



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Changing the Score: The Impact of Media Coverage on Saudi Football Team's Performance in the 2022 World Cup from the Perspective of Audience

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Sep 18, 2024 Accepted: Nov 5, 2024	This study aims to explore how media coverage influences the performance of athletes through the case of the Saudi football team in the 2022 World Cup. The study measures the characteristics of the local media coverage from the perspective of the Saudi audience using an online survey of 415 Saudi football fans. The results show that the main characteristics of the local media coverage were: its widespread among the society, its social responsibility and its avoidance of discrimination and the least recorded feature was its interactivity. The audience highly agreed that the local media coverage did affect the performance of the team in a positive way ( $\mu=3.95$ ) and that it has boosted player confidence and team spirit, but it also raised expectations and pressure, which could hurt performance. The study shows that media coverage requires to be more balanced and responsible.
<b>Keywords</b> Sport Media coverage Performance World Cup Media coverage assessment Football team Audience	

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## INTRODUCTION

Sports and the media share a significant relationship in modern societies (Al Fahadi, 2020; Almahraj, 2023; Pérez-Seoane et al., 2023). The media coverage of sports significantly impacts various aspects, including public perception, athlete behaviour, viewer enjoyment, and community engagement (Brannagan & Reiche, 2022; Lev et al., 2022) and it exerts an impact on sports from several angles; for instance, research has demonstrated that athletic performance and efficiency are reduced by inevitable distractions that can interfere with an athlete's ability to focus and that the media can serve as a negative distraction for athletes (Frisby & Wanta, 2018), thereby affecting the performance of a team. However, the impact of media coverage on athletes has been an understudied topic in sports research (Kristiansen et al., 2011).

Media coverage can shape the public's perception and opinion of athletes and, hereby, influence their performance (Lev, 2022; Haller et al., 2012; Margaretha et al., 2023). From one side, it can encourage their confidence, motivation, and ability to focus during competitions. Positive media coverage highlighting athletes' achievements and skills can boost their confidence and motivation, leading to improved performance. On the other side, negative media coverage or criticism can harm an athlete's mentality and performance (Fernández et al., 2016). Media coverage leads to added stress and potential distractions, ultimately impacting their performance on the field or court (Lev et al., 2022).

Media coverage of athletes can also affect their performance by amplifying the pressure and scrutiny they face. This creates a heightened sense of expectation and scrutiny, leading to increased performance anxiety (Nadhira & Angeliqa, 2020; Lev et al., 2022). The amplification of pressure and scrutiny by media coverage can create heightened expectations and performance anxiety for athletes. Athletes and sports organizations must understand the influence of media coverage and develop coping strategies to manage the potential stressors that may arise. Ultimately, media coverage can positively and negatively affect an athlete's performance, depending on various factors such as the nature of the coverage and the athlete's ability to manage these pressures (Briganti et al., 2021; Al-khresheh et al., 2024 ).

While there are sensible sociological reasons to focus on problematic sports reporting, structural and systemic issues in which the media is implicated, and alternatives to hegemonic sports media, it is high time for instances of excellent sports journalism to be afforded the theoretical and empirical attention long granted to their 'bad' journalistic counterparts (Weedon et al., 2018). It could be used to evaluate media coverage of sports events or news stories. Nevertheless, the evaluation of coverage in sports media has yet to be studied extensively (Whiteside et al., 2012: 28). Additionally, across media studies, questions regarding what constitutes 'excellent' media coverage are currently inciting substantial debate and thus warrant further research.

The literature shows a broad interest in how major sports events, such as the FIFA World Cup affect national identity, international perceptions, and media dynamics. Yet there is not enough discussion about the sport media coverage during these tournaments and how it could affect the audience or the athletes.

Almahraj (2023) examines British press coverage of Saudi Arabia's international sports events, and Al-Ansari (2020) analyzes Twitter posts about sports events, including the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, but these do not focus on the Saudi media's portrayal of their national team during the World Cup. This suggests a need to understand how local media narratives about the national team affect local audiences' perceptions and engagement. Al Fahadi (2020) and Dhaenens, Brannagan, and Reiche (2022) focus on the broader effects of mega sports events, such as national branding, political controversies, and cultural effects. These studies help understand the macro-level effects of such events, but they do not need to explain the micro-level dynamics of local media coverage of specific teams or athletes or the audience's reaction. This oversight indicates a research gap in localizing media coverage, essential for understanding the media's role in shaping sports narratives and national pride, especially in culturally and politically complex Saudi Arabia.

Thus, the problem statement of this paper is the need to evaluate local media coverage of the Saudi football team during the 2022 World Cup from audience perceptions. This gap is critical because understanding the local media's coverage of the national team from the perception of local audiences can illuminate how does the audience evaluates the sport media. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the audience's perception of local media coverage of the Saudi football team during the 2022 World Cup, shedding light on local media's role in national identity construction and international perception management in global sports events.

Based on the research gaps, the study designs two research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the main characteristics of the local media coverage of the Saudi football team in the 2022 World Cup from the audience's perspective?

**RQ2:** Has the local media coverage regarding the Saudi football team in the 2022 World Cup affected the team's performance from the audience's perspective? If so, how?

### **Saudi football team participation in World Cup 2022**

In 2022, the Saudi football team won against Argentina (2-1) in their first match in the World Cup tournament. According to an analysis by Nielsen's Gracenote, this historic and memorable victory was regarded as the greatest World Cup shock of all time (BBC Sport, 2022). The media coverage of the Saudi football team's participation in the World Cup 2022 varied, with some outlets offering supportive and optimistic coverage while others were critical or skeptical. This diverse media coverage can create a range of emotions and reactions among the athletes, including increased motivation or added pressure. The Saudi media extensively covered the participation of the Saudi

football team in the World Cup 2022. They provided in-depth analysis, match previews and reviews, player profiles, and interviews with the team members and coaching staff. The coverage highlighted the team's journey, preparation, and the expectations surrounding their performance in the tournament. The media coverage in Saudi Arabia focused on promoting national pride and rallying support for the team. In addition, the media coverage highlighted the challenges and obstacles faced by the team, such as formidable opponents and injuries. The media coverage aimed to create a sense of unity and support among the Saudi citizens, fostering a positive image of the team and encouraging their success in the tournament.

The athletes have had to navigate the pressure and expectations placed upon them, while the public has been influenced by the media's portrayal of the team. This media coverage has the potential to shape the narrative surrounding the team's performance and can influence the public's perception of their success or failure (Nadhira & Angeliqa, 2020). The media attention and coverage surrounding the Saudi football team's participation in the World Cup 2022 has impacted public perception and exerted pressure on the team and individual players. The players may feel the weight of expectations and scrutiny from the media and the public, which can affect their confidence and performance on the field.

Fans and the local media erupted in jubilation and embraced the team and players. The New York Times journalist Tariq Panja said on BBC Radio 5 Live: 'The fans are going mental. This result will go down in the history of Saudi Arabia and then some' (BBC Sport, 2022). However, directly after this victory and after the media and fans raised high expectations, the team's performance deteriorated, and the team was subsequently defeated by Poland (2-0) and Mexico (2-1). This decline in the team's performance has raised questions regarding whether the intensive media coverage has affected the Saudi team players. Since it is difficult to determine whether there was an impact, investigating the audience's perspective on the media coverage and its effect on the team's performance is vital to evaluate the media coverage and its role. The media coverage must be evaluated consistently and across different occasions.

### **Best Sports Media Coverage**

Sports and the media have always served each other and are thus regarded as sharing a symbiotic relationship (Whiteside et al., 2012: 24; Al-khresheh et al., 2024). Sports media endeavors to attract fans seeking content about their teams, particularly during large sport events, and sports needs media coverage to attract an audience. Media coverage exerts a strong influence on fans and athletes. For instance, previous studies have asserted that the media in general could negatively impact modern sports (Hargreaves, 1982; Lasch, 1977; Whannel 2003) and that it could therefore 'reinforce immoral and unethical forms of social behaviour' (Shamansouri & Khosro, 2009). Moreover, media producers and bloggers covering sports today may operate with different standards and practices than those in traditional sports media (Whiteside et al., 2012: 24). These are all reasons why the concept of 'excellence' in relation to sports media should be afforded greater attention, in addition to its heightened significance in the economy of 21st century news media industries.

The development in the field of sports media, in the age of social networks, prompted Farrington et al. (2012) to state that sports journalism has transitioned from the 'toy department' to the finance department, where it is now regarded as 'crucial' to the audiences of many media organizations (Farrington et al., 2012: 1). This has made it necessary to examine sports media coverage through the lens of ethics in conjunction with professionalism. It is vital to assess media coverage in sports and to provide insight into the positive and negative facets. However, minimal studies have examined media coverage of specific sports events to assess its quality or characteristics. One of these few studies was a case study conducted by Whiteside et al. (2012). They used a content analysis to compare the media coverage of a specific story in both new media and traditional media. The study did not offer a particular scale for evaluating the media coverage; however, it analyzed the media story using several approaches. The analysis included some features of media coverage that could be classified as follows: the sources, being unbiased, being neutral, and being objective.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine what is 'ideal' or the 'best' media coverage, particularly in the field of sports. One important reason is that among the various frameworks employed to describe 'excellent' journalism, sport is seldom addressed, 'a legacy perhaps of its perennial dismissal as trivial

subject matter' (Weedon et al., 2018). For instance, Lewis and Weaver (2015) found that emphasizing personal information about athletes in news stories could maximize both the audience's enjoyment of the story and their intentions to support the athletes in the future, yet this may not always have the same effect on the athletes themselves. In addition, Weedon et al. (2018) posed the following question in their study: What are 'ideal' or 'excellent' journalistic practices in sports? Weedon et al. (2018) analyzed 376 articles from eight leading scholarly journals that feature sports media research with the aim of examining instances in which 'excellent' sports reporting was highlighted, described, or advocated.

### **Media Coverage and Athletes' Performance**

Media exerts a significant influence on individuals through various facets of their lives, such as education, health, behaviour, basic human interaction (Bashir & Bhat 2017), and mental health (Sharma et al., 2020; Jam et al., 2024). Media coverage is a two-edge sword. It can profoundly influence athletes' identity and self-perception (Şahin, et. al, 2024) yet its pressure can be a highly potent stressor that can affect the athletes' performance in a negative way.

Several studies have shown an association between media exposure and levels of stress, ego, self-esteem, shame (Johnson & O'Brien, 2013), and self-image (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020). Some studies have demonstrated that cumulative stress is correlated with an increased susceptibility to illness and injury (Hamlin et al., 2019; Mann et al., 2016; Szivak & Kraemer, 2015), which may affect the athlete's performance. Shamansouri and Khosro (2009) explored the role of the media in stress creation and athletes' performance from the athletes' perspective. In their findings, 75% of the respondents believed that the media plays a significant role in creating stressors because of the following reasons: excessive attention devoted to competition's sensational margins; the dissemination of false news; the augmentation of excitement and stress levels among athletes and others; and the magnification of insignificant sports events, thereby causing athletes' loss of attention and focus and resulting in athletes' performance declines. Kristiansen et al. (2012) found that an indirect positive statistical correlation between the performance climate and media stress can be revealed through 'ego orientation'. The findings of their study support the postulates that a mastery climate (i.e., a climate where the success of the athlete is not determined by winning, but when they feel that they have been improving and having fun) reduces the perception of stress among athletes, and the converse is true for a performance climate.

The limitations of these studies demonstrate the difficulty of studying media effects on athletes. To support theoretical models, the studies recommend longitudinal research to assess long-term effects, demographic expansion, and empirical data integration. More studies are needed, and research should be expanded to include diverse sports disciplines, age groups, and cultural contexts to fill gaps in the literature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

To examine the ethical implications of media coverage, researcher employs approach that involve analyzing quantitative data such as the amount and prominence of coverage given to different sports and athletes, as well as the language used in the coverage (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Research could also be conducted to gather data through surveys or interviews with audience, athletes, coaches, and media professionals (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The surveys and interviews with the audience allow researchers to assess media coverage and gain understanding of its impact on sports. For example, several studies have utilized surveys to explore several aspects in sports media coverage (Jakubowska, 2013; Fernández et al., 2016; Laucella et al., 2017; Pope, Williams & Cleland, 2022; Smith-Ditizio & Smith, 2023).

Understanding the audience's reception of media coverage is crucial in addressing the different issues faced in the field of sports (Torres et al., 2022). By employing audience reception, researchers gain valuable insights into how audiences interpret and respond to media messages (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). Therefore, this study attempts to measure the quality of media coverage based on specific characteristics and uses it to survey a sample representing the audience. According to the research, there is no scale to evaluate sports media coverage. For this reason, a number of 'quality'

features or norms were gathered from previous studies. Horky and Stelzner (2013) offered a list of principles associated with 'quality' journalism that they adapted from a set of ethical guidelines devised by the Association of German Sports Journalists. The list includes norms such as (with rephrasing) the following:

To avoid racial defamation or discrimination.

Being truthful and objective.

Thoroughly research resources.

Being transparent in criticism of others

In their study, Weedon et al. (2018) identified more quality-related features, such as critical, balanced, unbiased, neutral, socially responsible, and having more equitable coverage of different athletes. Whiteside et al. (2012) also discussed the following features: unbiased, neutral, and objective. An online questionnaire was designed; it includes a scale of 12 characteristics related to sports media coverage, and each one is represented with a statement. These are as follows:

Avoid racial or political defamation or discrimination.

Truthful and objective.

Transparent in criticism of others.

Critical.

Balanced.

Unbiased.

Neutral.

Socially responsible.

Interactivity

Widespread.

Diversity of sources.

Informativity.

### **Data collection**

A carefully structured survey collected Saudi football fans' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of the 2022 World Cup (N=415). The survey was distributed online to reach a broad audience and make it easy for participants. With its large sports fanbase, social media was the main survey distribution channel. Fan associations from various football clubs promoted the survey among their members, ensuring that the sample included diverse perspectives from dedicated football fans. The survey was distributed a few days after the World Cup to ensure that participants' memories of the event were fresh, thereby improving the reliability of their responses about their experiences and engagement. The survey used multiple-choice with Likert scale, and open-ended questions to maximize response rates and understand the audience's experiences.

### **Sampling collection**

The sample (N= 415) was selected randomly from across all genders, regions, and ages (above 18) in Saudi Arabia, and the only criteria was to be an individual who watched the Saudi team participate in the 2022 World Cup and has been exposed to local media coverage. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample (N = 406) (gender, age, educational level, degree of follow-up, region, follow-up of external coverage or international).

Although the questionnaire was distributed among all categories, the response rate for males (89%) was considerably higher than that for females (11%). Regarding the age variable, the first four age groups ranged between 15% and 31%, while there was a minority of the age group older than 56 years (4%), and this could be related to the interests of the age categories.

The educational level of the sample varied between a minority (3%) of those with less than a high school certificate, 19.7% with a high school diploma, 17.2% with a higher education degree, and a majority (60.1%) with a B.A. degree. Regarding the level of exposure to local media coverage regarding the 2022 World Cup, more than half of the respondents (53.2%) stated that they did follow the local media coverage regarding the 2022 World Cup 'daily' during the tournament, and 36% stated that they followed the coverage 'sometimes', while only a minority (10.8%) of the respondents reported 'rarely'.

**Table 1. Demographic statistics**

Demographics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	363	89.4
	Female	43	10.6
	Total	406	100
<b>Age</b>	18-25	61	15
	26-35	118	29.1
	36-45	126	31
	46-55	83	20.4
	56 +	18	4.4
	Total	406	100
<b>Education</b>	Lower than high school	12	3
	High school	80	19.7
	B. A	244	60.1
	M.A/ PhD	70	17.2
	Total	406	100
<b>Following local media coverage</b>	Often	216	53.2
	Sometimes	177	40.6
	Rarely	13	3.2
	Total	406	100
<b>Following international media coverage</b>	Often	173	42.6
	Sometimes	196	48.3
	Never	37	9.1
	Total	406	100

The sources of local media coverage for the sample varied between the following: the public TV channels (e.g., SSC or Saudi TV), which were followed by the majority (68%); the private or non-public TV channels (e.g., MBC Pro Sport), which were followed by only 15.5% of the sample; the local sports accounts on Twitter, which represented a high percentage (54.9%); and Snapchat accounts, with 29.1% of the participants.

**Table 2. Sources of local media coverage**

The local media coverage source	Frequencies	Percentage from the sample (N=406)
<b>Public TV Channels</b>	279	68.7
<b>Private TV Channels</b>	63	15.5
<b>Sports News Accounts on Twitter</b>	223	54.9
<b>Sports News Accounts on Snapchat</b>	118	29.1
<b>Total</b>	1,450	168.2

**Statistical equations**

The study used a 5-points Likert scale ranging from 1=very low to 5=very high. To answer the research questions, the researchers used two statistical methods (with SPSS version 23):

Percentages to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Descriptive statistical methods to calculate the weighted arithmetic means ( $\mu$ ) and standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) and to analyze the responses of the participants to each statement and dimension.

To determine the length of the five levels of the Likert scale, the averages were calculated. The criterion for the value of each level of agreement was as follows:

Mean Likert scale scores indicate varying levels of agreement across statements or questions, suggesting a nuanced understanding of respondent attitudes. Scoring 4.21 to 5 indicates "Very High" agreement with the statements, indicating consensus or strong endorsement among respondents. Mean scores of 3.41 to 4.20 indicate "High" agreement, indicating positive but not unanimous sentiment. The "Medium" level of agreement, with scores between 2.61 and 3.40, indicates ambivalence or neutrality. Scores from 1.81 to 2.60 indicate "Low" agreement, while scores from 1 to 1.80 indicate "Very Low" agreement, indicating severe disagreement. These findings reveal consensus and disagreement among the surveyed population.

**Table 3. Level of agreement**

Likert scale	Mean $\mu$	Level of Agreement
Strongly Agree	4.21- 5	Very High
Agree	3.41- 4.20	High
Maybe	2.61- 3.40	Medium
Disagree	1.81- 2.60	Low
Strongly Disagree	1- 1.80	Very Low

**RESULTS**

**Q1: What are the main characteristics of the local media coverage regarding the Saudi football team in the 2022 World Cup from the perspective of the sample?**

To answer this question, the (12) characteristics of sports media coverage were traced. Table 4 shows that the surveyed sample was primarily positive about local media coverage of the Saudi football team during the 2022 World Cup. Media coverage characteristics were generally rated "High" by various statements, with mean scores ranging from 2.49 to 4.14 on a scale where higher values indicate stronger agreement. With a mean score of 4.14 and an SD of 0.895, "Widespread" coverage was the highest-rated attribute, indicating that respondents agreed that coverage was widespread enough in society. This is followed by "Socially responsible" and "Avoiding racial discrimination" coverage, which had mean scores of 4.13 (SD=0.938) and 4.03 (SD=1.078), respectively, indicating that the media delivered social responsibility and inclusivity.

"Balanced," "Informative," "Diverse in sources," "Unbiased," and "Neutral" also scored above 3.80, indicating that respondents found the media coverage fair, well-informed, and diverse. These traits indicate that local media are trying to portray the Saudi national team's World Cup participation fairly. It reflects a media landscape that seeks objectivity and rich content to serve a broad audience with accurate and diverse information. In contrast, "Interactive" media coverage scored 2.49 (SD=1.050), falling into the "Medium" agreement level. This implies a gap in the media's interactive engagement with its audience through interviews. This could improve the media experience by fostering a more dynamic and engaging dialogue between the media, the team, and the fans. The average score of 3.77 (SD=1.028) across all characteristics indicates high satisfaction with local

media coverage, but interactivity could be improved. This feedback shows media organizations the importance of high coverage standards and audience engagement to improve sports viewing.

**Table 4. The main characteristics of the local media coverage regarding the Saudi football team in the 2022 World Cup**

Characteristics	Sentence	Mean $\mu$	SD $\sigma$	Agreement level	Order
<b>Widespread</b>	I think the local media coverage of the Saudi national team was disseminated widely enough in society.	4.14	.895	High	1
<b>Socially responsible</b>	I believe that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team carried the values of social responsibility.	4.13	.938	High	2
<b>Avoiding racial discrimination</b>	I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team has avoided racism towards players or other teams.	4.03	1.078	High	3
<b>Balanced</b>	I think the media coverage of the Saudi national team was balanced.	3.96	.989	High	4
<b>Informative</b>	I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team contained a lot of information and various reports about the Saudi national team and its players.	3.91	.963	High	5
<b>Diverse in terms of sources</b>	I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team used a variety of information resources.	3.90	.932	High	6
<b>Unbiased</b>	I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team was not biased towards or against certain players.	3.86	1.129	High	7
<b>Neutral</b>	I think that the media coverage of the Saudi national team during the World Cup period was neutral in its presentation and evaluation of the rest of the teams.	3.80	1.049	High	8
<b>Critical</b>	I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team provided reasonable criticism of the national team and other teams.	3.74	1.118	High	9
<b>Transparent in criticism</b>	I believe that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team was honest and transparent in giving and receiving criticism regarding the team's performance.	3.67	1.108	High	10



<b>Truthful and objective</b>	I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team was logical and realistic.	3.66	1.085	High	11
<b>Interactive</b>	I think that the local media coverage did produce enough interactive activities (such as interviews).	2.49	1.050	Medium	12
<b>Average</b>		3.77	1.028	High	

**Q2: Did the media coverage regarding the Saudi football team in the 2022 World Cup affect the performance of the football team? If so, how?**

To answer this question, the researcher designed (6) phrases to ascertain the most important positive effects of the local media coverage on the team's performance. Table 5 summarizes the positive effects of local media coverage on the Saudi national team's 2022 World Cup performance. With all statements scoring "High" or "Very High" among the surveyed audience, media support is widely believed to be beneficial. The statement about the media's positive support for the team scored the highest, with a mean of 4.21 (SD=0.959), indicating "Very High." This suggests that respondents agreed that the media helped the team's performance by boosting morale and public support. The subsequent statements, which focused on specific media effects like boosting player self-confidence, reducing competitor fear, and strengthening team spirit, scored above 3.9, indicating "High" agreement. These findings demonstrate the many ways local media coverage can boost a sports team's performance. By creating a supportive and encouraging environment, the media can help players improve their mental health and performance readiness, which are essential for high-level competition.

The overall average score of 3.95 (SD=1.034) across these statements supports the idea that supportive media coverage improves team performance. It emphasizes the role of media in athletes' mental states and its potential to improve sports outcomes. Additionally, the slight variation in scores suggests that media influence could be optimized by improving player comfort and ease during performances. These findings help media outlets support athletes by emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that recognizes the media's power to shape sports narratives and outcomes.

**Table 5. The positive effects of local media coverage on the performance of the team**

Statements	Mean $\mu$	SD $\sigma$	Agreement level	Order
<b>I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team supported the Saudi national team's performance in a positive manner</b>	4.21	.959	Very High	1
<b>I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team helped the players to feel self-confident in their performance</b>	3.98	1.012	High	2
<b>I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team helped the players to not fear the competing teams</b>	3.97	1.055	High	3
<b>I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team strengthened the players' spirits</b>	3.94	1.017	High	4
<b>I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team in general had a positive impact on the players' performance.</b>	3.86	1.062	High	5
<b>I think that the local media coverage of the Saudi national team encouraged the national team to perform with ease and comfort</b>	3.74	1.096	High	6
<b>Total Score</b>	3.95	1.034		High

Table 5 indicates the order of the negative effects according to the participants' agreement rates. The value of the total score for the axis, with a mean of  $\mu = 3.38$  and a standard deviation of  $\sigma = 1.229$ ,

means that the responses of the sample towards the phrases of this axis are medium to high. The responses of the phrases ranged from high to medium, while the value of the standard deviations ranged between  $\sigma = 1.142$  to  $\sigma = 1.306$ , which indicates homogeneity among the respondents' answers.

The study explored whether the general attitude towards the impact of media coverage on the performance of the team was positive or negative. To answer this question, the researcher compared the averages of the statements regarding a positive and negative influence to determine the general inclination regarding the impact of media coverage on sports; the positive impact was higher, with a mean of  $\mu = 3.95$  and a standard deviation of  $\sigma = 1.034$ , while the negative effect had a mean of  $\mu = 3.38$  and a standard deviation of  $\sigma = .968$ . It is clear that the general evaluation of the participants regarding the impact of media coverage on the performance was high.

**Table 6. The negative effects of local media coverage on the performance of the national team**

Statements	Mean $\mu$	SD $\sigma$	Agreement level	Order
I think that the media coverage of the Saudi national team during the 2022 World Cup led to an .exaggeration of the players' self-confidence	3.76	1.142	High	1
I think that the media coverage of the Saudi national team during the 2022 World Cup raised .expectations and put pressure on the players	3.65	1.171	High	2
I think that the media coverage of the Saudi national team during the 2022 World Cup led to under-evaluating the competing teams by the team.	3.57	1.225	High	3
I think that the media coverage of the Saudi national team during the 2022 World Cup made the .players nervous and fearful	3.21	1.259	Medium	4
I think that the media coverage of the Saudi national team during the 2022 World Cup in general negatively affected the players' .performance	3.18	1.306	Medium	5
I think that the media coverage of the Saudi national team during the 2022 World Cup thwarted the performance of the Saudi national team.	2.91	1.272	Medium	6
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>1.229</b>	<b>Medium</b>	

**DISCUSSION**

The findings from this study indicate a positive shift in participants' attitudes toward the media coverage of the team's performance. According to the findings, the answer to the first question was that the audience believes that the local media coverage of the Saudi teams' participation in the 2022 World Cup was ethical in general. The participants showed a high agreement rate in believing that the local media coverage positively supported the performance of the Saudi national team.

A limitation of this positive media coverage is the inability to distinguish between the genuine improvement in performance and the perception of improvement created by the media. In other words, while the participants perceived the media coverage to have a positive impact on the team's performance, it is important to consider that this perception may not necessarily reflect the actual improvement in performance.

Characteristics such as social responsibility ( $\mu = 4.13$ ) and avoiding racial discrimination ( $\mu = 4.03$ ) had high agreement rates. Other features, such as being balanced, informative, diverse in terms of resources, unbiased, neutral, and critical, had high agreement levels ( $\mu$  between 3.74 and 3.96). These findings suggest that the participants view media coverage of sports teams as having a positive impact, with an emphasis on ethical and responsible reporting.

These findings support previous research that indicates a positive influence of media coverage on sports performance (Gunter & Wadsworth, 2005; Shamansouri and Khosro, 2009; Kristiansen et al., 2012; Cunningham, 2012; Toffolett & Palmer, 2015; Baka, 2016; Kinnunen & Kalliopuska, 2017; Fisher & Berenbaum, 2018; Wilson & Finkel, 2020).

However, other characteristics related to professionalism yielded less agreement than the previous, including transparency ( $\mu = 3.67$ ), objectivity ( $\mu = 3.66$ ), and interactivity ( $\mu = 2.49$ ). These findings suggest that while participants generally perceive media coverage of sports teams to have a positive impact, there are areas where improvements can be made. Future research should explore ways to enhance transparency, objectivity, and interactivity in media coverage of sports teams. Transparency is crucial in understanding the profound impact that media coverage can have on public perception and individual performance across various domains, including politics, sports, and local communities. Objectivity is essential for providing fair and unbiased information to the audience, ensuring that different perspectives are represented accurately, and interactivity is important for engaging with the audience and fostering a sense of connection and participation.

Ultimately, improving these aspects of media coverage can lead to a more informed and empowered audience, as well as enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of sports reporting in shaping public perception and supporting athletes' improvement.

However, the positive impact of media coverage on sports performance was evident in the study, as indicated by the higher mean scores and agreement rates among participants. This indicates that local sports media coverage adheres to ethical values; however, it must develop further by practicing more transparency and objectivity in its sports coverage. It must incorporate more interactive activities with the audience. The results also suggest that the audience believes that the local media coverage impacted the player's performance, which is compatible with the findings of Shamansouri and Khosro (2009) and Kristiansen et al. (2012) and highlights the role of sports media coverage in players' performance. Nonetheless, the results indicate a different direction of this perceived effect; in contrast to the previous studies that indicated a negative effect of media coverage on athletes, this study suggests that the audience believes that the media coverage had a positive impact on the players' performance and that it has 'helped the players to feel self-confident in their performance'. This finding indicates a positive impact of the sports media coverage of an event on players' performance. However, although the results were 'perceived' by the audience, not the athletes themselves, it could represent a foundation for further research. Another study that approaches these questions from the perspective of the players could be conducted to compare the results. If they were different, this may indicate an issue with audience awareness. The finding suggests that the most highly agreed-upon positive effects of the media coverage were that it has 'helped the players to feel self-confident in their performance' and 'helped the players not to fear the competing teams'. These findings highlight the potential power of media coverage in shaping athletes' mindsets and boosting their confidence on the field.

The results show that the most agreed-upon negative impact of local media coverage was that it has 'led to an exaggeration of the players' self-confidence', 'has raised expectations and put pressure on the players', and 'led to under evaluating the competing teams'. These findings suggest that while media coverage can have a positive impact on players' performance by boosting their confidence, it can also create unrealistic expectations and increase pressure on the players. Overall, the impact of media coverage on athletes in sports is complex and multifaceted.

These findings are important for journalists, bloggers, and producers in the sports media sphere, as they should help them to ensure a balanced media coverage that provokes excitement while simultaneously being objective and truthful to preserve high-quality standards and avoid any negative issues that could arise from the contentious surrounding the sports events. Overall, it is clear that the media has a significant impact on sports (Arif et al., 2022). It shapes public perception, influences player behaviour, and can have both positive and negative effects on athletes' performance.

### **5.1 Managerial and Policy Implications**

The study has important implications for sports media and team management. First, the results show that media coverage can boost players' confidence and team spirit, emphasizing the need for sports

organizations and media outlets to create a supportive media environment. This could include training journalists on the psychological effects of their reporting, emphasizing constructive criticism, and promoting positive narratives to boost athlete morale. Sport's governing bodies and team management may also work with the media to create motivational campaigns that highlight team achievements and individual stories of resilience and hard work to create a positive team environment.

Results about media's negative effects, such as inducing undue pressure or unrealistic expectations, require a more nuanced approach to media relations and coverage. Media policies during major sporting events could promote balanced reporting, avoid sensationalism, and respect athletes' mental health. This may include media guidelines, pre-agreed themes with athletes and coaches, and media blackout periods to focus on performance. Sports federations, teams, and media organizations need to work together to protect athletes from overexposure and ensure that media coverage improves their performance.

The mixed views of the media role emphasize the need for continuous feedback between media, audience and athletes. Media impact on team morale and performance can be assessed regularly to improve strategies. Post-event debriefs, athlete media surveys, and media-sports team dialogues could help. These measures can ensure that media coverage promotes sports in a way that benefits athletes' performance and well-being, helping teams win international competitions. Strategic sports-media engagement can result in more informed, responsible coverage that promotes athletic excellence and protects athletes' mental health.

## 5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

The study has its limitations. The use of self-reported data, which may be biased by social desirability or recall bias, may limit the findings. Social media and football fan associations may only partially represent Saudi football viewers, limiting the generalizability of the results. The study only examined the Saudi context and the 2022 World Cup, raising questions about its applicability to other teams, sports, or cultures.

To better understand media effects across cultures and sports, future research should include more sports and countries. A longitudinal design may reveal how media coverage affects team performance over time beyond a single tournament. Qualitative methods like interviews with players, coaches, and media personnel can enrich quantitative data and provide a more nuanced view of the media-athlete relationship. Social media and digital platforms are increasingly influencing sports coverage and athlete-fan interaction, so future studies may examine their role. These methods would remedy the current study's flaws and expand our understanding of media coverage's complex effects on sports performance.

## 5.3 CONCLUSION

Media coverage of sports has a profound impact on various aspects of the sporting world. This includes shaping public perception, influencing player behaviour, and impacting athletes' performance. This study has provided an overview of audience preference in relation to sports media coverage. It has highlighted a range of influencing factors that are related to sports media coverage. The main characteristics of the local media coverage that the audience highlighted were as follows: widespread dissemination, social responsibility, and avoidance of racial discrimination. Conversely, the least salient characteristics were as follows: transparency in criticism, truthfulness, objectivity, and interactivity.

These results, in general, demonstrate a positive attitude and high satisfaction with the media coverage; however, these results should be used as guidelines for media organizations, journalists and bloggers to improve their media covering sports. Regarding the impact of media coverage on the performance of the players, the results indicate that the audience understands that media coverage influences the team's performance. They believe that media coverage of the Saudi national team during the 2022 World Cup led to an exaggeration of the players' self-confidence, raised expectations, put pressure on the players, and led to under-evaluating the competing teams by the team.

The results indicate that the general attitude of the audience towards the impact of media coverage on the performance of the team was positive ( $\mu = 3.95$  and  $\sigma = .864$ ). This means that the audience

believes that the local media coverage has encouraged the team's performance. Overall, it is clear that media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of sports events and athletes (Lev et al., 2022). It can influence how the audience perceives sporting events, affect the behaviour of players during games, and even impact the performance of athletes.

Further studies are recommended to compare the evaluation of media coverage from the perspectives of players and the audience and to explore the differences and incongruences between them. Studies could be conducted to examine the specific strategies employed by media outlets to shape public perception of sports events and athletes, as well as the potential ethical implications of these strategies. In addition, it is also essential to delve into recommended studies about media coverage. One important area of study is exploring the ethical implications of media strategies in sports coverage is of utmost importance. As media coverage has the power to influence public opinion, there is a need to critically evaluate the potential effects and ethical considerations surrounding the portrayal of athletes and sports events.

**In summary**, the study illuminates the powerful role that media coverage plays in shaping athletic performance, with the potential to bolster self-confidence, heighten expectations, and exert pressure on athletes. The results underscore the vital responsibility that journalists and bloggers bear as they craft narratives around sporting events. It is imperative for media practitioners to adopt a more transparent approach, ensuring that critiques are constructive and delivered with truthfulness and objectivity. Furthermore, media organizations should champion widespread access to coverage that promotes social responsibility and actively combats racial discrimination. By embracing these ideals, media can become not just observers, but positive agents that enhance the sporting experience and support athletes in their pursuits.

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