

# The role of women in the production of journalistic pieces: analysis of *Mundo Deportivo* and *Marca* during Qatar 2022

***El papel de las mujeres en la producción de piezas periodísticas: análisis de Mundo Deportivo y Marca durante Qatar 2022***

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ARTICLE



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## Abstract

Historically, both in Spain and internationally, the role of female journalists in the media has been characterized by being scarce and stereotyped. This poor representation has been called on numerous occasions as a “symbolic annihilation” (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000). The invisibility of women has been carried out mainly in the field of sports journalism, which has been configured as a difficult space for women to access and develop professionally (Ramon et al., 2020; Sainz de Baranda, 2013).

The article aims to analyse the role played by women sports journalists in the production of journalistic pieces published in the Spanish sports press during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The research was based on a quantitative content analysis that studied the information published between November 20 and December 18, 2022, the period in which the sporting event was held. The results indicate, among other things, a poor presence of female journalists in the production of articles, a low number of women designated to work with information about Qatar 2022 and a limited presence of female journalists both in the creation of opinion articles and also in the authorship of

the information that appears on the front pages of the newspapers.

**Keywords:** Sports journalism, women journalists, *Marca*, *Mundo Deportivo*, *FIFA*, *Qatar*.

## Resumen

Históricamente, tanto en el ámbito español como en el internacional, el rol de las periodistas en los medios de comunicación se ha caracterizado por ser ínfimo y estereotipado. Esta escasa representación se ha denominado, en numerosas oportunidades, como una “aniquilación simbólica” (Gerbner y Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000). La invisibilización de las mujeres se ha llevado a cabo principalmente en el campo del periodismo deportivo, el cual se ha configurado como un espacio difícil para que las mujeres accedan y se desarrollen profesionalmente (Ramon *et al.*, 2020; Sainz de Baranda, 2013).

El siguiente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el papel que cumplieron las periodistas

deportivas en la producción de piezas periodísticas publicadas en la prensa deportiva española durante la Copa Mundial de la FIFA Qatar 2022. La investigación se basó en un análisis de contenido cuantitativo que estudió las informaciones publicadas entre el 20 de noviembre y el 18 de diciembre de 2022, período en el que se disputó dicho evento. Los resultados indican, entre otras cosas, una pobre presencia de las periodistas en la producción de artículos, una escasa cantidad de mujeres designadas a trabajar con informaciones sobre Qatar 2022 y una presencia limitada de mujeres periodistas, tanto en la creación de artículos de opinión como también en la autoría de las informaciones que aparecen en las portadas de los periódicos.

**Palabras claves:** Periodismo deportivo, mujeres periodistas, *Marca*, *Mundo Deportivo*, *FIFA*, *Qatar*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports journalism has historically been characterized as a section with several ethical dysfunctions: low diversity of the sports agenda, gender inequalities, and informative sexism (Franks & O'Neill, 2016; Ramon *et al.*, 2020). In the specific case of women, although it is true that, over time, there has been progress regarding their work, it continues to be a male-dominated site (Bernstein & Kian, 2013; Faedo *et al.*, 2022).

In Spain, despite the arrival of new technologies and communication platforms, the sports press has a fundamental role within the journalistic industry. It continues to have a large number of followers today (Faedo *et al.*, 2022). Within this sports press, and sports journalism in general, the sport that completely dominates the panorama is soccer, which causes other ac-

tivities to end up being displaced from the media agenda (Rojas-Torrijos, 2012).

The latest major soccer-related sporting event has been the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Precisely, this tournament has been characterized by a large number of controversies in terms of human rights. It has come to be called The World Cup of Shame (Amnesty International, 2016). It has been criticized on numerous occasions for, among other things, homophobic attitudes and the absence of fundamental rights of migrant workers and women (Arrung, 2022). Therefore, what was the role of women journalists in the Spanish sports press at the time of the event? The general objective of this research is to analyze the role played by female sports journalists in the production of journalistic pieces published in the Spanish sports press during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE SPORTS MEDIA?

Since its origins, journalistic information has been configured as a men-dominated site (Beasley, 2020). The case of sports journalism is no exception: gender inequalities and informative sexism are characteristics that have always been present (Franks & O'Neill, 2016). Hardin and Shain (2006) point out that women are outsiders about their gender but insiders regarding compliance with journalistic norms and values. This poor representation of women journalists has been referred to, on numerous occasions, as “symbolic annihilation”, which explains that, by ignoring and/or portraying women in stereotypical roles, the media do nothing more than symbolically annihilate them (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000).

Since sports is a male-dominated space, this has a direct impact on the field of journalism: men “own” sports journalism because they “own” sports (Everbach, 2018; Hardin & Shain, 2006). Therefore, the presence of women in this journalistic specialization is scarce, as explained by different research. Generally speaking, as Schoch (2022) observes, studies expose invisibilization, gender discrimination, the difficulties they face regarding the reconciliation between work and family, the unbreakable glass ceiling, and the need for female reporters to constantly struggle to obtain recognition and keep their jobs (Hardin & Shain, 2006; Organista *et al.*, 2019).

Franks and O'Neill (2016) studied six national newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK) and found that only 2.3% of the stories were created by women. In Schoch's (2020) analysis, only

9% of the articles analyzed were written exclusively by women. The Women's Media Center (2021), which studies gender representation in print, digital, and wire news, reported that in 2021, women produced 15% of sports news in newspapers, 24% in online media, and 8% of news in wire services.

Regarding the performance of roles at the top of management, women have few possibilities of obtaining a position due to a “glass ceiling.” As explained by Sarrió *et al.* (2002), this ceiling functions as a barrier supported by gender stereotypes that assume that the traits of an ideal manager are those prototypical of masculinity and that, therefore, do not allow women to access positions in media management.

On the other hand, it often happens that women work with “soft” news while men work with “hard” news. As explained by Schoch (2020), Tuchman (1972), and Van Zoonen (1998), the former are those with little news prestige, and the latter are those with a high level of journalistic and public interest. Consequently, women report more frequently on, for example, women's sports, which are considered not very prestigious and of less appeal to the audience (Boczek *et al.*, 2022; Organista *et al.*, 2019).

### 2.2 THE CASE OF SPANISH SPORTS JOURNALISM

In Spain, talking about women in journalism necessarily implies talking about unequal opportunities (Ufarte, 2012). Numerous studies show women's scarce and stereotyped presence in the Spanish sports media.

Through a study on hate speech on Spanish women sports journalists on Twitter, Blanco *et al.* (2019) collected dire figures: 89.6% of the journalists participating in the study have experienced violence in the course of their work, and half of them have suffered it continuously. Hate

speech not only affects them emotionally but also damages their personal and professional reputation. In addition, they harm them in their work and safety, as they ultimately restrict their freedom of expression (Blanco *et al.*, 2019).

According to Ramon *et al.* (2020), who, through interviews, inquired about the opinion of various experts in sports journalism on gender discrimination, women incorporated into the sports journalism profession are a minority. These authors point out that the journalists interviewed are aware that they are perceived as anecdotal elements, that their physical appearance is an essential factor in the eyes of men, and that “their interest in sports journalism is interpreted more from stereotypes (maybe ‘because they like some sportsperson’) rather than really as a professional option” (p. 1190). In addition, it is necessary to de-masculinize the newsrooms, which involves breaking the glass ceiling and getting more women into decision-making positions (Ramon *et al.*, 2020).

Sainz de Baranda (2013), in a longitudinal investigation of the sports press, points out that women represent only 9.1% of the total number of female news bylines. On the other hand, despite an increase of women as reporters (mainly as editors) over the years, we cannot observe an increase in positions of responsibility such as the direction or sub-direction of a newspaper. In the same way, Ortega and San Miguel (2016) and Salido Fernández (2021) pronounce themselves. Men prevail in all Spanish sports television journalism roles: anchor, reporter, and voice-over (Ortega & San Miguel, 2016). In addition, women who enter a profession as masculine as sports journalism do so

with rigorous limitations and requirements (Salido Fernández, 2021).

Concerning decision-making positions, Caro *et al.* (2004), some years ago, and Román-San-Miguel *et al.* (2021), more recently, showed that the number of women in management positions in the Spanish sports media is scarce. Few women are in positions of responsibility and, when they do exist, they do not even occupy 50% of the management team (Román-San-Miguel *et al.*, 2021). The authors explain that there is not a single woman in a management position who holds the position of director, and the highest level to which a woman reaches is deputy director. Consequently, since they do not have roles at the top and, in general terms, their presence is not numerous in the newsrooms, rather than feminization within the press, there is a “pseudo-feminization”; that is, an appearance of change rather than a fundamental transformation (Soriano *et al.*, 2005).

On the other hand, Faedo *et al.* (2022), in an investigation on the work of women in *Marca* and *Mundo Deportivo*, explain that the informative production of women in the Spanish sports press shows resistance in the newsrooms that reproduce a journalistic culture that does not allow their incorporation in the production of content. In addition, they report that there has been a regression in the number of women who sign reports. It is more feasible for a woman to write an article in 2010 than in 2018. In addition, they tend to work with informative articles but not with opinion articles.

Along the same lines, an analysis by Alonso-Alende *et al.* (2019) shows that, out of 3,304 opinion pieces studied during a month in 25

newspapers, only 21% were written by women. Although male authorship dominates in all categories, this difference is more pronounced in sports content: while women participate in 10% of these, men do so in the remaining 90%.

Furthermore, it is wise to point out that Spanish sports newspapers remain highly popular despite the press losing ground to new technologies (Faedo *et al.*, 2022). To briefly exemplify this situation, we can point out that *Marca* and *Mundo Deportivo* were newspapers with a large number of readers during the first quarter of 2023. While *Marca* was the most-read newspaper in Spain in the first quarter of 2023 (976,000 readers per day), *Mundo Deportivo* ranked in the top 10 of those with the highest readership in the whole country (232,000 readers per day) (*Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación*, 2023).

After reviewing some of the most relevant studies on the employment situation of women in both international and Spanish sports journalism, this research takes a theoretical stance based on three main ideas that complement each other: the theory of the “pseudo-feminization” (Soriano *et al.* 2005) of sports journalism, the idea that women are outsiders (Hardin & Shain, 2006; Ramon *et al.*, 2020) due to their gender, and the “symbolic annihilation” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 2000) that they suffer in the media.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research technique applied for this study is quantitative content analysis, which describes, in an objective, systematic, and quantitative way, the manifest content of the communication (Berelson, 1952). We analyzed the journalistic pieces published (only where authorship was identified) between 20 November and 18 December 2022 in the print versions of the oldest sports newspapers published in Spain: *Mundo Deportivo* and *Marca* (founded in 1906 and 1938, respectively). The period above was studied because that is when the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 occurred.

The journalistic pieces in which authorship could be identified accounted for 67.4% of the published (see Table 1). Those signed by women were studied, except on specific occasions when the production of men was also analyzed, to make some comparisons. The following variables were analyzed for each of the journalistic pieces: a) Date, b) Author's name, c) Author's sex, d) Journalistic genre (informative/interpretative/opinion)<sup>1</sup>, e) Sports discipline, f) Sex of the sports competition, and g) Cover page<sup>2</sup>. All of them were coded and worked with Microsoft Excel tables and filters.

In addition, it was identified that 1) the hierarchical positions and 2) the journalistic team in charge of working with information on Qatar 2022 from each of the newspapers. These data were obtained directly from the pages of the newspapers.

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1 Informative (news and briefs), interpretative (chronicles, reports, interviews), opinion (analysis, columns, reviews, editorials, and comic strips).

2 The variable “front page” refers to whether or not the piece of journalism analyzed appears on the newspaper's front page.

Table 1

Study sample

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Total number of articles	5.057	2.523	2.534
With an element of authorship	67,4% (3.409)	52,6% (1.324)	82,2% (2.085)
No element of authorship	32,6% (1.652)	47,8% (1.199)	17,9% (453)

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2

Authorship of articles

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Men	81,8% (2.786)	73% (966)	87,3% (1.820)
Women	13% (445)	23,6% (312)	6,4% (133)
Not detectable	5,5% (178)	13,5% (46)	6,3% (132)

Source: own elaboration.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 JOURNALISTS CONSPICUOUS BY THEIR ABSENCE

The first results indicate a notable absence of women in the authorship of articles. Whether individually in each newspaper or in general, men clearly dominate (see Table 2). While in *Mundo Deportivo*, women participated in 23.6% of the creation of articles, in *Marca*, they participated in an even lower percentage, 6.4%. Therefore, as Faedo *et al.* (2022) and Franks and O'Neill (2016) explain, female journalists have low participation in producing information. The percentages obtained show that women continue to be the outsiders that Hardin and Shain (2006) mentioned: their presence in news and sports journalism is limited.

From another perspective, another critical element to highlight is the roles played by female journalists during the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar. During the competition, both newspapers had a team in charge of reporting on the World Cup on all the days studied. In both cases, the situation is worrying. In the case of *Mundo Deportivo*, the newspaper presented its team under the title "*El once del Mundial*", and out of eleven people, only one woman appeared: Cristina Cubero, deputy editor. The situation of *Marca* is similar: they reported a team of ten people under the name "*Despliegue Marca Qatar*", and Marta Pérez was the only woman.

On the other hand, when trying to identify the journalistic genres in which women worked, the research comes up against the findings of Alonso-Allende *et al.* (2019) and Faedo *et al.* (2022): women journalists have limited participation in opinion articles (see Table 3). Their presence is distributed between informative and interpretative pieces, but their presence is not significant in producing opinion pieces. The case of *Marca* is the most critical: the participation of women in this type of article only represents 6%.

**Table 3***Journalistic genres of the articles written by women.*

Journalistic Genres	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Informative	40,7% (181)	36,9% (115)	49,7% (66)
Interpretative	41,3% (184)	42% (131)	39,8% (53)
Opinion	18% (80)	21,1% (66)	10,5% (14)

*Source: own elaboration.*

## 4.2 SPORTING COMPETITIONS: IN WHICH ONES DO THEY HAVE THE MOST IMPACT?

On the other hand, when examining the sports competitions in which the female journalists mostly worked, it can be seen that football dominated by far in both newspapers: 72.8% (227) in *Mundo Deportivo* and 70.7% in *Marca* (94) (see Table 4), which makes total sense; during the period analyzed, a football event took place. This dominance of football may also be due to the “footballisation” (Rojas-Torrijos, 2012) that sports journalism suffers from: football reigns over all sports and leaves the rest in the background. As football is the basis of the journalistic business, sports journalism has almost become football journalism (Rojas-Torrijos, 2012).

**Table 4***Sporting disciplines of articles written by women.*

Sport	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	Sport	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	Sport	<i>Marca</i>
Football	72,1% (321)	Football	72,8% (227)	Football	70,7% (94)
Athletics	6,7% (30)	Athletics	4,9% (15)	Athletics	11,3% (15)
Swimming	2,9% (13)	Swimming	3,8% (12)	Basketball	3% (4)
Other sports	18,2% (81)	Other sports	18,6% (58)	Other sports	15% (20)

*Source: own elaboration.*

Beyond the sporting disciplines, the sex of the sporting competitions the women worked with was identified. The majority did so with competitions practiced by men. Therefore, in this case, what is described by authors such as Boczek *et al.* (2023) and Organista *et al.* (2019), who explain that women tend to work with sports played by women, is not fulfilled.

In addition, the data in Table 5 shows a large majority of information about men, both in *Mundo Deportivo* and *Marca* (see Table 5). Although a men’s World Cup was indeed held during the period analyzed, the supremacy of information about men was overwhelming. Therefore, as Ortega and San Miguel (2016) explain, the media make women athletes invisible, which contributes to a systematic absence of women’s sports, in contrast to an over-supply of men’s sports.



**Table 5***Sex of sports competitions in articles written by women*

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Men	82% (365)	83,3% (260)	79% (105)
Women	9,5% (42)	8,7% (27)	11,2% (15)
Mixt	8,5% (38)	8% (25)	9,8% (13)

*Source: own elaboration.*

### 4.3 MANAGEMENT AND COVER: INVISIBILISATION AT ITS BEST

On the other hand, the positions within the hierarchical structure of the newspapers were identified according to what they reported during the period studied. In the case of *Mundo Deportivo*, out of fifteen people mentioned as responsible for different areas of the newspaper, only one is a woman, and it is precisely the same one who is part of the team in charge of covering Qatar 2022: Cristina Cubero (deputy editor). The situation at *Marca* is just as serious: out of 17 people identified as responsible for different areas, only one was a woman: Yolanda Santander (editor-in-chief). Therefore, as mentioned by Caro *et al.* (2004) and Román-San-Miguel *et al.* (2021), women do not seem to have presence within the hierarchical structures of the media.

Finally, all the information on the front pages during the studied period was analyzed. The front page is the place where the most impor-

tant articles of the newspaper are reflected, as it seeks to provoke the attention of the eventual reader (Alonso-Allende *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, it is positioned as a central element for newspapers. The study of this variable aimed to identify how many front-page stories were produced by women.

The results showed that the participation of women is negligible and that men monopolize most of them. In the case of *Mundo Deportivo*, women only participate in 14.2%. In *Marca*, this percentage is even lower; they only take part in creating 3.9% of the information on the front pages. If we look at the total of all the data published on the front pages of the two newspapers, we can see that women participate in 8.1%, while men participate in 91.3% of the cases (see Table 5).

**Table 6***Authorship of all articles appearing on the covers*

	<i>Mundo Deportivo + Marca</i>	<i>Mundo Deportivo</i>	<i>Marca</i>
Total	309	127	182
Men	91,3% (282)	85,9% (109)	95,1% (173)
Women	8,1% (25)	14,2% (18)	3,9% (7)
No element of authorship	0,9% (3)	0,8% (1)	1,1% (2)

*Source: own elaboration.*



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows a poor presence of women journalists in producing journalistic pieces in the Spanish sports press. Although women in both newspapers are relegated in all the variables analyzed, it should be noted that the situation is worse in *Marca* than in *Mundo Deportivo*. In the Madrid newspaper, women are less present in the authorship of the information, producing opinion articles, and creating the articles published on the front pages. Therefore, this research corroborates what Soriano *et al.* (2005) explained almost 20 years ago: there is a “pseudo-feminization” in the Spanish sports press that implies that women’s participation in journalism is more an appearance than a reality. As Hardin and Shain (2006) and Ramon *et al.* mentioned, women continue to be outsiders.

With such a low level of representation and such evident marginalization, it is necessary to think that barriers may hinder their participation and representation in Spanish sports newspapers. This limited participation is directly linked to the “symbolic annihilation” proposed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) and Tuchman (2000). The news agenda needs diverse voices to ensure women’s and men’s equal representation in newspapers.

On the other hand, beyond the number of women involved in producing information, the low number of women in the teams assigned to cover the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar is also worrying. This poor representation in such a sporting event only demonstrates the lack of confidence in women’s journalistic work. It helps to perpetuate a gap between men and women that seems to have no end in sight.

Along the same lines, the fact that only one woman is reflected in each newspaper man-

agement team confirms what Román-San-Miguel *et al.* (2021) explained: the positions of responsibility and management in the media are monopolized by men. A glass ceiling still imposes difficulties and obstacles that do not allow women to progress regarding newsroom leadership. Women journalists need more opportunities to climb the ladder in sports media.

Additionally, women have almost zero participation on the front pages, which is significantly alarming. As Alonso-Allende *et al.* (2019) explain, the front page is the showcase that brings the reader the most important articles of the newspaper. Therefore, is the information produced by women journalists not relevant enough to be on the front page of newspapers? Both men’s and women’s voices need to be equally represented on such a central element of the newspaper.

In short, it is essential that, from its place, the sports press collaborates to combat inequalities between men and women. As Salido Fernández (2021) explains, “It is essential that the sports media industries implement actions aimed at eradicating this inequality because only by encouraging greater participation of women in all stages of the news production chain” (p. 43). They must help to build a more caring and egalitarian society, which they can do by: a) promoting the participation of women in this journalistic format to close the gender gap; b) appointing them more equitably in the production of information; c) giving them more access to leadership positions.

Although the results do not allow to confirm the absence of women in Spanish sports journalism in general, they do show some really worrying data regarding the sports press in particular. The situation of women in journalism is a phenomenon worthy of study from different perspectives. This work can serve as a

starting point for future analyses. For example, it would be interesting to transfer this study to the digital field and new technologies: will their participation be just as scarce there? On the other hand, the analysis could be extended to other Spanish sports newspapers or even to radio and television: Would Qatar 2022 have had extensive participation of women journalists, or would the situation have been as unequal as in the press?

Beyond quantitative studies, looking at the phenomenon from a more qualitative perspective

would be interesting. For example, it would be interesting to analyze, beyond the numbers, how women experience these inequalities, if they suffer any discrimination, and if they believe that journalistic pieces are produced considering the gender perspective, among other questions.

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