



Gendered Coverage of Nigerian Female Athletes by Selected Sport News Websites

Ekemerem Kaneng Gbadamosi-Ladoja^{a*}, Godfrey Danaan^b

^{a,b}Department of Mass Communication, University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

*Corresponding email: ekemeremladoja@gmail.com

Abstract

The coverage of female athletes by the media is one of the debated subjects in social science research, and sports media are not excluded from this discourse, as the representation of female athletes in digital media has also raised questions. The frequency of coverage given to female athletes by digital media is a concern, not only because of its influence on aspiring female athletes but also because of its potential to shape people's perceptions of women's sports and female athletes. This study therefore examines the digital sports media coverage of Nigerian female athletes. A quantitative content analysis was conducted on 3,015 articles from *Complete Sports*, *SportingLife.ng* and *Sports247*, published during five major sporting events. A structured coding scheme was used to analyse the frequency of coverage given to female athletes, with intercoder reliability established using Krippendorff's alpha. The findings reveal that digital sports media continue to give male athletes more coverage than female athletes, including during women's sporting events. This disparity reinforces traditional views and promotes gender inequality in sports coverage. The study recommends greater emphasis on the achievements of female athletes and training for sports journalists and editorial boards on equitable sports coverage.

Keywords: digital media, female athletes, sports news websites, sports coverage, women's sports

Introduction

Sport is one of the most powerful platforms for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. Sport also provides a reliable mirror of society. It is a microcosm of society and is thus described by some as society in miniature. Sport and the mass media enjoy a symbiotic relationship, with participants affected by this relationship. Both sport and the mass media are driven by the desire to reach spectators, fans, consumers and audiences. The increasing popularity of sport is partly attributable to the enormous amount of attention devoted to it by the mass media, while the media generate revenue from sport (Ikechukwu et al., 2026). The media thus generate increased interest in sport, and this increase subsequently warrants even greater media attention and sports coverage across various media outlets, including newspapers, magazines, radio, television and, more recently, online media (Beck & Bosshart, 2002; Lange, 2002).

Today, sport is considered a fundamental part of society because it plays an important role in the cultural and social lives of communities. Its influence is reflected in everyday language, as terms such as 'fairness' and 'end game', among others, have become part of daily vocabulary (Altvater, 2012). Sport has a significant impact on society because it represents the unending struggle of the human race for accomplishment and dominance. It is commonly believed that the media portray and reflect important issues in society; therefore, what is depicted in the media deserves attention (Altvater, 2012). Furthermore, it has been suggested that 'how members of society see themselves, how they are viewed and even treated by others, is determined to a great extent by their media representation' (Bernstein, 2002, p. 416).

Women's participation in sport has a long history marked by division and discrimination, but also by significant accomplishments by female athletes and important advances in gender



equality and the empowerment of women and girls (Ada & Özbey, 2026; Reddy et al., 2026). These achievements were made despite numerous barriers arising from gender discrimination (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2010). Women were often perceived as being too weak for sport, particularly endurance sports such as marathons, weightlifting and cycling. It was also frequently argued in the past that sport was harmful to women's health, particularly their reproductive health. Although progress has been made, many barriers remain (Billings et al., 2018).

Today, the growth of women's sport is one of the most exciting trends in the sports industry (Nielsen, 2018). The Nielsen report further explains that women's sport is perceived as more progressive, less money-driven and more family-oriented. It also indicates that women find women's sport more inspiring than men do. Okaka and Omoifo (2010), citing research conducted by the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) in 2007, reported that the first recorded organised sporting event took place in 1910. Women's participation in competitive sport was traced to the post-independence period between 1960 and 1966 and the post-military period between 1966 and 1978. The authors also noted that women's participation in sport in Nigeria has continued to increase.

A generation ago, sport was a core patriarchal institution within a broader, contested gender order. However, with the growth of girls' and women's participation in athletics, sport no longer plays this traditionalist role in gender relations in a straightforward or definitive manner (Messner, 2002). According to Cahn (1990), the coverage of female athletes dates back to the 1920 Olympic Games, known as Antwerp 1920, which featured 2,626 athletes from 29 countries, comprising 65 women and 2,561 men. Only a few women were permitted to compete. Cahn, as cited in Cookey (2006), notes that the 'heterosexiness' of female athletes, including their sexuality and sexual orientation, was the focus of attention rather than their sporting performance.

More than a century later, some scholars have suggested that media coverage of female athletes may not have changed substantially (Gemar, 2025; Greene, 2026; Sonia, 2026). Media researchers have criticised sports coverage for its gender bias and the dominance of male athletes on sports pages. Female athletes have consistently been relegated to a 'runner-up' status in media representation (Smith, 2011). In a study titled *Gender in Televised Sports*, Messner and Cooky (2010) examined sports news and highlight programmes between 1989 and 2009. Their findings revealed that women's sport was under-reported, with male athletes receiving 96.3% of the airtime and female athletes receiving only 1.6%.

A study by Jones (2015), which examined the online media coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, found that male athletes received more coverage and appeared more frequently in photographs than female athletes. Female athletes, however, received twice as many mentions as male athletes in relation to their personal relationships. The study concluded that this pattern confirmed the existence of a historical glass ceiling, with women's coverage accounting for between 30% and 45% of Olympic coverage. Despite advances in online media, coverage of women's sport has not significantly surpassed that of men's sport in mainstream media (Jones, 2015).

As sport evolves, so do the media and the technologies that influence sports coverage. The World Wide Web has become an ideal medium for sports fans because of its accessibility, interactivity, speed and multimedia content. Sports websites have become one-stop sources of information for modern sports fans. A single website can provide information about current



matches, archives of past events, detailed background information for understanding statistical trends and prediction models for future sporting events (Real, 2006). With media expansion, online coverage of female athletes appears to have moved away from stereotypical representations. However, studies indicate that, as with traditional media, online media provide less coverage of female athletes and often portray them in sexualised or trivialising ways (Caldwell, 2020).

Complete Sports, *SportingLife.ng* and *Sports247* are Nigerian sports websites that provide extensive coverage of sporting events. Examining their coverage of female athletes provides an opportunity to assess how established sports websites contribute to reinforcing or challenging gender biases in sport. This study therefore aims to determine the frequency of coverage given to female athletes by the selected sports websites across five major sporting events.

Review of Related Literature

Sport Media Complex

The term sport media complex was coined by Sut Jhally in 1989 to describe the symbiotic relationship between sport and the media and how each institution influences the structure, livelihood and growth of the other. This complex is shaped by interrelated political, economic and sociocultural factors (Genovese, 2010). Similarly, the sport and media industries have developed a mutually beneficial relationship, with both making gains from their complementary interests. While sport provides valuable content and audiences for media operators, the media serve as a source of revenue, either directly through the marketing of broadcasting rights or indirectly through exposure for sponsors. This makes the media an effective promotional tool for sport (Evens et al., 2013; LeFever, 2012). Slack and Aims, as cited in LeFever (2012), argue that the sport sector benefits from the sport media complex because it receives a much-needed infusion of money from sponsors and media organisations.

The relationship between sport and the media continues to evolve. Modern sport and the modern press developed alongside each other, and despite the dominance of television and new media in the sport-media relationship, the long-standing relationship between sport and newspapers and radio cannot be overlooked (Jarvie, 2006). Newspapers provided free publicity, described major events and published results. In the early years of the nineteenth century, they also provided prizes, management, commitment and even judges and referees (LeFever, 2012). Television's live visuals strengthened its 'dream marriage' with sport by bringing events to audiences in real time. Meanwhile, sport and newspapers provided text-based background information, analysis and statistical details about events and athletes. Although these media complemented one another, newspapers could not provide real-time accounts in the same way as television, while television was less suited to presenting lengthy written accounts. Online media appeared to offer the advantages of both formats (McChesney, as cited in Whannel, 2000; Real, 2011).

Lavoie and Calhoun (2014) argue that the relationship between sport and the media, commonly described as the sport media complex, remains unparalleled and continues to expand alongside emerging technologies. In recent years, the internet and information technologies have profoundly altered people's relationships with work and leisure, transforming both business and private life. Mautner (2005) argues that the internet occupies a privileged position as a primary information source in the public sphere. It has also transformed the ways people interact and communicate by creating new channels of communication. The media landscape has increasingly shifted towards the internet, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimating



that 53.6% of the global population, or 4.1 billion people, were online (Sainz-de-Baranda et al., 2020).

Television was once the leading medium in the sport media complex, but the digital age has brought significant changes. Online media have moved beyond being an alternative to traditional media and have gained wider acceptance, further transforming the evolving sport media complex. Technological changes have enabled sports enthusiasts to access the content of their choice on their preferred platforms and at their preferred times. Online content can be reproduced, transferred and manipulated more easily. Furthermore, the internet's networked infrastructure allows text, photographs, moving images, audio and live content to be produced, distributed and consumed through the same multimedia or converged platforms and devices. New media therefore offer speed, visual content and analysis, with sports reporting at the forefront of multimedia innovation (Croteau et al., 2012; Genovese, 2010; LeFever, 2012; Real, 2006).

Broadcast television is now complemented by a range of other platforms, including internet-enabled television sets, mobile phones, tablets, game consoles, desktop computers, laptops and notebooks. Rowe (2004, 2011) describes this development as an impressive mediated 'live' audience. Although large and aspiring to global reach and simultaneity, this audience represents only one manifestation of audiences within the global 'media sport cultural complex'.

Gendered Coverage of Sport

Although women's participation in sport has increased over the years, media coverage has been observed to lack depth and breadth. Lee, as cited in Curtis (2014), identifies three strategies employed by the media that are 'exclusionary and restrictive'. First, female athletes receive less media coverage, making their status secondary to that of male athletes. Second, media representations of female athletes and reports of women's sport do not accurately reflect the substantial increase in participation rates, performance and achievements among female athletes. Third, reports that include women's sport are often trivialised. Similarly, Messner (2009) identifies four recurring ways in which dominant media treat women's sport: silence, which involves under-representation; humorous sexualisation; backlash; and selective incorporation of prominent female athletes.

Generally, sport, particularly at the professional level, is viewed as a male-dominated domain that attracts considerable attention from male audiences. It is well documented that female athletes receive significantly less coverage than their male counterparts. Consequently, the portrayal and representation of male and female athletes in the media have attracted scholarly attention (Koivula, 1999). In a study titled 'Things Are Changing, But How Much?', Kane, as cited in Shaller (2006), argues that women's sporting events and female athletes are substantially under-reported and under-represented across the mass media, creating the false impression that women are largely absent from the sporting scene. Messner and Cooky's (2010) longitudinal study of televised sports news and highlight programmes indicates that coverage of women's sport is declining at what they describe as an 'alarming rate'. Kinnick's (1998) research on the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games also found that stories about male athletes dominated media coverage despite the performances of female athletes at the Games. Kinnick argues that the absence or under-representation of women implies that female athletes either do not exist or have no newsworthy achievements.

The lack of coverage or acknowledgement of women's sport and female athletes may lead audiences to believe that these subjects are not worthy of media attention. By ignoring women's



sport and female athletes, the sports media create the impression that men's sport and male athletes are more highly valued (Trolan, 2013). When women's sport and female athletes are presented as absent from the sporting scene, or their achievements are downplayed, the media diminish women's involvement and deny female athletes the status, power and respect commonly accorded to male athletes (Jeroh, 2012). Female athletes not only receive less media coverage than male athletes but, when they are covered, they are often portrayed as women first and athletes second (Smith & Bissell, 2014). Smith and Bissell further argue that media coverage of female athletes focuses on their appearance, emotions and relationships, whereas male athletes are praised for their athletic ability, strength and masculinity.

More recent Nigerian evidence suggests that the problem persists. Chukwurah et al. (2022) examined gender inequality in Nigerian sport through interviews with 20 female football, track and field athletes and five coaches. Although the study did not undertake a quantitative content analysis of media output, participants reported disparities in media coverage alongside broader inequalities in athletes' welfare. Earlier studies by Ajibua et al. (2013) and Gbadamosi-Ladoja (2015) examined disparities in media output, focusing on print media. In contrast, Chukwurah et al. (2022) examined the perspectives of athletes and coaches, showing that unequal media visibility remains part of the lived experience of Nigerian female athletes.

Therefore, these studies establish a significant pattern of gender inequality in sports coverage in Nigeria. However, they do not adequately explain how the transition from print to online sports journalism has affected the frequency of coverage given to female athletes. This gap is particularly significant because online journalism operates through faster publication cycles, continuous updates, multimedia content and competition for audience attention. These characteristics distinguish online sports journalism from the newspaper environment examined in earlier Nigerian research. The present study therefore addresses this gap by examining the frequency of coverage given to female athletes by selected Nigerian sports websites across five major sporting events.

Theoretical Framework

Hegemony Theory

The concept of hegemony is derived from the Greek word *hegemon*, meaning 'leader'. It describes the process through which the beliefs, values, ideologies and practices of a particular social class come to dominate the wider society. The beliefs of that class become hegemonic when alternative or competing beliefs are excluded, ignored or repressed. This process can occur through both conscious and unconscious mechanisms (Kosut, 2012). The Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony to describe the dominance of one social class over others. He argued that there are two basic forms of domination: physical force and cultural consent (Fink, 2015; Gramsci, 1971; Kosut, 2012; Severin & Tankard, 2014). Pedersen, as cited in Kian (2007), defined hegemonic masculinity as the general acceptance of masculinity as the primary characteristic of Western society, placing women in positions subordinate to men. In societies characterised by hegemonic masculinity, masculinity serves as the standard against which other characteristics are measured, while masculine traits are regarded as the most desirable and valuable in society (Connell, 1995; Del Gandio, 2012).

Several scholars, including Bryson (1990) and Hargreaves (1994), have argued that sport serves as a hegemonic institution through which men's power over women is preserved. Although Gramsci (1971) did not specifically examine gender in his discussion of hegemony, scholars have



recognised the existence of gendered hegemony, commonly discussed in relation to hegemonic masculinity. This concept has become an important theoretical framework for explaining male dominance, power structures and gender inequalities in sport (Connell, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Fink, 2015; Messner, 1988). Hegemony can therefore be understood as the process through which a dominant social class employs cultural, ideological and economic influences to secure consent for its dominance over others (LaVoi et al., 2019). Elueze and Jones, as cited in Kian (2007), argued that the mass media have reinforced gender differences by promoting a masculine sport hegemony in several ways. First, the media perpetuate male dominance in sport by refusing to cover female athletes and women's sport or by providing them with minimal coverage.

Second, the limited overall coverage of female athletes may lead the public to underestimate the number of women participating in competitive sport. Furthermore, sports media often focus on sporting events and portrayals that reinforce stereotypical feminine images of women athletes. Several scholars have argued that sport and the media are two of the principal forces that help preserve and maintain hegemonic masculinity in Western societies (Connell, 1990, 2005; Miloch et al., 2005; Vincent & Crossman, 2008). However, hegemony is not necessarily permanent or uncontested. As Hargreaves (1995, p. 220) observes, 'Hegemony is never guaranteed: it must be worked for continually and renewed by the hegemonic class or class fraction'. Hegemony is therefore a dynamic process involving participation, negotiation, diversity, change and struggle among individuals and groups in real-life situations, rather than a process in which subordinate groups are simply deceived by dominant ideologies.

From a Gramscian perspective, the new media landscape may continue to reinforce traditional masculine and patriarchal hegemony, with women generally remaining less powerful within the sport media complex (Hardin, 2011). Since sport has served as a major arena for legitimising ideologies of male superiority, it is important to examine the frameworks of meaning employed by sports media in representing the emergence and participation of female athletes. In the present study, hegemony theory provides a basis for examining whether the frequency of coverage given to Nigerian female athletes by selected sports websites reflects the continued dominance of male athletes in sports media.

Research Design

The study adopted quantitative content analysis, a research method that developed from quantitative newspaper analysis in the United States during the 1920s (Neuendorf, 2002). Riffe et al. (2014, p. 3) define quantitative content analysis as 'the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods'. This systematic approach makes the research procedure transparent, understandable and relatively straightforward to apply (Mayring, 2004).

Sample Size

The sample consisted of articles retrieved from three Nigerian sports news websites: *Complete Sports*, *SportingLife.ng* and *Sports247*. The articles covered five major sporting events featuring Nigerian female athletes. These events were selected because they represented important sporting platforms through which female athletes had received national and international media attention over the years. Articles were retrieved from the selected websites, captured as screenshots and stored in PDF format. A total of 3,015 articles were analysed.



Table 1. *The breakdown of News stories across the different sporting events.*

Sporting Event	Date	Number of Articles
The FIFA Women's World Cup 2019	7th June–22nd June 2019	940
All-African Games	19th–31st August 2019	718
FIBA Women's Afrobasket 2019	10th–18th August 2019	397
2019 IAAF Championship	27th September–6th October 2019	548
World Wrestling Championship 2019	14th–20th September 2019	412
Grand Total		3,015

Sampling Technique

The study focused on selected sports news websites, which informed the use of purposive sampling. This technique involved selecting three sports news websites that cover male and female athletes and sporting events at national, continental and international levels. Although the websites cover international sporting events, they also give particular attention to Nigerian athletes and sporting events. The websites were also selected because of their reasonable audience reach. Purposive sampling is used to gain a deeper understanding of selected cases rather than necessarily to generalise findings to a wider population (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The selection of the websites was based on their sustained coverage of sporting events, their relevance to the study and the availability of published content. The sampling process also focused on articles covering Nigerian male and female athletes participating in continental and international sporting events to provide an understanding of gendered coverage patterns.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a coding sheet developed from the coding frames and categories established by the researchers. The coding sheet was designed to ensure consistency and precision in the classification of the sampled articles according to the study's objectives.

Reliability of the Instrument

Intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's alpha. This measure was selected because of its flexibility in accommodating multiple coders and different levels of measurement, as well as its ability to account for agreement occurring by chance, making it suitable for content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). The researcher and a research assistant coded sports news articles relating to the FIFA Women's World Cup France 2019, the FIBA Women's AfroBasket 2019, the 12th African Games, the 2019 World Athletics Championships and the 2019 World Wrestling Championships. A codebook, developed iteratively through consensus between the coders, provided detailed definitions of the coding categories and guidance for classifying the articles. A pilot test on 300 articles (10% of the sample) resolved initial disagreements, achieving a preliminary $\alpha \geq 0.80$. Krippendorff's Alpha was calculated using:

$$\text{Where: } \alpha = 1 - \frac{D_o}{D_e}$$

D_o = Observed disagreement, derived from coder pairwise differences.

D_e = Expected disagreement, based on category frequency distributions.

The Krippendorff's Alpha coefficients, with 95% CIs, Frequency of Coverage): $\alpha = 1.00$ [95% CI: 1.00, 1.00]

The analysis produced a Krippendorff's alpha coefficient of .1.00, indicating a high level of intercoder reliability. De Swert (2012) recommends a minimum of .80 for generally acceptable reliability. The obtained coefficient of 1.00 which is a perfect therefore exceeds the recommended

threshold and indicates a high level of agreement and consistency between the coders. The result is evidence that the coders though they coded independently adhered to the coding guide.

Data Analysis Process and Procedures

The study used Descriptive Statistics to analyse the data. According to Babbie (2020) descriptive statistics are essential for presenting clear and concise picture of the data before moving to more complex inferential analysis. They provide a foundation for understanding the patterns and characteristics of media coverage.

Unit of Analysis

Every News article within the stated duration published on the selected Sport News websites. Female athletes and female teams mentioned in articles or headlines. sport type, frequency of coverage and tone of coverage.

Results and Discussion

Table 2. *The Frequency of Female Athletes' Coverage at the 12th edition of the All-African Games*

Gender	News Websites						Percentages
	Complete Sports		Sports 247		Sporting Life		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Female	3	11.8%	10	6.17%	16	10%	4.0%
Male	359	90.6 %	67	41.3 %	104	65%	73.81%
Mixed	9	2.27%	7	4.3%	15	9.3%	4.31%
Others	25	6.3 %	78	48.1 %	25	15.6%	17.82%
Total	396	100%	162	100%	160	100%	100%

Nigerian female athletes got 11.8 % of the coverage by *Complete Sports* online during the 12th edition of the All-African games. 90.6 % of the articles in *Complete Sports* went to stories on male athletes, 2.27% for mixed stories on both male and female athletes at the event and while 6.3 % of the articles bordered on other stories not related to the event. In *Sporting life* ,10% of coverage dwelt on Nigerian female athletes at the 12th edition of the All-African games. Articles that reflected both male and female athletes at the event got 9.3% of articles while other stories got 15.6%. Articles on male athletes got 65% of coverages during the event. In *Sports 247*, 6.17% of articles during the event were Nigerian female athletes participating at the event accounted for while mixed reports on both male and female athletes at the event received 4.3% of articles. 41.3 % of the articles were on male athletes and other sporting stories receiving 48.1 % of coverage. In all Nigerian female athletes 29 articles out of a total of 718 across *Complete Sports*, *Sports 247* and *Sporting Life* which resulted in 4.0% coverage across the three selected media during the 12th edition of the All-African games.

Table 3. *The frequency of coverage of female athletes at the FIBA Women's Afrobasket 2019*

Gender	News Websites						Percentages
	Complete Sports		Sports 247		Sporting life		
	Freq.		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Female	3	1.26%	0	0 %	8	6.8 %	2.77%
D'Tigress							
Male	216	91.1 %	15	34.8%	90	76.9%	80.85%
Others	18	7.5%	28	65.11%	19	16.2%	16.37%
Total	237	100%	43	100%	117	100%	100%

The Nigerian female basketball team is called the D'Tigress and, in *Complete Sports*, the team accounted for 1.26% of coverage during the AfroBasket tournament, while male athletes accounted for 91.1% and other sports stories accounted for 7.5%. In *Sporting Life*, the D'Tigress received 6.8% of coverage, while male athletes accounted for 76.9% of articles during this period and other sporting activities accounted for 16.2%. A total of 397 stories were covered during the Women's Afrobasket tournament, with Nigerian female athletes, that is, the D'Tigress, accounting for 11 stories, which places their coverage during the period at 2.7%. In *Sports247*, the D'Tigress received no coverage during the entire tournament. Male athletes accounted for 34.8% of coverage, while 65.11% focused on other sporting events.

Table4. The Frequency of Female athletes' Coverage at FIFA Women's World cup, France 2019

Gender	News Websites						Percentages
	Complete Sports		Sports 247		Sporting life		
	Freq.		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Female	31	6.2%	14	9.2%	40	13.7%	9.04%
S\Falcons							
Male	447	89.7%	67	44.3%	173	59.4%	73.08%
Others	20	2.1%	70	46.3%	78	26.8%	17.87%
Total	498	100%	151	100%	291	100%	100%

In *Complete Sports*, the Nigerian female athletes, the Super Falcons, had 31 stories, which accounted for 6.2% of the articles. A total of 89.7% of coverage went to male athletes, while 2.1% of the stories focused on other sporting activities. *Sporting Life* had 13.7% of its coverage devoted to the Super Falcons, while male athletes received 59.4% of coverage and neutral sporting activities accounted for 26.8%. The Super Falcons received 9.2% of coverage in *Sports247*, while 44.3% of the coverage focused on male athletes and neutral sporting events accounted for 46.3%. A total of 940 articles were published by the three media outlets, with the Super Falcons receiving 9.04% of coverage during the World Cup period.

Table 5. The extent of Coverage of Female Athletes at the 2019 World Athletics Championship (IAAF).

Gender	News Websites						Percentages
	Complete Sports		Sports 247		Sporting life		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Female	5	2.0%	1	1.3%	29	12.3%	6.3%
Male	217	88.2%	15	78.3%	167	71.3%	72.0%
Mixed	4	1.6%	0	0%	8	3.4%	2.1%
Others	20	8.1%	58	20%	30	12.8%	19.4%
Total	246	100%	74	100%	234	100%	100%

Complete Sports allotted 2.0% of its coverage to Nigerian female athletes at the IAAF and 1.6% to mixed reports on both male and female athletes, while 88.2% of the coverage during the tournament went to male athletes. Neutral sporting events accounted for 8.1%. Nigerian female athletes at the IAAF received 12.3% of coverage from *Sporting Life*, while male athletes received 71.3%. A total of 3.4% of the reports focused on both male and female athletes at the IAAF. Neutral sports reports accounted for 12.8% of coverage. *Sports247* devoted 1.3% of its coverage to Nigerian female athletes, 0% to mixed reports and 20% to male athletes, while neutral sports reports accounted for 78.3% of coverage. The only report on the IAAF Championship, published

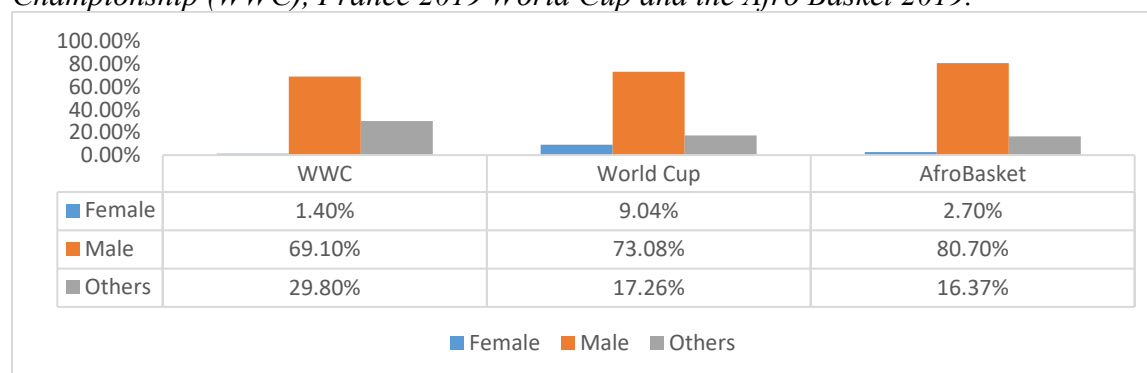
on 5 October 2019, was an opinion piece on a Nigerian-born Bahraini athlete who won the women's 400 m event at the competition. Apart from this piece, there was nothing regarding the IAAF Championship. A total of 554 reports were published across the three media outlets, with Nigerian female athletes receiving 35 stories in all, which accounted for 6.3% of coverage during the IAAF tournament.

Table 6. *The Frequency of Female Coverage at the World Wrestling Championship, WWC 2019*

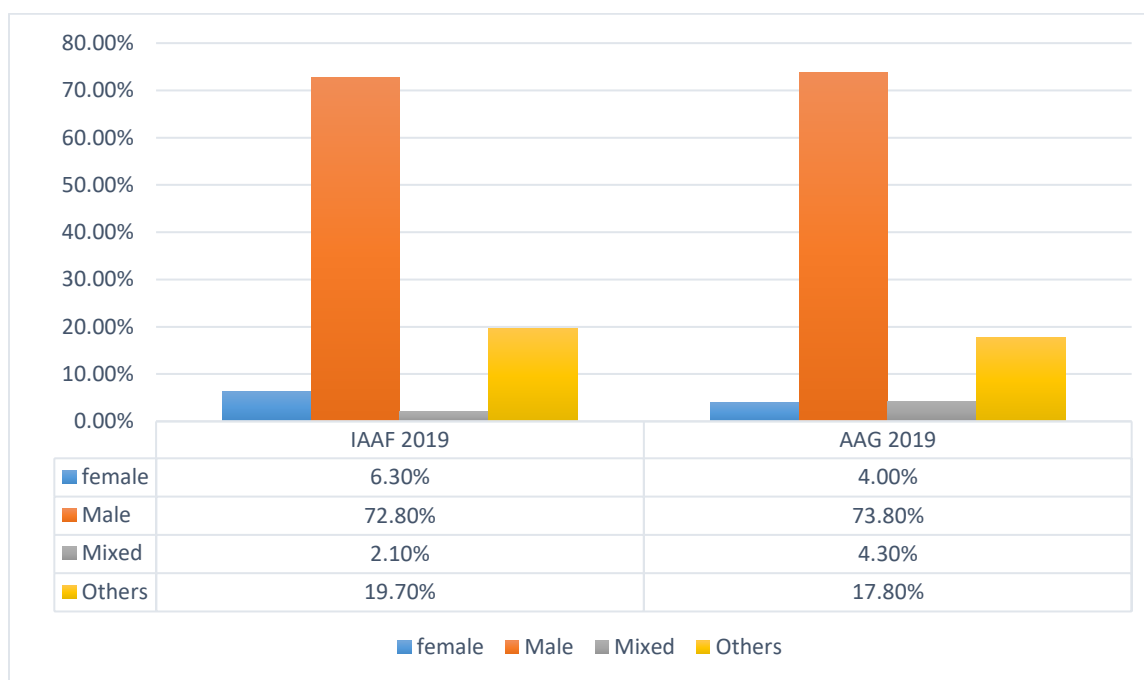
Gender	News Websites						Percentages
	Complete Sports		Sports 247		Sporting life		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Female	2	1.03%	2	2%	2	1.65%	1.4%
Male	173	89%	23	23.7%	89	73.5%	69.1%
Others	19	9.7%	72	74.2%	32	26.4%	29.8%
Total	194	100%	97	100%	121	100%	100%

Complete Sports had 1.03% of its coverage devoted to Nigerian female athletes at the event. A total of 89% of coverage focused on male athletes, while neutral sports reports accounted for 9.7%. In *Sporting Life*, 1.65% of coverage went to Nigerian female athletes, 73.5% to male athletes, and neutral stories received 26.4% of coverage during the championship. Nigerian female athletes at the championship received 2% of coverage in *Sports247*, while male athletes received 23.7% and neutral sports reports accounted for 74.2% of coverage. A total of 412 reports were published across the three media outlets during the period under review, with Nigerian female athletes receiving six stories in all, which accounted for 1.4% of coverage, while male athletes received 69.1% of the coverage. A total of 29.8% of coverage went to other sporting events.

Graphs 1. *Graphical Representation of Level of Female Athletes at the World Wrestling Championship (WWC), France 2019 World Cup and the Afro Basket 2019.*



Graph 2. Graphical Representation of Female athletes at The IAAF & 12th edition of the All-African Games.



Findings and Discussions

The study examined the disparity in the coverage of Nigerian female athletes by selected sports news websites, with emphasis on the frequency of coverage devoted to Nigerian female athletes at five different sporting events. The findings reveal that there is a significant imbalance in the representation of Nigerian female athletes, with female athletes accounting for 4.0% of the articles, while male athletes dominated the coverage with 73.81%. The findings from the data in Tables 2 to 6, as well as Figures 1 and 2, agree with the numerous findings by other scholars on the under-representation of female athletes in sports media coverage (Cooky et al., 2013; Litchfield & Kavanagh, 2019). The low proportion of articles dedicated to female athletes across all the events examined, ranging from 1.40% to 9.00%, suggests persistent gender inequality in coverage by online sports media.

The dominance of coverage of male athletes, accounting for 69.10% to 80.70% of the articles, further reveals the male-dominated nature of coverage by online sports media. This pattern can also be linked to the hegemonic ideology within sports media. Media organisations produce more stories on men's sport because they believe it is what most audiences want, thereby creating a cycle in which men's sport receives more engagement and publicity, while women's sport receives less exposure or none in some cases (Fink, 2015; Frisby, 2017). The unequal focus on male athletes may be described as a process of normalisation. As audiences repeatedly encounter male-dominated competitions as the main content of sports pages, men's sport can appear naturally more important (Baumer, 2026). Baumer further argues that men's sports tend to receive more coverage when they are out of season than women's sports that are in season, thereby making women's sport appear less significant because it is presented less often. Instead, media visibility



contributes to the creation of perceived unimportance. Repeated exposure builds familiarity, public interest, commercial opportunities and fan loyalty. Thus, the large amount of coverage devoted to male athletes may reinforce what Fink (2015) called the sport media commercial complex. In this system, media coverage, audience interest, sponsorship, investment and sporting visibility are closely connected. More media coverage increases the profile of male athletes and men's competitions, which can attract advertisers and sponsors, as well as increased financial support, improve event promotion and generate public interest.

In contrast, limited coverage of female athletes may reduce sponsorship opportunities and public familiarity with women's sport. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Ikechukwu et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2026), showing that sports media have historically allocated far more attention to male athletes and men's sport. Similarly, Cooky et al. (2021) found that women's sport remained severely under-represented in televised sports news and highlights programming in the United States, receiving approximately 5% of coverage in both 1989 and 2019. Their findings are significant because they show that the under-representation of women is not simply a temporary issue but a persistent pattern that has continued despite substantial growth in women's sporting participation and top-level performance. The presence of the 'Others' category, ranging from 16.37% to 29.80%, may indicate a broader variety of sports coverage, with the specific nature and composition of this category including other sporting stories, such as sports administration and other events. The inclusion of mixed coverage of male and female athletes in the IAAF and African Games events, although limited, suggests a potential shift towards more inclusive and balanced representation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that there is a notable disparity in the frequency of coverage accorded to female and male athletes by online sports media, with female athletes receiving comparatively less media attention. This disparity indicates that the expansion of digital sports platforms has not necessarily led to equitable media visibility for female athletes. The unequal allocation of reports has consequences for the recognition and visibility of female athletes, as sustained media coverage can contribute to public awareness, acceptability and the prominence accorded to particular athletes and sporting events. However, the implications of these findings for women's sport, aspiring female athletes, societal welfare and the economic opportunities available to media organisations cannot be overemphasised. Finally, addressing disparities in coverage is important not only for improving the visibility of female athletes but also for fostering more equitable representation of sport in the digital media environment.

Recommendations

1. Based on the findings that Nigerian female athletes receive less coverage than male athletes, the study recommends that sports journalists and editors should be educated on the importance of equitable sports coverage and should prioritise athletes' sporting achievements, skills, performances and professional accomplishments when reporting on female athletes.
2. The study further recommends that newsroom editors and policymakers should be encouraged to develop media policies on the coverage of women's sport to address the allocation of coverage, which, as revealed by the study, remains dominated by male athletes. This will improve the visibility of female athletes both in and out of season, rather than concentrating attention around major competitions or exceptional performances.



3. Finally, the study recommends that continuous research should be carried out across different media platforms.

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During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT for grammar correction and language polishing to improve clarity and readability. Similarly, Grammarly and DupliChecker were used for further grammatical editing and plagiarism checking. After using these tools, the authors carefully reviewed and edited the content. The substantive ideas, analyses and arguments are primarily the authors' own. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the published article.