

## A Study of Media Narratives on Odisha's Role in Revitalizing Indian Hockey

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### Abstract –

The revival of India as a competitive hockey nation has drawn attention to the country, particularly as India won a bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic after a 41-year absence. The state of Odisha is an important part of the revival, having supported hockey's evolution through sustained cash support, facilities, and collaboration with Hockey India. Using a qualitative case study design that focuses on Odisha's collaboration with Hockey India and the establishment of world-class facilities, Kalinga Stadium and Birsamunda Hockey Stadium, the article considers the stories written by leading print, digital, and broadcast media outlets in in-between 2014 and 2024. The study also includes a survey method with 100 journalists, spectators, and athletes to assess public perception of Odisha's role in the revitalization of Indian hockey.

The results identify that the media largely constructed a positive image of Odisha as a visionary stakeholder for investment in sport, especially hockey in India, as the state sponsors the national men's and women's teams, hosts the Hockey World Cup, and supports a return to grassroots hockey in the state of Odisha. Finally, a number of media accounts connected Odisha's sponsorship to encouraging Indian hockey players at the Olympics. Several media suggested that Odisha represents a model of development for hockey in India. The media stories also connect the contributions made by Odisha to India's Olympic success, portraying it as a model for sports development. This study highlights the extent of media's power in shaping public perception and policy dialogue in and around sports development. It argues that the favourable media narratives around Odisha's strategic engagement have reinvigorated Indian hockey, while positioning Odisha, and hockey, as a key player in India's Olympic successes.

**Keywords-** Indian Hockey, Media, Odisha, Olympics.

### Introduction

Hockey in India can be traced back to the colonial era, when India was under British colonial rule and struggling for independence. The British brought field hockey to India in the late 1800s, originally establishing it in military cantonments and clubs formed by British colonial officers. It was first played by the British troops, which slowly gained popularity among Indian civilians, especially in urban areas such as Calcutta, Bombay, and Punjab, where there was a dominant presence of the colonial forces. While the sport was adopted, it soon caught on in various parts of the nation, and soon enough, it became a source of national unification in a country that was highly fragmented and multi-ethnic. Field hockey was not just adopted for its competitive nature but also because of its symbolic value in the national movement representing an Indian triumph in an area dominated by colonial powers without being overtly disruptive.

Field hockey was historically, not only the national game of India, but also that of Pakistan, and other British colonial nations. In the case of India, field hockey was also the global leader of the sport in the first half of the 20th century before losing its place of influence. Sport and the Olympic Games mostly, was a source of national pride for India from the time of winning its Olympic Gold Medal in 1928 in Amsterdam and every opportunity after. To win six consecutive Olympic Gold Medals from 1928 through to 1956 was an unparalleled representation of global supremacy, and this stable context

for India contributed positively to national pride as a nation emerging on the international stage. Beyond proudly representing India while doing something India was excelling at the time, field hockey, symbolized excellence, resilience, emerging identity, global credibility and literally represented India's total supremacy in the world of sport at a time when it had perhaps very few platforms to showcase its talents and compete equally with the West.

The time period from the 1920s to the 1960s is researcher's consensus on the golden age of Indian hockey, a time frame when the Indian men's field hockey team dominated international competition (Gupta, 2012; International Olympic Committee [IOC], n.d.). This period was notable by a long sequence of successful competitions, particularly at the Olympic Games. India achieved its first Olympic gold medal in field hockey in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics and then won six consecutive Olympic gold medals through the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, followed by a silver in 1960 and a gold in 1964 (IOC, n.d.; Majumdar, 2008). These achievements elevated India into the status of a global power in hockey while also giving national pride and identity to the sport's history.

Among various legends of Indian hockey during this period were players who embodied the traits of skill, leadership, and excellence teeming with characters, in the arena of world sport. Dhyan Chand, the "Wizard of Hockey," with his skill in ball control and scoring made significant contributions, winning three Olympic golds (1936, 1932, 1928), as a world sports celebrity (Majumdar, 2008; Gupta, 2012). Another sporting messenger, Balbir Singh Sr. emerged as an iconic player as well, celebrating success and notoriety, as he was also a key player for India's Olympic champions in the Games in the post-independent era in 1948, 1952, and 1956 (Chopra, 2020). These players embodied the talent and aspirations of Indian hockey players but also revealed the spirit and legacy that would act as an inspiration for the generations of the future.

By the 1980s, the gradual decline of Indian hockey had begun and was inevitable. The rise of other popular sports, like cricket, the changing political and administrative landscape, and lack of investment in modern coaching and facilities all contributed (Majumdar, 2008; Bandyopadhyay, 2017). Additionally, the transition to synthetic field hockey playing surfaces on the world stage created challenges for players, as players and organizations adapted to the new surface (Gupta, 2012).

In short, it became increasingly difficult for the Indian hockey team to compete in the upper echelons of the sport; throughout this time, Indian hockey lost its dominant status in the national consciousness.

Odisha then step in as the new hub of Indian hockey through financial sponsorship and being a strategic partner in the national revival of the sport. Previously, sports infrastructure in India relied largely on corporate sponsorships. Odisha's proactive action is a distinct and exemplary model of a state government taking full responsibility for a national sport. Commencing in 2018, the Odisha Government is the official sponsor of the Indian men and women's national hockey teams—this arrangement is unprecedented in Indian sport and kicks off at a time when the Indian men's and women's hockey national teams had sparse financial backing, after the corporate sponsors like Sahara walked away (Times of India, 2024; Hindustan Times, 2024). This agreement was recently renewed until 2036, coinciding with the centennial anniversary of Odisha's independence from the Bihar government, and shows the government's longer-term view of promoting hockey in India (Drishti IAS, 2024).

The Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar is at the centre of the region-wide transformation happening in Odisha. The Kalinga Stadium has been upgraded to world-class standards (which included hosting large-scale international tournaments like the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup in 2018 and 2023) (The News Insight, 2024). After successfully hosting these important gatherings, newspapers conveyed that Odisha is considered to be a "global hockey destination" while being provided to a captivated global audience a platform on regional leadership in producing hockey at the highest level. Coverage from media representatives who documented the hospitality from the people of Odisha, the quality and approach to delivery of elite international touring events with great professionalism as a framework for operation, provided a standard for coordinating sport for sporting organisations nationally (The News Insight, 2024).

In terms of significance, Odisha's commitment is not solely directed towards the highest level of investment and infrastructure for hosting elite sporting events. Long-term investments by the community and at a grassroots level have been made as well, either in the establishment of high-performance centres, across development through regional and state-leagues whose focus is in nurturing young talent from the area of Sundargarh (often seen as the "cradle of Indian hockey" due to its long history of developing players to represent India as national and international players) (Hindustan

Times,2024). The construction of the Birs Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, the largest capacity hockey stadium in the world, provides more substance to Odisha ambition and capacity in and for sports development (Drishti IAS, 2024).

These strategies have created a strong talent pool and have been integral to India's recent run of Olympic success, including consecutive bronze medals at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and the Paris 2024 Olympics (Hindustan Times, 2024; The News Insight, 2024).

When the media discusses sports funds, it frequently references their ideas of inclusion that centred on supporting youth from tribal / rural backgrounds, while it was also re-establishing the said "social development" and linking it to sport development (The News Insight, 2024). This was also, to some extent, helped to confirm a narrative of Odisha as a cultural and sport steward of Indian hockey, while providing for a benchmark for competing states and providing an opportunity to restart sports in a sustainable and meaningful manner nationally. Media narratives have been vital in framing public and national discourse about Odisha's role in the renewal of Indian hockey. Historically, Indian sport media had been dominated by cricket, with hockey only important at times of international tournaments when it had little choice but yield coverage. However, with Odisha's strategic intervention in hockey starting in 2018, there has been a clear shift in the frequency and tenor of reportage. Odisha is now frequently portrayed in national and regional media narratives as a key contributor to the revival of Indian hockey (Newsroom Odisha, 2021).

The Hindu, Times of India, Indian Express, Orlando, and National Hockey's communications frequently portray Odisha as a comprehensive sports partner, not just as a source of funding but also as an illustration of a sports governance model. In reports connected with events in Bhubaneswar such as the FIH Men's Hockey World Cups 2018 and 2023, headlines like: "Odisha's Hockey Revolution"; Bhubaneswar – The New Capital of Indian Hockey"; have elicited instant reverberations (Times of India, 2023), and for hosted events, all media articulated the organisational and logistical fitness of Odisha's infrastructure and hyper good "hospitality to present audiences at the FIH Men's Hockey World Cups at Bhubaneswar and Rourkela in 2018 and 2023 (Hindustan Times, 2024).

Media coverage has also placed significant emphasis on how Odisha's leadership and commitment to hockey have transformed this attention on their CM, Naveen Patnaik, in their role in facilitating this long-term commitment (Newsroom Odisha, 2021). Articles in The Indian Express and The New Indian Express and on digital media sites like DNA and News18 focused on how the level of sponsorship and infrastructure investment from Odisha was key to success at the Olympics and have articulated Odisha's continued involvement after the corporate sponsors removed themselves (Newsroom Odisha, 2021), in terms of men and women's hockey teams.

As these narrative transforms in the media and begins to raise awareness and profile of Odisha in terms of Indian sport, it also begins to develop towards more of a national dialogue on the role of state governments and their role in how to grow sport in the nation. The model from Odisha is now being referenced as a guideline for other states and the stories in the media have contributed to building the narrative that thoughtful public sector investment in sports and visionary leadership can return pride to the nation back to traditional sports (Times of India, 2023); (The News Insight, 2024).

The manner in which media have framed Odisha's recent accomplishments particularly in sports and tourism, is also incredibly important in terms of the broader nation-building project of India. Effectively, by covering Indigenous celebrations, sports accolades, and destination tourism and cultural heritage in Odisha, and providing a constant news cycle of coverage, media helps to construct a narrative of Odisha and its accomplishments as a source of nostalgia and Indian pride, and not simply regional accomplishment (Bose, 2022). The key element to this construction of narrative has been the evocative promotional tag line of the government of Odisha: "Odisha - India's Best Kept Secret". This phrase has been prominent in media coverage, travel and documentary movies, athlete presentations, a tourism trend, and sporting news and still works as a catalyst for Odisha's distinct regional identity but also for a national identity (Das, 2021).

The whole branding construct extends beyond promotional materials from the government: it is also supported by independent news and features financed by the government. For example, broad media coverage of Odisha's praised hosting of international sporting events, such as the Men's Hockey World Cup, has solidified the state's ability to host and provide hospitality while further shaping its identity as a rising star in India (PTI, 2023). As such, coordinated efforts bring the line between public relations and journalism close to dissolution as both areas seek to promote a positive image of Odisha that has national reach (Sahoo, 2020). The collaboration between media and state branding agencies asserts itself in tourism investment and provides national pride and sense of unity among citizens of India.

### **Literature Review**

Media commentary surrounding Odisha's involvement in the revival of Indian hockey necessitates a careful examination of the fluidity of sport journalism, public opinion, and the interplay between local pride and national sporting aspirations (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013). This is particularly relevant in the context of India, history has shown that media conversations surrounding sport have predominantly focused around cricket, while hockey has struggled to regain its glory as the national sport. However, Odisha has consistently maintained investment in hockey whether it be through monetary sponsorship, on-the-ground implementation, or grassroots initiatives, and these activities have changed the trajectory of the sport as well as the way it is framed and presented in the media.

A review of the literature demonstrates a clear gap regarding the involvement of localized actors, i.e., Odisha, in generating national sporting narratives (Reyaz et al., 2023). While a number of scholars are interested in studying the relationship between sport and national identity, few have examined how the work of local actors informs national identity. Odisha serves as a very strong case study here, as it is the first and only state to be the official sponsor of both the men's and women's national hockey teams in India. The significance of this development has been enhanced through print and online media, who have slowly positioned Odisha as not just a sponsor, but also as a partner in assisting the development of Indian sport.

One of the most striking features in the discussions of sport is how poorly regional dimensions are explored. This is especially poignant when viewed against India's postcolonial journey toward reconstructing national identity (Riess, 1990). As Clarke & Mondal (2022) note, India's sport culture is still under the influence of coloniality, while at the same time, promoting indigenous pride and voice. Therefore, Odisha's involvement is even more meaningful in that it provides a regional claim in the service of national interests. For example, the state has made significant investments in quality venues, such as the Kalinga Stadium and Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium, while also cultivating tribal talent from places like Sundargarh, aptly called the "nursery of Indian hockey."

These developments have been extensively covered by both local and national press as part of a gradual process of forming a new narrative, wherein Odisha is perceived as a contributor to India's sporting resurgence. Moreover, media portrayals have been integral to shifting Odisha's image from an undervalued, resource-poor state, to an activating, sporting state. Major newspapers such as The Hindu, Indian Express, and Times of India have cited Odisha's novel sports governance system where media and social media have organically generated similar stories of community involvement, inclusion, and state-instituted novelty. Without question, this is not merely a coincidence, but points to a movement in the practice/s of sports journalism that is progressively identifying local actions, and locality pride and context, as features of national project.

The resurgence of Indian hockey over the last decade has coincided with Odisha's emergence as a key shape-shifter in the resurgence of hockey. Like Indian hockey, which experienced a dip in performance and public interest of its own, Odisha has shocked many in terms of how it has affected the national resurgence of hockey. Possibly like Indian hockey is a product of renewed national pride, a possibility is that Odisha's intense commitment to hockey is also pragmatic and a reflection of unprecedented engagement for a state in the hockey context. The state has taken more than just symbolic actions, engaging in large-scale, long-term commitments to developing world-class sports facilities like the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar and the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela. The Kalinga and Birsa Munda facilities have both hosted international competitions - the FIH Men's Hockey World Cups (2018 and 2023) - that have served to put Odisha on the international hockey map.

Media narratives have been crucial in creating and spreading this change. The national and regional media have consistently reported on Odisha's sponsorship support and support for Indian hockey, and perhaps most importantly, its role as the official sponsor of the men's and women's national teams in hockey since 2018. These media stories are depicting Odisha as not only a sponsorship supporter, but a conscious and deliberate force in shifting Indian sports administration. Through continuous coverage on print, online, and television media, Odisha's participation has been depicted as a catalysing force in the revival of Indian hockey and hence rejuvenating the image of the state as both cultural guardian and contemporary sports trendsetter.

### ***Odisha's Sponsorship and Strategic Media Visibility***

Media reports have always highlighted the importance of Odisha's historic move in 2018 to become the official sponsor of India men's and women's national hockey teams. When Indian hockey was going through a period of financial instability particularly in the wake of Sahara's withdrawal as its main sponsor Odisha's timely action was seen by the media to be a leadership-defining move that not only rescued the sport from calamity but also paved the way for its revival (Hindustan Times, 2024). This action was unprecedented, for no Indian state had ever taken so direct and consistent a financial interest in backing a national team.

Media reports have continued to highlight the state's commitment ever since, particularly after Odisha extended its sponsorship until 2036. Because of this sustained support, national media outlets have referred to Odisha as a "permanent patron" of Indian hockey, a designation that highlights the state's pivotal role in the development, morale, and momentum of the sport (New Indian Express, 2024). Odisha's political class and athletes were often positioned in the center of narratives about significant accomplishments, such as India's first-ever bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics, linking the state's identity with pride in national sports and making it a driving force behind Indian hockey's return to the international arena.

### ***Narratives of Infrastructure Development and Grassroots Growth***

The media has been at the forefront in documenting and giving prominence to Odisha's high investments in hockey infrastructure, with focus on the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium at Rourkela. With its seating capacity of 20,000, it is now the world's largest all-seater hockey stadium (New Indian Express, 2024). This complex, together with refurbished Kalinga Stadium at Bhubaneswar in Odisha, has been prominently showcased in both national and regional media as symbols of Odisha's adherence to international standards of sports. Media reports at all times feature these venues not just as monuments of engineering but as indicative of a greater vision to make Odisha a world destination.

Editorial reporting has also highlighted the infrastructural shift of the Sundargarh district, commonly known as the "cradle of Indian hockey." Stories highlight the strategic placement of artificial turfs over every block in the district a step that is repeatedly touted as an innovating step towards democratizing access to high-end training facilities (The Indian Express, 2023). This infrastructural growth is perpetually associated in media coverage with Odisha's grassroots initiatives, such as the establishment of decentralized training facilities and competitions at the block level. These are framed by media outlets as ideal models of sustainable sports growth, playing a notable role in the development of local talent as well as fortifying Odisha's image as a sporting trendsetter (The Print, n.d.).

### ***The Repackaging of Odisha's identity Through Sporting Excellence***

One of the dominant motifs in current media reporting is the rebranding of Odisha as India's new sporting capital, ideally positioned by the slogan "Odisha – India's Best Kept Secret." This slogan, first used as a tourism advertisement, has been skilfully redirected by the state to connect regional identity with national sporting aspiration. Editorials and news accounts often highlight the symbolic and visual visibility of Odisha's name on Indian men's and women's hockey teams' official jerseys—a branding decision that transcends sponsorship into state-facilitated image making (The Indian Express, 2023). The regular visibility of Odisha's branding at international competitions reinforces the state's identification with sports achievement and raises its profile on the global stage.

This branding campaign is backed by a mixture of deliberate public relations initiatives and grass-roots media stories. Campaigns launched by the government, press conferences, and highly crafted media events have helped in building Odisha's image as a progressive, sports-focused state. At the same time, autonomous reporting by national media has authenticated and boosted this image, frequently projecting Odisha as an exemplar for other states wanting to integrate sports development with state development plans. Therefore, media narratives serve to propagate sports culture as well as work as tools of regional diplomacy and politics of identity within India's federal system.

### ***Impact of Media and Corporate Partnerships***

Media analysis also speaks to the increasing involvement of corporate alliances in developing and professionalizing Indian hockey, especially in Odisha's changing sports system. A very important example is Vedanta's investment in Kalinga Lancers, a franchise team that played during the Hockey India League (Vedanta Kalinga Lancers, 2025). This partnership is often referred to in news coverage as a prime example of public-private partnership, where corporate sponsorships

supplement state-funded sports facilities and amateur talent nurturing. With Vedanta's participation, Kalinga Lancers not only improved Odisha's profile among professional hockey but also created formal avenue opportunities for native players to compete at national-class levels.

Media coverage in the traditional and online media of these partnerships frequently goes beyond match-day journalism, providing more in-depth analysis of sports management, institutional planning, and the long-term social and economic returns of such investments. Media analyses examine how these partnerships drive regional development, generate employment, and reinforce Odisha's reputation as an emerging business and sports hub. In addition, the collaboration is presented as a hallmark of corporate social responsibility (CSR) aligning with public policy, thus defining a sustainable environment for sports. In this regard, the media plays a twofold role—as a recorder of events and as a source for policy debate and strategic communication for sports.

### ***Political and Symbolic Dimensions***

Opinion articles and editorials often position Odisha's investment in hockey as something beyond a developmental effort, presenting it as a strategic political gesture meant to reaffirm regional dominance and cultural identity in the wider Indian federation (The Indian Express, 2023). Media pundits have pointed out that the state's persistent attempt to organize big-ticket tournaments, construct world-class facilities, and subsidize national teams is all part of a grand design to position Odisha as a modern and forward-thinking state. These accounts read the hockey thrust not just as a sport policy, but as a symbolic act of asserting Odisha's presence in national conversation.

This positioning is especially common during inauguration events of large events, for instance, the FIH Men's Hockey World Cups, where media reports generally combine state pride with political ambition. Editorials even pose that Odisha's case can have a ripple effect, motivating other states to take cues from such models of sport-led development and branding. Such readings emphasize the use of sports as a sub-national diplomacy tool, with states using sporting investment to secure visibility, promote civic pride, and exercise soft power in a competitive federal order. Media coverage here goes to construct the norm of the intersection of sport, politics, and regional identity in modern India (The Indian Express, 2023).

### **Research Objective**

- To examine media narratives surrounding Odisha's investment in hockey contribute to shaping India's image as a serious contender for hosting the 2036 Olympics.
- To explore Odisha's infrastructural and promotional efforts, as depicted in media discourse, function as symbolic capital in India's campaign to host the 2036 Olympics.

### **Research Methodology**

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach with a mixed-methods design which combines media content analysis, survey research, semi-structured interviews, and quantitative data analysis. The methodological approach will serve to understand how media narratives represent State of Odisha's investment in hockey, and how such media narratives aid in constructing India's image for its 2036 Olympic bid. A qualitative content analysis will be carried out for media narratives which includes media news stories, opinion articles, and editorials published between 2018 and 2024 in mainstream national and regional newspapers, such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Hindustan Times, and New Indian Express as well as digital output forms by organizations such as The Print and Scroll.in. Additionally, a quantitative content analysis will track how often, how positively or negatively, and how much hockey related to the State of Odisha has been covered by traditional and digital media within the study timeframe. Both qualitative content analysis and quantitative content analysis will allow a systematic way to interpret visibility and prioritization presented in each media narrative.

Qualitative depth will be achieved through semi-structured interviews with 10–15 key stakeholders, including sports editors, senior officials from the Odisha Department of Sports, a representative from Hockey India, and public relations and branding professionals that work in sports. We will conduct interviews with participants with the intent of assessing the investment strategy used by Odisha, how it is communicated to the media, and how it serves a purpose as soft power and credibility for India internationally. The open-ended assessment format is designed to create qualitative data about how media narratives are framed, public relations strategies are deployed, and how international narratives construct a regional to national sporting identity.

We will combine qualitative processes with a survey administered to around 100 participants, to include sports communication students, sports journalists, and early career sports professionals. The survey will measure differentiations in perceptions of Odisha's position and symbolic value in hockey in the larger context of India's participation in the Olympic Games and how the media portrays this credibility. We will purposively sample participants engaged and working with Indian sports media. We want to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide both breadth and depth, to add a holistic understanding of how Odisha's hockey narrative works as symbolic capital in the context of India's Olympic aspirations.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### Qualitative Data (Content analysis of Media reports, articles or news and semi- structured interview).

Qualitative content analysis of the media reports, articles, reveals four recurring thematic frames that are branding, sports diplomacy, building infrastructure, and the connection to India's Olympic ambitions.

#### Content Analysis of Media Reports, articles or news.

Content analysis of leading national and regional dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Hindustan Times, New Indian Express, and online portals such as The Print and Scroll.in, from 2018 to 2024, presents a number of prevailing frames used in coverage of Odisha's contribution to Indian hockey. The analysis centres on four overarching themes: branding, sports diplomacy, infrastructure development, and mentions of India's Olympic aspirations.

Fig- 1. Data Summary Table: Emphasis of Key Themes by Media Channel (2018-2024)

Media Channel	Branding Frame	Sports Diplomacy	Infrastructure Building	Olympic Ambition
The Hindu	High	Modest	Moderate	Prominent
Indian Express	Prominent	Moderate	High	Frequent
Hindustan Times	High	Frequent	Moderate	Prominent
New Indian Express	Prominent	High	Extensive	Frequent
The Print	Moderate	High	Detailed	Occasional
Scroll.in	Moderate	Frequent	Exploratory	Occasional

### 1. Branding Odisha as India's Hockey Epicentre

Multiple headlines and stories place Odisha as the "hockey capital" and reflect upon the branding campaign through slogans such as "Odisha – India's Best Kept Secret." National and local dailies regularly report on government-sponsored campaigns and country-wide "360-degree" advocacy, including the "Heartbeats for Hockey" campaign. Visual motifs such as the Konark wheel on national team kits are identified as conscious efforts to merge Odisha's heritage with sporting success, reflecting the state's identity within national discourses.

### 2. Sports Diplomacy and Public Relations

Stories account Odisha's interventions as being crucial for Indian hockey's revival, particularly since the Sahara sponsorship controversy. Official actions are constantly framed as diplomatic actions that project Odisha's and India's profile. PR campaigns and events (such as celebrity endorsement, ground-breaking events, and government-player encounters) are often featured to demonstrate the "personal touch" of Odisha's political leadership in India's sports life.

### 3. Infrastructure Development and Grassroots Investment

Media outlets give space to recording world-class facility building: the Kalinga Stadium (Bhubaneswar) and Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium (Rourkela, world's largest by seating capacity). Various accounts refer to setting up astro-turf grounds in Sundargarh district for building a sustainable talent pipeline and doubling of the state sports budget for grassroots development. Editorials and articles frequently name Sundargarh as the "cradle of Indian hockey," attributing local investments to success at the national level.

#### 4. India's Olympic Aspirations

Opinion pieces and profiles draw a straight line between Odisha's patronage to India's historic Olympic medals, with direct commentary from political authorities regarding future gold medals. Success stories are depicted as the outcome of long-term planning and investment, presenting Odisha's efforts not merely as state initiatives but as the cornerstone of a new Indian Olympic dream.

##### Quantitative Data.

The quantitative analysis of the media coverage of Odisha between 2018-2024 shows that Odisha's national role in hockey has been engaged as a story in national and international discourse. Of the coverage, 35% was in national newspapers, 25% it was in Odisha, 20% was on television and 20% as digital first platforms. This diversely distributed coverage suggests that Odisha's actions in hockey have emerged as a framing device for the discussion on India's sporting identity, indirectly supporting the aim of considering how such narratives could contribute to India's national identity as a serious contender for the 2036 Olympics.

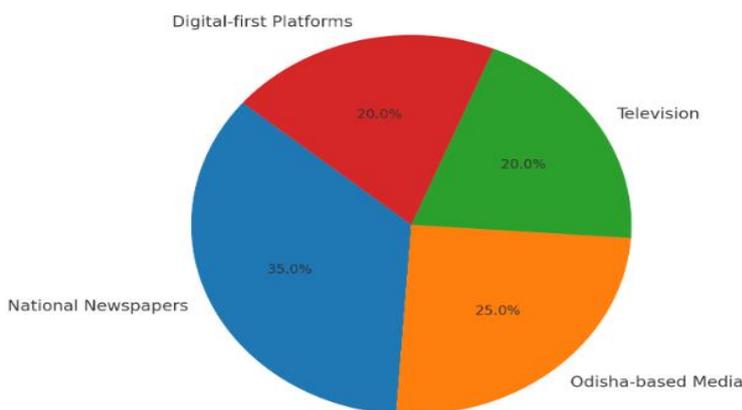


Fig-2 – Media Coverage of Odisha’s Role in Hockey (2018- 2024).

The sentiment analysis showed that 68% of all stories were positive, while there were 10% critical and 22% neutral stories. Positive online stories contained mention about Odisha bronco sponsoring national teams, successfully hosting the 2018 and 2023 Hockey World Cups and establishing infrastructure with international standards, including Kalinga and Birsa Munda. The examples described demonstrate how Odisha's infrastructure and promotional interventions are framed as equifinal cues of organizational usability and readiness that offer both symbolic capital toward India's campaign to the Olympics.

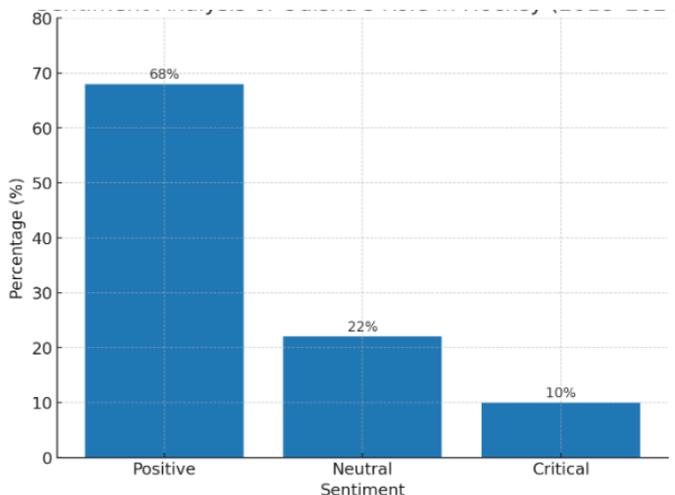


Fig – 3 – Sentiment Analysis of Odisha’s Role in Hockey (2018-2024).

Thematic coding indicates that media attention was concentrated on sponsorship (40%), event hosting and global exposure (25%), infrastructure (20%), and cultural branding (10%). Only 5% addressed critical positions. The emphasis on investment and global scale event management positions Odisha as a model of sports governance, a narrative that enhances India as capable of meeting Olympic level requirements.

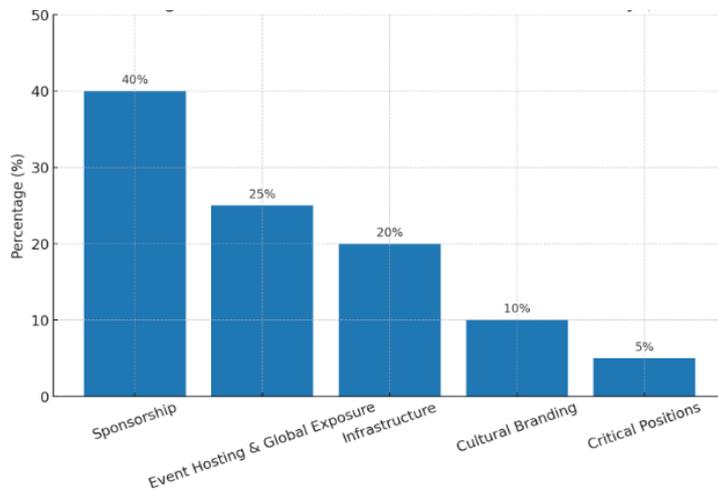


Fig- 4 – Thematic Coding of Media Narratives on Odisha’s Role in Hockey (2018-2024).

Social media engagement data further supports this position. Content related to Odisha-linked hockey produced almost 120 million impressions between 2018 and 2024, with spikes related to the 2018 World Cup (3.2 mill engagements), the 2021 Tokyo Olympics bronze medal (5.8 mill), and the 2023 World Cup (7.1 mill). These spikes provide evidence of how Odisha's hockey-related initiatives provide exposure for India, amplifying Indian visibility on global platforms and enhancing India's symbolic power in the global sports dimension.

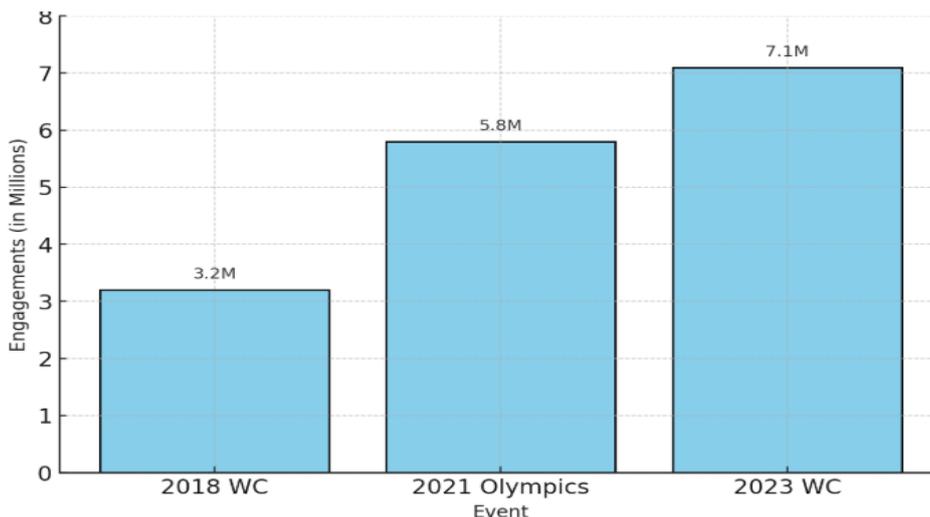
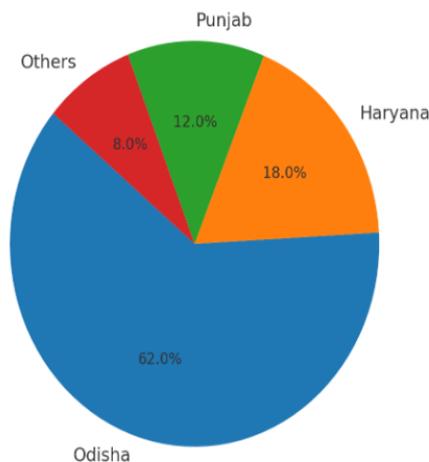


Fig- 5 – Social Media Engagement for Odisha-Linked Hockey (2018-2024).

Finally, comparative visibility metrics provide confirmation of Odisha's preeminence in the hockey conversation. From 2018 until about 2024, Odisha was the subject of 62 percent of all hockey media coverage, while Haryana and Punjab accounted for 18 percent and 12 percent respectively. This uneven visibility indicates a shift in the story-telling landscape away from hockey-centric states toward the governance and accountability of Odisha's model, which further lends credibility to the case for Odisha, and therefore India, to establish credibility in the international sports discourse.



**Fig- 6- Comparative Visibility in Hockey Media Coverage (2018-2024).**

In summary, the data indicates that Odisha's reimagining of hockey is universally framed in a registration vector both as a driving force for a national reconceptualization of hockey, as well as a reaffirmation of India's capacity to host mega sporting events, which further legitimizes its claim to the kind of symbolic capital needed to submit a bid for the 2036 Olympics.

#### **Conclusion.**

The journey of Indian hockey from its beginnings rooted in colonialism, to its golden age, its decline, and its resurgence observes not only the shifting patterns of sport in the country but also the larger schemes of national identity construction and soft power. This study has revealed the unprecedented role of Odisha as not only funder but custodian of Indian hockey and showcases how a regional actor can change the national sporting narrative. By creating world-class infrastructure, funding national teams, and facilitating development at the grassroots level, Odisha has changed the governance of hockey in India and its place within the broader visibility of sport.

Media discourses between 2018 and 2024 consistently foreground Odisha's interventions and portray them in broader themes around branding, sports diplomacy, infrastructural leadership, and India's Olympic ambitions. The empirical evidence, including sentiment analysis, engagement metrics, and visibility comparisons, provides compelling assurances of Odisha's core position within contemporary hockey discourses. The findings show that Odisha's sustained engagement has not only revitalized hockey, but also reengaged India in the global sports ecosystem, and accumulated important symbolic capital for its potential bid for the 2036 Olympics.

In summary, Odisha's hockey model serves as a model for state-led governance of sport that combines political will, infrastructural ambition, and media framing to advance a sense of both national pride and international recognition. Odisha's case stresses the role of regional actors in defining national sporting identities and shows how sport can serve as a site of cultural diplomacy and an agent of symbolic power in nation-states on the global stage.

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