

## A Gendered Analysis of Sports Spectatorship in Pakistan with a Focus on Women's Perspectives and Social Media Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

The presence of fans in the stands is a natural and vital aspect of sporting events, bringing color and vibrancy to the game. Sports fans are crucial for a lively sports ecosystem, but Pakistani women's participation remains limited due to cultural norms, social barriers, and economic constraints. This study aims to explore the perspectives of Pakistani women on sports spectating. Employing a quantitative approach through surveys, the research investigates their attitudes, preferences, and motivations for watching sports. Convenience sampling was used, and data was analyzed using SPSS software. The age range of the 188 respondents in our sample was 18 to over 35 years old. The findings reveal a growing interest among Pakistani women in sports spectating, with many preferring to watch online or on television. However, cultural barriers, safety concerns, and limited representation of women in sports hinder their participation. Social media platforms significantly influence female viewership, with many following online discussions and commentary. The study highlights the need for initiatives that promote inclusivity, address affordability issues, and create safe environments for women to enjoy sports spectating experiences. Insights from this study will assist stakeholders, including sports organizations, media, and policymakers, in developing strategies that foster an inclusive sports culture where women are at the center of fan communities. This paper shows growth opportunities for federations, leagues, and teams in attracting female sports fans. Increased female viewership can also benefit the sports ecosystem by fostering engagement, supporting athletes, and generating revenue.

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Sports Fans are the Soul of the Game

Sports without fans would lack passion and vibrancy. Fans are pivotal in energizing players and creating a lively atmosphere during matches (Majumdar and Naha 2022; Perveen et al., 2023; Shakeel et al., 2024). In Pakistan, sports fan culture is still male-dominated, and cultural and social barriers limit women's participation (Laar et al., 2019). However, with the growing sports culture worldwide, the missing female voice cannot be ignored. Understanding female fans' perspectives is crucial to revitalizing the local sports ecosystem.

Historically, sports have often been viewed as a predominantly male domain, with female participation and viewership receiving less attention and recognition. In their study, Kim and Know (2020) found a significant gender gap in women's sports spectatorship. However, the landscape is evolving, and the "spectator gender gap" is narrowing. There is a growing recognition of the valuable role that female spectators play in enhancing the vibrancy and inclusivity of sports culture. In recent years, women have seen increased acceptance and involvement in sports. Beyond participation, women are also expanding their presence as spectators. For example, a 2020 report on global sports fans recorded that 47% of women were interested in or watched sports, while in 2022, 56% of female fans stated that they watched or followed sports (Gough, 2023; Durrani et al., 2024; Bibi and Khan 2023; Arshad et al., 2023).

Encouraging Pakistani women to attend sporting events as spectators and developing fan communities could significantly elevate local sports while empowering women through leisure and entertainment avenues. Listening to and understanding their need and preferences as sports viewers is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into the interests and preferences of a significant demographic segment, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of sports fandom in Pakistan. Secondly, it highlights the potential for expanding and diversifying the

audience base for sports events, thereby fostering greater engagement and support for athletes and teams. Additionally, it underscores the importance of creating inclusive and welcoming environments within sports venues and media platforms to cater to the needs and preferences of female spectators. It will make the fan experience more inclusive.

### **Spectators' Effects on Players' Performance**

The presence of spectators at sports events can have a significant impact on both players' performance and the overall team. When fans show their unwavering support, it sends a powerful message that they are fully invested in being with the team. This gesture demonstrates their involvement and emphasizes their integral role in the game. Moreover, this uplifting experience brings great joy to the players and adds an element of fun to the overall atmosphere (Gregory, 2020).

Research suggests that the energy and enthusiasm of the crowd can serve as a motivational factor for athletes, inspiring them to perform at their best and elevate their level of play. Additionally, the support and encouragement from spectators can create a positive atmosphere that enhances the overall experience for both players and fans alike. Moreover, the presence of a lively and engaged audience can contribute to the ambience of the event, making it more enjoyable and memorable for all attendees. The absence of spectators has a notable impact on the professional aspects of a game. Teams tend to perform differently, making their playing style less captivating in matches without spectators. There are fewer hits, fewer dribbles, and fewer goals scored in such games (Smith, 2020).

### **Factors that Influence Their Decisions or Motivate Them to Watch Sports**

Various factors influence Pakistani women's decisions to engage in sports spectatorship, reflecting a complex interplay of individual preferences, societal norms, and external influences. One significant motivator is the excitement and competitiveness of the game itself, with many female fans drawn to the thrill of watching skilled athletes compete on the field. Additionally, the representation of women in sports, both as athletes and spectators, plays a crucial role in shaping female viewers' interest and engagement. Moreover, the affordability of tickets or subscriptions and the creation of safe and welcoming environments at sports venues are essential factors influencing women's decisions to attend live matches. Among sports supporters, motives such as escape, group affiliation, economic factors, eustress, self-esteem, entertainment, family, and game competitiveness are particularly common. These motives significantly influence their decisions to engage in watching sports (Malchrowicz-Moško & Chlebosz, 2019).

### **Hurdles Faced by Pakistani Women in Sports Watching**

Pakistani women encounter various obstacles that hinder their participation and enjoyment of sports spectatorship, including cultural, economic, and environmental factors (Laar et al., 2019).

#### **Cultural Barriers**

Cultural norms and expectations often dictate gender roles and behaviors, influencing the extent to which women feel encouraged or discouraged from engaging in sports spectatorship. In conservative societies like Pakistan, traditional gender norms may prioritize domestic duties over leisure activities. In Pakistan, women have mostly been considered second-class citizens due to socio-cultural, economic and legal constraints (Akhunzada et al., 2015), leading to limited opportunities for women to attend sports events or watch games on television. Moreover, certain sports may be perceived as more suitable for men, resulting in societal pressure for women to refrain from participating in sports-related activities.

#### **Economic Challenges**

Economic factors also play a significant role in shaping women's access to sports spectatorship. Limited financial resources may constrain women's ability to purchase tickets for live sports events or subscribe to sports channels on television. This study showed that 51.1% of female fans agreed that they do not watch or attend sports events and matches due to financial constraints. Additionally, disparities in income and employment opportunities may disproportionately affect women, further limiting their ability to afford leisure activities such as attending sports matches.

#### **Unsafe Environments**

Unsafe environments within sports venues and public spaces pose a significant barrier to women's participation in sports spectatorship. Concerns about personal safety, particularly in crowded stadiums or male-dominated spaces, may deter women from attending live sports events. Instances of harassment or verbal abuse directed towards female spectators further contribute to feelings of insecurity and discomfort, creating a hostile environment that discourages women from actively engaging in sports-watching activities. In Pakistan, an unsafe environment is one of the major barriers for women (Zamir & Jullandhry, 2021).

Sports stadiums serve as physical gathering places for sports fans and hold a significant social significance in their lives. These stadiums act as platforms that create a distinct atmosphere where fans can cultivate and strengthen their sense of identity. Hence, ensuring a safe environment within these stadiums becomes crucial for fostering this experience (Mastromartino et al., 2020).

### **Social Dynamics and Male Dominance**

Male dominance within sports culture can also act as a hindrance to women's participation in sports spectatorship. In male-dominated spaces such as sports pubs or stadiums, women may feel marginalized or excluded, leading to reluctance to attend such venues. Instances of vulgar language and rowdy behavior exhibited by male spectators can further exacerbate feelings of discomfort and alienation among female fans, discouraging them from actively participating in sports-watching activities. In Pakistan, female fans' fondness is crushed by saying '*sport is boys' thing*' (Mari, 2020) and '*women have zero sense of sport*'.

Pakistani women face a myriad of challenges and obstacles that hinder their participation and enjoyment of sports spectatorship. Pakistan is among those developing nations that restrict the participation of women in some of the sectors that are purely considered for males, and sports is one such field where women face several problems and hindrances that make the survival of women nearly impossible in this field (Jamil, 2019). Understanding female audiences better may inform policies and practices to encourage widespread sports spectatorship among Pakistani women.

### **Social Media's Influence on Instill Sports Interest**

Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for instilling and fostering sports interest among Pakistani women. Overall, women dominate social media (Vogelzang, 2023) and are likely more influenced by social media than men. With the rise of digital platforms and apps, fans have increasingly become active participants in the world of televised sports. These technological advancements, undoubtedly influenced by a consumer-driven corporate culture, have significantly enhanced fan engagement. The ability for fans to join in as live spectators from their connected devices would further empower their involvement (Majumdar & Naha, 2020).

By providing real-time updates, engaging content, and opportunities for interaction and discussion, social media platforms play a significant role in shaping the sports viewing experience. Hashtag campaigns, exclusive digital content and interactions with favorite athletes help develop connections between fans and teams. For example, the prevalence of sports-related discussions and commentary on platforms like Twitter and Facebook can spark interest and curiosity among female users, leading them to explore and follow sports events more actively. Additionally, the ability to connect with sports teams and athletes directly through social media channels enhances the sense of community and belonging among female fans, further strengthening their engagement with sports content. This study also revealed that 50.5% of women catch up on sports on social media, and 56% of them have watched a match they saw on social media.

It is important to explore how Pakistani women view sports as spectators. This helps us understand how sports fandom works in Pakistan and promotes inclusion within the sports community. This study will highlight the preferences and motivations of female fans and will add valuable insights into what influences their interest and participation in sports content and events.

### **Problem Statement**

Pakistani women's participation in sports spectating remains limited due to a complex interplay of cultural norms, social barriers, and economic constraints. While a growing interest in sports exists among Pakistani women, societal expectations, safety concerns, and limited representation hinder their active engagement in sports. Understanding these challenges and the factors influencing women's sports viewership is crucial for promoting inclusive and enriching the sports ecosystem in Pakistan.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study focuses on Pakistani women's views on watching sports. It aims to understand their attitudes, preferences, and motivations. Existing research has largely focused on global trends or the experiences of male sports spectators in Pakistan, leaving a gap in our understanding of Pakistani women's specific experiences and motivations in this area. This study aims to address that gap and provide valuable insights into the unique perspectives of Pakistani women as sports spectators.

Promoting inclusivity within the sports culture is another crucial aspect. Encouraging women to participate in sports spectating not only fosters a more inclusive environment but also empowers women by offering them leisure and entertainment opportunities within the realm of sports. By understanding women's preferences regarding sports,

channels, and environments, stakeholders such as sports organizations, media channels, and policymakers can develop strategies that cater to the needs and interests of this growing demographic. This research is a valuable resource for informing stakeholders and guiding them in creating initiatives encouraging female sports viewership.

Additionally, increased female viewership can significantly impact the local sports ecosystem. It can lead to greater fan engagement, increased support for athletes and teams, and potential revenue growth. By shedding light on the factors influencing women's engagement with sports, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of sports spectating in Pakistan. It sets the stage for developing initiatives that promote inclusive and active participation of women in the sports fandom domain.

### **Research objectives**

1. To examine the views and perceptions of Pakistani women regarding sports spectatorship.
2. To identify factors contributing to Pakistani women's interest and involvement in sports as spectators.
3. To assess the social media's influence on female sports viewership.
4. To provide insights to promote and encourage female sports viewership in Pakistan.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the attitudes and preferences of Pakistani women towards watching sports?
2. What are the primary factors that influence Pakistani women's decision to spectate sports?
3. How are Social Media platforms influencing female viewership?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Sports Spectatorship**

According to Deloitte (2020), sports spectating has become a global leisure activity with immense economic and social significance. Spectators, often referred to as the "12th man," breathe life into stadiums with their energy and emotions (Bilalić et al., 2021). Studies by Tamir (2022) and Majumdar & Naha (2020) highlight how fan presence goes beyond creating a vibrant atmosphere. Sports events become a battleground for communities and identities, fostering a sense of belonging and shared passion. Stadiums serve as platforms for fans to cultivate their identity through chants and rituals (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Tamir, 2021). This shared experience strengthens fan communities and validates their connection to a larger group (Tamir, 2020). Smith's (2020) research even suggests that a lack of spectators can negatively impact the game itself. Additionally, Ma and Kaplanidou's (2020) work highlights how cultural factors can influence the impact of service quality on spectator satisfaction.

### **Gender and the Sports Spectating Landscape**

However, the global landscape of sports spectating has historically been dominated by men. Kim and Know's (2020) study reveals significant differences in interest levels, perceptions of female athletes, and willingness to attend events between men and women. Although Malchrowicz-Moško & Chlebosz (2019) found social motives like supporting athletes and expressing admiration to be important for female fans of mass sports, their participation has often been limited.

Fortunately, female sports viewership is on the rise globally. Solon's (2022) study demonstrates a surge in women following top sports leagues, presenting valuable marketing opportunities. Interestingly, the research suggests that women's fandom may be more event-driven, highlighting the potential to convert casual viewers into loyal fans. However, the situation in Pakistan is quite different. Laar et al., (2019) penned that women in Pakistan face significant social, cultural, and religious restrictions on both sports participation and spectating. Furthermore, research on Pakistani women's experiences in sports is scarce, as most studies focus on cricket and male audiences (Nawaz & Hess, 2020).

Despite these limitations, a glimmer of hope emerges with the rise of social media. Mari (2020) suggests that social media platforms have allowed Pakistani women to express their interest in sports, particularly cricket, which was previously discouraged. Women are pushed down by comments such as, "*They just want the attention, women are meant to stay indoors, sports are for boys and men.*" Dawn's (2021) observation of women's growing fondness for sports, especially cricket, because of their amazing performance and social media exposure further emphasizes this potential. Sports consumption can vary greatly depending on individual, cultural, and societal factors. However, it's worth noting that women's sports viewership in Pakistan is still developing, and efforts are needed to increase female participation.

### **Research Gap**

While existing research predominantly focuses on sports spectating in general or women's sports viewership globally. There's a lack of research specifically exploring Pakistani women's attitudes, motivations, and challenges related to sports spectating. While cultural and societal limitations for female athletes in sports participation in Pakistan are acknowledged, the previous research lacks female sports fans' perceptions. There's a need for a deeper understanding of what and how these factors specifically influence Pakistani women's decisions regarding sports spectating. This study not only sheds light on women's views about watching sports or a match, but the study can also offer valuable insights to stakeholders for targeted initiatives.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Social learning theory is the philosophy that individuals can acquire knowledge through observation, imitation, and modelling. This social psychological framework was theorized by Albert Bandura in 1977. According to Bandura, people learn by watching the actions and outcomes of behavior models. In the context of sports fans, social learning theory suggests that fans may model their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards sports and teams based on the actions and attitudes of those around them, such as family members, friends, and peers. This can lead to transmitting cultural norms, values, and traditions within sports communities. This research established social learning theory as a framework for understanding the influence of societal expectations and gender roles on women's interest and participation in sports spectating.

Feminist theory is a framework for analyzing gender-based power relations and understanding the social construction of gender. According to Burton (2012), feminist theory has its roots in Marxism and encompasses various perspectives and approaches. Feminist theory in sports explores the construction and reinforcement of gender and femininity in sports. Using a feminist framework can help us understand the factors that limit Pakistani women's participation in sports fandom. The goal is to support more fairness and choice for women to be sports fans.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This research employed quantitative methods to comprehensively understand Pakistani women's perception of watching sports. Surveys and questionnaires were the primary sources of the data collection.

#### **Research Sample**

Residents of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan, were selected. Only females were encouraged to participate in the study by completing the survey via email, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups. To ensure that every respondent had a knack for sports, the survey's first question asked the students whether they watched sports. There were 188 respondents in all to the online surveys.

#### **Sample Frame**

Every female participant (n = 188) who has watched sports. The age distribution of the respondents was as follows: 71.8% were fall between 18 to 24; 14.4% were between the ages of 25 and 31; only 6.9% were between 31 to 35 and the remaining respondents (6.9%) were above 35. 85% of the respondents were students of which undergraduate students comprised (57.4%) of the sample (n=188), followed by master's degrees (20.7%).

#### **Sampling Technique**

A convenience sampling method was used for data gathering. A Google form was made available online to 188 Pakistani women to gather their replies. There were 5 sections in the questionnaire. Initially, the questionnaire comprised demographic questions like age, gender, and educational background. The next questions were about their sports-watching habits and interests. Then there were 4 sections consisting of game preferences, motivation, and influence on sports spectating and the Likert scale of the questionnaire explored Pakistani women's opinions about sports spectatorship. The researcher employed non-probability sampling to choose 188 females from Rawalpindi/ Islamabad city.

#### **Data Collection**

The author created the questionnaire and rated their levels of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale and participants answered questions like "I enjoy Watching sports" and "Social Media platforms influence my decision to watch a particular sport" on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

**Data Analysis**

The pre- and post-test data and participant survey questionnaire responses comprise the two primary components of the quantitative data. SPSS was used to statistically analyze the survey data. Tables with explanations included the standard deviation, mean, and average scores for each questionnaire item.

**RESULTS**

Table 1: Demographic

Respondents' Demographic		Frequency	Percent
Age	18-24	135	71.8
	25-31	27	14.4
	31-35	13	6.9
	35 and above	13	6.9
	Total	188	100.0
Occupation	Student	161	85.6
	Employee	13	6.9
	House-maker/ Unemployed	14	7.4
	Total	188	100.0
Education Level	Matric	13	6.9
	Inter	28	14.9
	BS	108	57.4
	MS / MPhil	39	20.7
	Total	188	100.0

The demographic statistics of 188 female participants who spectate sports are in the above table. The first section includes information about the respondents' age, occupation, and education level. The findings indicated that 71.8% of the participants were aged 18-24, 14.4% were 25-31, and 6.9% were age 31-35 and above 35, respectively. The results exemplified the education and occupation of the respondents, among them 85.6% were students, 7.4% were either house-makers or unemployed, while 6.9% of the respondents were employed. The participants' education levels were 57.4% enrolled in BS programs, 20.7% were MS or MPhil students, 14.9% were intermediate students, and only 6.9% were matric students.

Table 2: Spectating Frequency (Respondents')

Question	Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	M	S.D
How often do you watch sports?	39 (20.7)	54 (28.7)	27 (14.4)	41 (21.8)	27 (14.4)	188 (100)	2.80	1.371

The above table shows the results for female fans who watch sports. Among them, 28.7 % watch occasionally, 21.8% often watch, and 14.4% watch always, while 20.7% have never watched.

Table 3: Sports Interest (Respondents')

Question	Cricket	Football	Hockey	Other	Total	M	S.D
What type of sports are you interested in watching?	134 (71.3)	27 (14.4)	13 (6.9)	14 (7.4)	188 (100.0)	1.51	.916

The above table shows the interest of the female spectators in watching sports. The results showed that 71.3% of the females are interested in watching cricket, 14.4% of the participants are interested in football, 7.4% chose other sports including badminton, tennis, and basketball, while 6.9% consider watching hockey.

Table 4: Spectating Preferences (Respondents')

Question	Attending live events	Watching on Television/ online streams	Following social media updates	Total	M	S.D
How do you usually watch sports?	27 (14.4)	69 (36.7)	92 (48.9)	188 (100.0)	2.35	.718

The above table shows the preferences of female spectators when watching sports. The results revealed that 48.9% of the females follow social media updates, 36.7% of respondents prefer to watch sports on television and online live streams, and only 14.4% have chosen attending live events as their preference.

Table 5: Attending Live Events. (Respondents')

Question	Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	M	S.D
If you attend live events, how often do you so?	67 (35.6)	27 (14.4)	54 (28.7)	27 (14.4)	13 (6.9)	188 (100.0)	2.43	1.292

The above table shows the frequency of female spectators who have attended or watched live sports events or matches. The results revealed that most respondents (35.6%) have never experienced watching or attending live sports events. The study further signifies that 28.7% of the female participants sometimes attend live events and 14.4% often appear at live events. Meanwhile, only 6.9% of female sports fans catch up on live events.

Table 6: Motivation to Watch Sports (Respondents')

Question	Interest in Sports itself	Sporting a specific team/ athlete	Enjoyment/ Entertainment	Total	M	S.D
What motivates you to watch sports?	55 (29.3)	27 (14.4)	106 (56.4)	188 (100.0)	2.27	.887

The above table shows the factors that motivate Pakistani females to spectate sports matches and events. The study identified that the majority of the respondents (56.4%) partake in sports for entertainment or enjoyment. The study further signifies that 29.3% of the female participants are interested in specific sports and catch up with matches and events. Meanwhile, 14.4% of people watch it because of their favorite player, team, or athlete.

Table 7: Attitude & Preferences & Barriers to Sport Spectator-ship

Question	S.D	D	N	A	S.A	Total	M	SD
<b>Attitude &amp; Preferences</b>								
I enjoy watching sports	14 (7.4)	0 (0.0)	66 (35.1)	108 (57.4)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.43	.834
Watching sports is a good way to spend my leisure time	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	93 (49.5)	54 (28.7)	41 (21.8)	188 (100.0)	3.72	.800
I prefer Watching sports live at stadium	0 (0.0)	95 (50.5)	79 (42.0)	14 (7.4)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	2.57	.629
I feel a sense of community when watching sports with others?	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	66 (35.1)	80 (42.6)	42 (22.3)	188 (100.0)	3.87	.749
I am comfortable attending sports events with male family members or friends	0 (0.0)	27 (14.4)	66 (35.1)	67 (35.6)	28 (14.9)	188 (100.0)	3.51	.916
I am interested in watching women's sports	0 (0.0)	42 (22.3)	66 (35.1)	66 (35.1)	14 (7.4)	188 (100.0)	3.28	.894
I watch sports if a Pakistani athlete or team participates	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	81 (43.1)	53 (28.2)	54 (28.7)	188 (100.0)	3.86	.837
<b>Factors Influencing Sports Viewership</b>								
I've interest in the specific sport	0 (0.0)	13 (6.9)	54 (28.7)	94 (50.0)	27 (14.4)	188 (100.0)	3.72	.795
National team or favourite athletes' performance	0 (0.0)	13 (6.9)	54 (28.7)	93 (49.5)	28 (14.9)	188 (100.0)	3.72	.800
The influence of friends and family who enjoy sports.	0 (0.0)	26 (13.8)	81 (43.1)	67 (35.6)	14 (7.4)	188 (100.0)	3.37	.813
Excitement and competitiveness of the game	0 (0.0)	13 (6.9)	26 (13.8)	108 (57.4)	41 (21.8)	188 (100.0)	3.94	.796
The presence of a positive and safe environment at sports events	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	53 (28.2)	122 (64.9)	13 (6.9)	188 (100.0)	3.79	.554
Opportunities to socialize and connect with other fans	0 (0.0)	27 (14.4)	65 (34.6)	83 (44.1)	13 (6.9)	188 (100.0)	3.44	.822
Societal expectations regarding women's participation in sports	0 (0.0)	13 (6.9)	107 (56.9)	68 (36.2)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.29	.589
Role models and representation of women in sports	0 (0.0)	13 (6.9)	93 (49.5)	68 (36.2)	14 (7.4)	188 (100.0)	3.44	.733
The affordability of tickets or subscriptions to watch sports	0 (0.0)	28 (14.9)	92 (48.9)	54 (28.7)	14 (7.4)	188 (100.0)	3.29	.809
<b>Social Media Influence and Sport Spectator-ship</b>								
Social media platforms influence my decision to watch a particular sport	0 (0.0)	27 (14.4)	66 (35.1)	95 (50.5)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.36	.722
I follow sports teams and athletes on social media to stay updated	0 (0.0)	27 (14.4)	65 (34.6)	96 (51.1)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.37	.723
Social media discussions and commentary increase my interest in watching sports.	0 (0.0)	14 (7.4)	67 (35.6)	107 (56.9)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.49	.633
Social media helps me connect with other female sports fans.	0 (0.0)	28 (14.9)	80 (42.6)	80 (42.6)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.28	.708
I attended/ watched sports events and matches that I saw on social media	13 (6.9)	28 (14.9)	66 (35.1)	81 (43.1)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.14	.917

There needs to be more positive female sports content on social media.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	93 (49.5)	82 (43.6)	13 (6.9)	188 (100.0)	3.57	.620
<b>Barriers to Sport Spectator-ship</b>								
Cultural norms discourage women from watching sports in Pakistan	0 (0.0)	40 (21.3)	67 (35.6)	41 (21.8)	40 (21.3)	188 (100.0)	3.43	1.050
My family disapproves of me watching sports	54 (28.7)	95 (50.5)	39 (20.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	1.92	.701
Due to limited access, I don't watch sports	28 (14.9)	108 (57.4)	39 (20.7)	13 (6.9)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	2.20	.773
The cost of tickets to live sporting events is a barrier to spectating.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	92 (48.9)	96 (51.1)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.51	.501
My religious beliefs discourage me from watching sports	40 (21.3)	109 (58.0)	39 (20.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	1.99	.650
Lack of female representation in sports coverage	0 (0.0)	27 (14.4)	80 (42.6)	81 (43.1)	0 (0.0)	188 (100.0)	3.29	.703
Pakistan doesn't have friendly environment for female sports fans	0 (0.0)	14 (7.4)	53 (28.2)	94 (50.0)	27 (14.4)	188 (100.0)	3.71	.803

The table mentioned above was a scale of 29 items and scored on a 5-point Likert scale. It was divided into 4 sections to check Pakistani females' attitudes and preferences, factors that motivate them to watch sports, the influence of social media on sports viewership, and hurdles that hinder sports-watching habits. Students from numerous universities validated the tool, and researchers used SPSS software to analyze the data to keep it standard and accurate.

### DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

According to the research questions, the researcher presented the discussions of this study's findings. The analysis of this study signifies that 28.7 % watch sports occasionally, 21.8% often watch, 14.4% watch always and only 20.7% have never watched. This means Pakistani females are likely interested in watching sports. The questionnaire was designed to get female sports fans' perceptions and identify the factors influencing their decisions. The study found that most of the respondents prefer to watch matches online (live streams) or on television, which aligns with the study of Hutchins et al. (2019). In the section '*Attitude & Preferences*' respondents showed positive attitudes and interest in watching games when the national teams or athletes participate. About 50 % of the respondents (n=188) have a great interest in sports (Cricket, Football, Hockey, Badminton, Tennis, etc.) and Dawn (2021) stated that the team's (Pakistani Cricket Team) staggering performance developed a great fondness in female fans for the sport (men's cricket). The study also revealed that women are also interested in watching women's sports, and McCarthy (2024) highlighted that women's sports are a range of men's sports in spectatorship.

The research identified the factors that influence their (women) decisions to watch sports. The females consider the following factors; excitement and competitiveness of the game, safe environments, fans' behaviors, women's representation, ideals or celebrities' presence, and affordability of tickets or subscriptions to watch a match. The study found that Ticket affordability, lack of women representatives, and unfriendly environment for women are the major barriers for female sports fans. Having female representatives instil interest among female fans and a safe environment will encourage them to watch stadium matches. Jang et al. (2020) also highlighted that service quality for spectators effectively impacts their (viewers) intentions.

The research also quantified the influence of social media and analyzed how it has affected sports viewership. The results revealed that 56.9% of the participants had infused interest by following up on the social media commentary and discussion. The findings showed that about 50.5% of them are interested in sports that have media domination and this is consistent with Organista et al., (2017) study and 43.1% have watched/attended matches that were trending or discussed on social media and they (females) also follow sports team and athletes on social media for updates. Spectators are the souls of a match and they instil life in a match and the study highlighted the same aspects. The growing sport's popularity among female fans is also fostering a more encouraging environment and social media can swell it. While women's sports participation in Pakistan remains under development, addressing these hurdles requires concerted efforts to challenge gender stereotypes, promote inclusivity and diversity within sports culture, and create safe and welcoming environments encouraging women to participate actively in sports-watching activities. By addressing these challenges, we can work towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable sports culture that celebrates women's participation and contributions as sports spectators.



## CONCLUSION

The findings above reveal that cultural, economic, and social dynamics influence Pakistani women's perspectives on sports spectatorship. While men have historically dominated sports spectating, there is a growing recognition of female spectators' valuable role in enriching the sports culture. Pakistani women encounter hurdles such as cultural norms, economic constraints, unsafe environments, and male dominance within sports culture, which hinder their participation and enjoyment of sports spectatorship.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher firmly believes that addressing the issues of gender stereotypes and gender roles will enable the often neglected female population of the country to contribute to national development, making them an asset to Pakistan's economy because spectators can generate significant revenue (Deloitte, 2020). This study attempts to identify the female fans' perceptions and barriers that hold them back from participating in and experiencing sports matches and events. The following recommendations are proposed to improve the situation and promote female sports viewership in Pakistan:

1. Introduce alternative ticketing options like discounted passes or family packages to make attending live events more affordable for women.
2. Advocate for free or subsidized entry for women at certain sporting events to increase accessibility.
3. Organize public screenings of major sporting events in safe and convenient locations for women.
4. Collaborate with sports venues and authorities to implement security measures and address issues of harassment or discrimination against female spectators.
5. Designate dedicated stadium sections for women and families to create a more comfortable and secure atmosphere.
6. Promote positive fan behavior campaigns to foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all spectators.
7. Enforce a zero-tolerance policy against harassment and inappropriate behavior.
8. Increase participation of women as athletes, commentators, and sports officials to provide role models for aspiring female viewers.
9. Showcase the achievements and stories of female athletes across various sports on media platforms to inspire female fans.
10. Partner with social media platforms to launch targeted campaigns that promote female sports viewership.
11. Encourage female athletes and sports personalities to engage with female audiences on social media platforms.
12. Utilize social media to create interactive discussions and online communities for female sports fans.
13. Partner with female sports influencers to share their experiences and generate interest in sports among women.
14. Launch public education campaigns that challenge traditional gender norms and encourage women's participation in sports.
15. Address cultural norms and societal expectations that may discourage women from attending sporting events.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create an environment that encourages Pakistani women to engage in sports spectating more actively. This can positively impact the overall sports culture in Pakistan by promoting inclusive, diverse, and a more vibrant sports fandom.

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