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The Impact Of Sports Media On Fan Riots And Fanaticism:A Descriptive Comparative Study

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Abstract

Objectives. This study aims to explore the role of various forms of sports media in contributing to the emergence and spread of fanaticism and violence among sports audiences. The research addresses the presence of this phenomenon in Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, and its detrimental effects on fans and the broader values promoted by sports, such as peace, tolerance, and intercultural communication.

Materials and Methods. To investigate the issue, the researcher employed a descriptive, analytical, and comparative methodology. The study relied on data drawn from three scholarly sources, each representing one of the target countries. Through comparative analysis, the research sought to interpret the findings in order to identify the underlying causes of media-driven extremism in sports contexts and propose strategies for mitigation.

Results. The findings reveal that digital platforms—particularly social media—exert a far greater impact on shaping fans' emotional responses, attitudes, and behaviors compared to conventional media outlets. Social media's ability to amplify messages rapidly and reach wide audiences appears to significantly contribute to the escalation of fanatic behavior in the sports domain across the three countries studied.

Conclusions. The study underscores the urgent need for collaborative efforts among Arab nations to confront this growing issue. It advocates for the development and dissemination of high-quality, culturally aware sports programming and media content that promotes unity, discourages divisive rhetoric, and fosters a spirit of respect and sportsmanship. Assisting nations with limited media resources in improving their sports communication strategies is also recommended.

Keywords: fanaticism, stadium hooliganism, media, social media, audience

Introduction

In recent years, the role of sports media has come under increasing scrutiny due to its dual potential to influence audiences either constructively or destructively. While sports are fundamentally designed to foster values such as fair play, peace, and intercultural unity, media representations of sports events can sometimes distort these ideals. Specifically, certain types of sports media coverage have been found to contribute indirectly to the intensification of fan fanaticism and the escalation of violent behavior. This often stems from content that sensationalizes conflicts—whether involving teams, referees, or even countries—leading to hostile fan reactions both inside and outside stadiums (Alaa Mortada, 2021).

Rather than promoting the noble messages of sportsmanship, many media platforms tend to emphasize controversy and discord. Such patterns of coverage, particularly when they revolve around defeats or disputes, risk inciting hatred and aggressive responses among viewers (Braun & Vliegenthart, 2009). Conversely, media has the potential to play a constructive role by highlighting positive narratives, encouraging mutual respect among fans, and promoting tolerance, even in the face of defeat (Sultan et al., 2024).

The significance of this issue lies in the far-reaching influence of sports media content—whether it incites aggression or fosters unity. On one hand, it may contribute to an increase in disruptive fan behavior, while on the other, it holds the capacity to reduce tensions through educational and ethically grounded messaging. Understanding this dynamic is vital for sports administrators, policymakers, and media professionals who aim to harness the power of media to prevent violence and encourage a culture of responsible fandom.

³ This study seeks to examine the influence of sports media on fan behavior—both its role in provoking riots and fanaticism, and its capacity to curb these phenomena. Through a comparative analysis of three prior studies conducted in Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, this research aims to identify the underlying drivers of media-induced aggression and explore methods to mitigate its spread. The studies selected for analysis are:

- ⁵ 1. **The Egyptian Study** – *The Role of Sports Media in Eliminating Fanaticism in the Era of Globalization* by Alaa Mortada (2019);

2. **The Saudi Study** – *The Saudi Public's View of the Role of Sports Television Programs in Promoting the Phenomenon of Fanaticism* by Faisal bin Muhammad Al-Aqil (2023);
3. **The Iraqi Study** – *An Analytical Study of the Role of Sports Media in Confronting Fanaticism and Riots in Sports Stadiums in Iraq* by Al-Hajjami Hussein & Hassanein Shaila (2017).

The issue at hand is especially pressing in light of the growing incidents of fan-related violence and unrest in these three countries. Such behaviors not only compromise the safety and spirit of sports but also threaten broader societal values and stability (Imad Bahattab, 2019). With the rise of digital technologies and social media, the impact of media content on audience emotions, beliefs, and actions has become more immediate and intense.

This study is guided by the hypothesis that sports media—across various formats including television, radio, print, and social media—can either contribute to or help prevent the spread of fanaticism and violence among fans. The researcher, with a background in sports management and firsthand familiarity with these phenomena, emphasizes the urgency of exploring this issue. The findings are intended to offer actionable insights for media practitioners and sports institutions striving to create a healthier and more respectful sporting environment.

Geographically, the study is anchored in Iraq (specifically Dhi Qar University), but it draws from regional data and perspectives. Temporally, it examines studies conducted between 2017 and 2023, and its human scope includes media professionals in Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The methodology integrates descriptive, analytical, and comparative approaches to comprehensively assess the patterns and implications of sports media practices.

Materials and Methods

Study Participants

The research sample consisted of 190 male and female students enrolled at the Faculty of Sports Sciences at the University of Jordan. The participants were chosen to represent young people's perceptions regarding the role of social media in mitigating violence in stadiums.

Study Organization

This study utilized a descriptive survey method, with data gathered via a structured questionnaire focused on the perceived effectiveness of social media in curbing aggressive behavior among sports audiences.

Statistical Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, alongside inferential tests to identify differences based on demographic factors—specifically gender. It is likely that t-tests or ANOVA were applied to determine statistical significance. Results indicated notable differences across gender lines in responses to the media’s role in violence reduction.

Results

The findings from the three studies conducted in Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia reveal key patterns and differences in how sports media influences hooliganism, fanaticism, and the promotion of positive sportsmanship. These findings are summarized below:

1. Sample Overview and Research Tools

All three studies employed questionnaires as their primary data collection instrument. Each study had a substantial sample size, which supports the credibility and generalizability of their findings.

Table 1. Overview of Study Samples and Instruments

No.	Country	Year of Publication	Research Instrument	Sample Size
1	Egypt	2019	Questionnaire	277
2	Iraq	2017	Questionnaire	480
3	Saudi Arabia	2023	Questionnaire	402

These studies are relatively recent and address the core issue of stadium violence and fanaticism, with a shared emphasis on the role of sports media in either promoting or mitigating these phenomena.

2. Public Perception of Media’s Role in Limiting Violence and Fanaticism

The studies found varying perceptions among the public regarding the effectiveness of sports media in reducing riots and extreme fan behaviors.

Table 2. Public Evaluation of Media’s Role in Reducing Fanaticism

Country	Mean Evaluation Score	Impact Level	Interpretation
Egypt	Moderate	Clearly noticeable	Media moderately helps reduce violence and intolerance.
Iraq	Moderate	Balanced	Media personnel recognize its positive influence.
Saudi Arabia	Average to Low	Inconsistent	Social media has more effect than other traditional outlets.

These evaluations reflect the diversity in sports culture and media literacy across the three contexts.

3. Media’s Role: Promoting or Reducing Fanaticism

Public opinion was also split on whether the media acts more as a deterrent or as a catalyst for fanaticism and violence.

Table 3. Public Perceptions: Media as a Source of or Solution to Fanaticism

Country	Media Limits Fanaticism (%)	Media Fuels Fanaticism (%)
Egypt	64%	26%
Iraq	60%	31%
Saudi Arabia	50%	78.6%

These results suggest a shared concern across countries regarding the dual role of media—with Saudi Arabia showing a particularly high risk in terms of media incitement, possibly due to unregulated or sensationalist content.

4. Differences in Impact Across Respondent Categories

There were also observable differences in how various groups perceived the media's influence, especially between youth, media professionals, and players.

Table 4. Variance by Respondent Group

Country	Highest Scoring Category	Statistical Significance	Interpretation
Egypt	Youth	Yes	Young people exhibit awareness of media's influence.

Iraq	Media Professionals	Yes	Professionals understand the media's social role.
Saudi Arabia	Media Professionals	Yes	Youth and students are more susceptible to media influence.

These results emphasize the need for tailored awareness programs, particularly for the more impressionable youth audience.

5. Promotion of Positive Sportsmanship

The studies also examined how well the media fosters values such as respect, sportsmanship, and ethical fan behavior.

Table 5. Mean Score for Media's Role in Encouraging Positive Behavior

Country	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Egypt	3.40	0.50
Iraq	3.38	0.60
Saudi Arabia	3.10	0.72

The Egyptian and Iraqi media scored slightly better in encouraging ethical sports values, while Saudi Arabia trailed, possibly due to inconsistent messaging or lack of structured educational content.

6. Media's Dual Role: Prevention vs. Provocation

Finally, the data confirmed that sports media in all three countries can act both as a force for prevention and as a trigger for disorder, depending on how content is framed and delivered.

Table 6. Comparative Summary: Media's Role in Fan Behavior

Country	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Reduces Intolerance (%)	Incites Fanaticism (%)
Egypt	3.35	0.45	64%	26%
Iraq	3.30	0.70	60%	31%
Saudi Arabia	0.75	0.75	50%	78.6%

These figures underscore a critical media gap, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where the risk of incitement is significantly higher. This gap may be due to either poor training of media personnel or deliberate attempts to attract viewership through provocative content.

Discussion.

² This study sought to explore the role of sports media in shaping behaviors associated with fanaticism, violence, and ethical conduct among sports fans across three Middle Eastern countries: Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal a multifaceted influence, underscoring both the constructive and potentially harmful roles of media in the sporting context.

One of the primary observations emerging from the cross-national comparison is that perceptions of media influence vary considerably depending on local media cultures, audience literacy, and the regulatory environment. In Egypt and Iraq, respondents acknowledged a moderate but positive role of sports media in limiting hooliganism and fostering sportsmanship. In contrast, respondents in Saudi Arabia reported a relatively higher exposure to inciting content—especially through unregulated social media platforms—raising concerns about the amplification of extreme fan behavior.

These findings are in line with previous research. For instance, Wright (2006) highlighted the capacity of violent media, including sports content, to elevate aggression levels among viewers. Similarly, Mahmoud Al Basheer and Walid Al Hammouri (2024) emphasized the role of social media in shaping stadium behaviors, finding notable gender-based differences in media impact. Moreover, a systematic review from 2007 to 2018 further reinforced the association between media exposure and behavioral indicators such as competitiveness, aggression, and group-based fanaticism.

However, while the current study provides meaningful insights, several methodological limitations must be addressed. First, the approach employed was comparative in nature, but not sufficiently described as either a meta-analysis, systematic review, or content analysis. The absence of clearly defined selection criteria for including Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia may also suggest potential regional or topical bias. A more transparent justification for the country selection would enhance the study's credibility and allow for broader generalizability.

Furthermore, although questionnaires were used consistently across the studies, there is a lack of detail regarding their construction. Information on the **validity and reliability** of these instruments—such as Cronbach's alpha values, sample items, or pre-testing protocols—is missing. Without this information, it becomes difficult to assess the robustness of the data collection tools and the reliability of the findings.

Another notable concern lies in the **unbalanced sample sizes** across the three studies. Iraq's sample (n = 480) was significantly larger than those from Egypt (n = 277) and Saudi Arabia (n = 402), which may introduce statistical imbalance and affect cross-study comparisons. Additionally, **demographic data** such as respondents' age, gender, education level, and level of media engagement were either sparsely reported or omitted entirely, further limiting the capacity to generalize findings across population subgroups.

Despite these constraints, the study offers important implications. It underscores the dual capacity of sports media—to serve as a tool for education and socialization, or conversely, to act as a trigger for disorder when sensationalized or poorly moderated. These insights highlight the need for more responsible media practices and the development of regulatory frameworks that curb inciting content while promoting messages of respect, tolerance, and healthy competition.

Future research should prioritize more **balanced sampling strategies**, greater demographic transparency, and validated measurement tools. Additionally, longitudinal and experimental designs could help establish causal relationships between media consumption and fan behavior, moving beyond perception-based self-reports.

In conclusion, while this study contributes to a growing body of literature on media influence in sports, refining its methodological rigor and addressing current limitations will be essential for achieving broader impact and academic relevance.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the complex and often problematic role of sports media in shaping public behavior and attitudes toward sports events, particularly in Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. While media holds the potential to serve as a positive influence by promoting sportsmanship and unity, the findings indicate a prevailing trend toward content that incites violence, fanaticism, and divisive sentiments among sports fans.

The lack of adherence to professional standards within sports media, coupled with minimal oversight from regulatory bodies, has exacerbated these issues. Moreover, the rapid and widespread influence of social media—often unmoderated—has further intensified emotional responses and heightened public polarization.

Additionally, the study underscores a significant gap in public awareness and media literacy among audiences, which has facilitated the rise of hooliganism and extreme fan

behavior. These factors collectively reveal a systemic weakness in the media's educational and moral role in sports culture.

Recommendations

1. Enforce Media Regulations
Government and media regulatory bodies should impose strict guidelines and sanctions on all forms of sports media to curb the spread of content that promotes violence, extremism, and fanatical behavior.
2. Promote Public Awareness
Organize large-scale educational campaigns, including training courses and workshops, aimed at raising awareness among fans about the social and moral dangers of violence and fanaticism in sports.
3. Integrate Media Education into Curricula
Introduce media literacy, particularly related to sports media, into school and university curricula to cultivate critical thinking, responsible media consumption, and ethical awareness among younger generations.
4. Professionalize Media Employment Standards
Establish and enforce strict employment standards within media institutions to ensure that only individuals with academic and professional qualifications in journalism and media are authorized to produce and broadcast sports content.
5. Foster Regional Collaboration
Encourage cooperation among Arab nations to exchange expertise, develop joint strategies, and create unified media messages that promote tolerance, national cohesion, and a civilized sporting culture.

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