantity of the sports visuals, size (space) of the visuals, how many visuals were used with story or without story and without caption or with caption. The current study does not analyze the visuals which are part of the advertisements.

RESULTS

A total of 430 sport visuals were found across the two time periods examined. In response to the first research question, which asked about the amount of sports visuals used by the newspapers in 2001 and 2011, there was an increase in the sport visuals across the time of this study. The most drastic changes were found in *The Times of India* newspaper, which reduced the number of visuals on the front page in 2011(N=266) as compare to 2001(N=336). Despite the

(N=70) visuals reduced in 2011, sport related visuals (N=60) 22.6% published on the front-page, compared to (N=10) 3% used in 2001. A change was also found in *The Tribune* as in 2001 only 2.1% of front-page visual were sport-related, compared to 17.1% in 2011. *Ajit* published 4.2% sports visuals in 2011 and 1.8% in 2001. *DainikBhaskar* newspaper had 4.9% in 2001 and 15.6% in 2011. The changes in total visuals as well as in sport-related visuals in 2001 and 2011 can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Total visuals in variable categoryforeachyear (2001-2011)

Newspapers	Visuals 2001	Sports (2001)	Visuals 2011	Sports (2011)
Ajit	341	(N=6)1.8%	331	(N=14)4.2%
D.Bhaskar	450	(N=22)4.9%	250	(N=39)15.6%
D.Tribune	371	(N=23)6.2%	273	(N=18)6.6%
I.Exp	335	(N=45)13.4%	332	(N=57)17.2%
P.Kesri	339	(N=25)7.4%	452	(N=57)12.6%
P.Tribune	225	(N=6)2.6%	292	(N=10)3.4%
Times of India	336	(N=10)3%	266	(N=60)22.6%
Tribune	192	(N=4)2.1%	198	(N=34)17.1%
Total	2589	N=141	2394	N=289

The second research question was in regard to how much space was given to sport visuals during the time period studied. The space of the sport visuals increased across the time period examined in this study. A major change was found in *The Times of India*, *The Tribune*, and *DainikBhaskaras* these newspapers were using only 3%, .4%, and 3.5% in 2001, while in 2011 they used 28.57%, 22.2%, and 25.1% space for sports visuals, respectively. The *Punjab Kesri* gave maximum space to sports visuals in both the

selected years 2001(16.1%) and 2011 (30.6%). *The Indian Express*, *Ajit*, *Punjabi Tribune* and *Dainik Tribune* have given 8% , .8 % , 1.5%, and 1.6% space (area) for sports visuals in 2001, while a decade later they gave 28.2% , 5.9%, 6.9%, and 11.3%, respectively. The use of space in 2001 and 2011 is seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Total Space (area) for the Sports visuals in 2001-2011

Newspaper	Year	Area for Visuals	Area of Sport visuals
Ajit	2001	19405.4 sq cm	0.8 % (159.83 sq cm)
	2011	10636.8 sq cm	5.9% (627.94 sq cm)
DainikBhaskar	2001	16160.6 sq cm	3.5% (577.53sq cm)
	2011	14396.4 sq cm	25.1% (3614.58 sq cm)
DainikTribune	2001	15741.1 sq cm	1.6% (259.73 sq cm)
	2011	11370.6 sq cm	11.3% (1288.24 sq cm)
Indian Express	2001	14012.8 sq cm	8% (1134.87 sq cm)
	2011	16139.8 sq cm	28.2% (4552.46 sq cm)
Punjab Kesri	2001	22895.03 sq cm	16.1% (3707.76 sq cm)
	2011	11660.9 sq cm	30.6% (3575.47 sq cm)
Punjabi Tribune	2001	16176 sq cm	1.5% (246.5 sq cm)
	2011	9819.1 sq cm	6.9% (685.64 sq cm)
Times of India	2001	16070.1sq cm	3% (485.98 sq cm)
	2011	9724.5 sq cm	28.57% (2778.44 sq cm)
TheTribune	2001	13241.6 sq cm	0.4% (56.22 sq cm)
	2011	11537.3 sq cm	22.2% (2561.74 sq cm)

Pertaining to the third research question, which asked about the use of captions in sports visuals, *The Tribune* used captions with 79.4% of its visuals in 2011 whereas in 2001 none of the sports visuals used with the caption. *DainikTribune*, *The Indian Express* and *DainikBhaskar* also increased the use of captions in 2011 compared to 2001. *The Times of India*, *Punjabi Tribune*, *Punjab Kesri* and *Ajit* reduced the use of captions in 2011, as they were using 90%, 100%, 52% and 66.7% visuals with captions in 2001 whereas they used 31.7%, 80%, 14% and 50% in 2011 respectively. Table 3 provides a listing of the newspapers' use of captions during this study. Table 3.

In response to the fourth research question, *The Tribune* increased the use of sports visuals with story on the front page, with 75% visuals with the story published in 2001 and 94.1% in 2011. *Punjabi Tribune* used 83.3% visuals without story in 2001, while in 2011 *Punjabi Tribune* used 70% visuals with stories. *Dainik Tribune* used a large percentage of visuals with the story in 2001 (77.8%) and 2011 (87.8%). *DainikBhaskar*, *Indian Express* and *Punjab Kesri* reduced the visuals with the story in 2011 as compared to 2001. The results of the fourth research question are displayed in Table 4.

Table 3. Withcaption and withoutcaption sport visualsonfrontpages in 2001-2011

Newspaper	Year	WithCaption	WithoutCaption
Ajit	2001	66.7%	33.3%
	2011	50.0%	50.0%
DainikBhaskar	2001	22.7%	77.3%
	2011	28.2%	71.8%
DainikTribune	2001	4.3%	95.7%
	2011	61.1%	38.9%
Indian Express	2001	13.3%	86.7%
	2011	61.4%	38.6%
Punjab Kesri	2001	52.0%	48.0%
	2011	14.0%	86.0%
Punjabi Tribune	2001	100.0%	0.0%
	2011	80.0%	20.0%
Times of India	2001	90.0%	10.0%
	2011	31.7%	68.3%
TheTribune	2001	0.0%	100.0%
	2011	79.4%	20.6%

Table 4. *Sportsvisualswithstoryorwithoutstory in 2001-2011*

Newspaper	Year	WithStory	WithoutStory
Ajit	2001	66.7%	33.3%
	2011	90.0%	10.0%
DainikBhaskar	2001	100.0%	-
	2011	48.7%	51.3%
DainikTribune	2001	77.8%	22.2%
	2011	87.8%	12.2%
Indian Express	2001	97.8%	2.2%
	2011	40.4%	59.6%
Punjab Kesri	2001	92.0%	8.0%
	2011	56.1%	43.9%
Punjabi Tribune	2001	16.7%	83.3%
	2011	70.0%	30.0%
Times of India	2001	30.0%	70.0%
	2011	36.7%	63.3%
TheTribune	2001	75.0%	25.0%
	2011	94.1%	5.9%

DISCUSSION

Several observations can be made based on the data collected and analyzed in this study. First, most of the selected newspapers increased the use of sports visuals in 2011 as compare to 2001. This increase is witnessed both in the increase in the overall number of visuals as well as the size of the visuals. *The Times of India* experienced an increase, as in 2001 the newspaper published only 10 sports visuals, which increased to 60 visuals in 2011. *The Tribune* also experienced an increase, going from 2.1% sports visuals in 2001, to 17.1% in 2011. *Ajit* published 4.2% Sports visuals in 2011, while in 2001 it published 1.8%. *DainikBhaskar* used 4.9% in 2001, and in 2011 published 15.6% sports visuals.

In addition to the number of sport visuals, the space (area) of the visuals is

important as large photographs attract the readers and communicate the message effectively. Results here show that major change has occurred in the use of size of sports visuals in 2011 as compare to 2001. All the selected newspapers for the study increased the space (area) for sports visuals in 2011. A major change occurred have found in *The Times of India*, *The Tribune* and *DainikBhaskaras* they were using only 3%, 4% and 3.5% in 2001, while in 2011 they used 28.57%, 22.2%, 25.1% space to sports visuals in 2011, respectively. The *Punjab Kesri* gave space to sports visuals in both the selected years, 2001 (16.1%) and 2011 (30.6%). Most of the papers were using large photographs of the World Cup cricket tournament as India's national team performed well in the world cup tournament in 2011. When India entered the tournament final, all the newspapers gave very good coverage to sports. After India won the World

Cup Final, few papers have published front page with the world cup photographs and caption only.

Photo captions are one of the most read text in a publication after the titles of news content "Photo captions and cutlines"[12]. The caption gives the important information of the photographs and attract readers to read full news item. The photo caption provides the basic information needed to understand a photograph and its relevance to a common reader. Caption writing is an essential part of the photojournalist work. During the writing of captions, all the important elements of news writing are considered. An inadequately written caption can mislead the readers and potentially reduce the impact of a good visual, thus damaging the credibility of a newspaper. *The Tribune* was not using captions with the sports visuals in 2001, whereas in 2011 the paper used 79.4% visuals with the caption. *DainikTribune*, *The Indian Express* and *DainikBhaskar* also increased the use of caption in 2011 as compared to 2001. *The Times of India*, *Punjabi Tribune*, *Punjab Kesri* and *Ajit* reduced caption use in 2011.

Use of visuals with the news item increase the credibility of the news and attract the readers to read the news. Visuals work as evidence to show the authenticity of an event that occurred and is published in the newspaper. Visuals break the monotony of news content and evoke readers emotions. Newspapers should prefer to use visuals with each news item. The study shows that *The Tribune* newspaper have increased the use of sports visuals with story on the front page. In 2001 they published 75% with the story while in 2011, 94.1%. *The Times of India* used maximum sports visuals without the story both the year, but increased to 6.7% visuals with the story in 2011. *The Punjabi Tribune* used 83.3% visuals without story in 2001,

while in 2011 the *Tribune* used 70% visuals with stories.

Overall the content analysis of front page sports visuals of eight leading Indian newspapers revealed changes in the sport visuals across the decade examined in this study. In 2011, all the selected newspapers carried more visuals of sports event as compared to 2001. As per the study, some of the selected newspapers have reduced the use of captions in their photographs, whereas photo captions are one of the most read text in a publication after the headlines on news content. In the current study, only cricket visuals were displayed in a big size in all the newspapers, whereas coverage should be balanced. It is thus proposed that whenever Indian players secure medals and trophies from international events that the local newspapers should display such successes. However, in India there is still dearth of quality sports journalists as no Indian university or institute offers courses to train students for this specialized branch of journalism.

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