

Media Representation and Celebrity Discourse: Editorial Approaches to Sachin Tendulkar's Retirement

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The retirement of Sachin Tendulkar, unarguably one of the greatest cricketers the world has ever witnessed, was a major landmark in the recent history of sport and generated a widespread media discourse across the world. This paper analyses how differently Indian and foreign media engaged with this celebrity discourse through a comparative analysis of the online editorials of three leading international dailies namely, *The Hindu* (India), *The Guardian* (UK) and *The New York Times* (US) during a given period. During the study, the researcher identified contrasting online editorial approaches (Indian and non-Indian pattern) to the treatment of Tendulkar's retirement. The retirement articles of other Indian greats in these three newspapers were also analysed and compared with the articles on Tendulkar. A number of variables and sub-variables were identified and analysed to discuss the key differences in the two 'patterns' of media representation. The paper concluded that while the Indian pattern idolised Tendulkar and made comparisons to God; the 'non-Indian pattern' was objective and neutral.

Keywords: Comparative analysis, editorials, media discourse, media representation, retirement, Sachin Tendulkar

Sachin Tendulkar is the all-time highest run-scorer in both Tests and One-Dayers, holder of almost all main batting records in the game, and the 'most worshipped cricketer in the world'. Tendulkar started making newspaper headlines ever since he scored a triple century as a fourteen-year old school kid. He went on to score the highest number of centuries in Tests and One-Dayers and is widely regarded as the 'greatest batsman of his generation'. Tendulkar had a 'celebrity status' (Malcolm, 2012) throughout his career and so the massive global media response at the time of his retirement was quite understandable. Along with his fans and followers, there were also widespread media reactions to the news of his retirement.

This paper examines the media portrayal of Tendulkar's retirement in newspaper editorials (online) of three leading national dailies from three different parts of the world – *The Hindu* (India), *The Guardian* (UK), and *The New York Times* (US). To make the study more elaborate and intensive, editorials and op-eds of other newspapers and websites have also been analysed. Articles and editorials from the day, Tendulkar announced his retirement to a week after he stepped on a cricket field for the last time were considered so that it is ensured that no significant piece focusing on his retirement and relevant to the study is left out.

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The researcher identifies a contrasting 'pattern' in the media representation of Tendulkar's retirement and names it 'Indian pattern' and 'non-Indian pattern' while exploring the key differences. This paper argues that the 'Indian pattern', which constitutes articles and editorial pieces written by Indian writers or appeared in Indian media, constantly tried to satisfy their readers by highlighting Tendulkar's brilliance as a cricketer and charisma as a human being. On the other hand, the 'non-Indian pattern', which constitutes online articles and editorials written by non-Indian writers, took a different approach. They were neutral, critical at times, and highlighted other interesting elements concerning Tendulkar and his retirement.

Through a detailed comparative study, the paper sketches the nature of these two patterns and seeks to understand the impact the two styles could have created with the audience. It also analyses the media's treatment, mainly by these three newspapers, of other contemporary Indian greats who played alongside Tendulkar like Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and Anil Kumble and discusses the key similarities and differences in their approach in the context of 'Indian' and 'non-Indian patterns' through literature review and content analysis.

Celebrities in Newspapers

According to a study conducted by 'Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press' in 2007, 87 per cent of people feel celebrities, their scandals and other related news get significant coverage. 54 per cent even blames the media for excessive coverage.¹ A report in the Indian daily '*The Hindu*' dated 3 May, 2011 have also cited newspapers' recent trend of an excessive coverage of celebrity and lifestyle related news². This can be subjected to over-dependence on advertisements due to the increasing pressure to increase the revenue. However, there are also arguments that this can also be due to the common readers' addiction to 'trash' and unimportant news³ (Frassinelli, 2010). It is also estimated that about 92 per cent of the editorial contents of English dailies like *The Sun* and *Mirror* is devoted to celebrity gossip and sports (Rooney, 1998). A similar trend can be seen in some of the other English-speaking countries of the world (Turner, 2000 and Carroll, 2002).

Sport and sport-related news form a major component of newspapers. In fact, sport is said to have even transformed the media (Bernstein and Blain, 2002; Whannel, 1992; Boyle and Haynes, 2000; Brookes, 2002). It is also clear from Bob Franklin's view that celebrities from the world of sport or the royal family turn out to be more newsworthy than other major international news of greater significance (Franklin, 1997).

Tendulkar's Retirement in Newspapers

Sport and sport-related news gains equal mileage in India with most newspapers reserving a good number of pages for this category. In a country where cricket is not just a sport and rather a way of life (Majumdar, 2006), it occupies a major share of the content in Indian media. Since his early days as a cricketer, Sachin Tendulkar gained a lot of media attention. From emotional letters to personal blogs, Tendulkar featured in sports pages and websites more than any other cricketer in the past (Dasgupta, 2013).

The number of articles written about Tendulkar at various stages of his career is limitless. So it was expected that a lot would be said and written when he retires. What was interesting was to note the various aspects those articles would chose to discuss about, considering his long career span and all the things that were already written about him.

Upon careful observation, it can be noticed that the approach in the content of Indian newspapers and the foreign ones were quite different.

The Indian newspapers largely talked about Tendulkar's greatness and his 'God' status in India (Dasgupta, 2013). Majority of those newspapers reminded their readers about what he offered them for 24 long years and warned them about what they would miss from then on. The non-Indian newspapers also mentioned how great a player Tendulkar was but also touched upon some of the other things that need to be looked into at that point of time. There were a couple of online articles from non-Indian authors and those even spoke about Tendulkar as an unfamiliar figure until his retirement or a short while before it. The researcher chose to expand the study to a few online articles like sport based op-eds in websites as well because it is mandatory for a rounded approach of the issues discussed in this paper.

The relevance of this topic accounts to the very limited research done in this area. Sport and media research is an emerging field globally (Bernstein and Blain, 2002) though it hasn't been explored much in India. There are research articles linking sports to other fields like psychology and biochemistry (Gupta, Goswami, Sadhukhan and Mathuri, 1996) and medicine (Ghosh, Ahuja and Khanna, 1985) but not many which deal with analysis of sport in media. A few other articles have discussed Tendulkar as case studies but all of them were again researches in sociology (Nalapat, 2012), advertising (Khatri, 2006) and marketing (Patel and Pratik, 2009), and not mainstream sport and media. There is also some research done on gender studies (Tominari, 2009) and national identity (Malcolm, 2012) linking sport and media but this paper discusses how media (online newspapers editorials in this case) deal with sports stories and how sports personalities (Tendulkar as the centre focus) are portrayed in different ways. A research on the analysis of how mainstream media treats the retirement of sportspersons has never been done before. Moreover, Tendulkar's status as a global icon and the hero of a generation (Rai, 2009) and the stunning worldwide media response on his retirement makes it a very relevant topic of discussion.

Contrast in 'Indian' and 'Non-Indian' Patterns

The central idea of this article was the comparison of three dailies from three different parts of the world – *The Hindu* from India, *The New York Times* from US and *The Guardian* from UK. The argument of the researcher was that the Indian newspaper tried to satisfy their audience by pointing out the greatness of Tendulkar, both as cricketer and human being where as the 'non-Indian' media had a more neutral and critical approach. This contrast was also noticed in majority of other articles and journals from Indian and non-Indian media. The decision to include two newspapers from non-Indian media was to emphasise there is more than one country that follows the same pattern, showing that it is not an editorial stand taken by a particular nation or its national daily. A comparative analysis of a few articles written at the time of his retirement would give a clearer picture.

One of the best examples of this approach by the Indian media would be the article written by Rahul Bhattacharya in the *India Today* (online) on his experience of covering Tendulkar's last first class match. The title of the article itself was 'Among the believers' and the author calls himself a 'devotee' of Tendulkar and narrates how his trip to the ground made him feel like going to a pilgrimage ⁴ Another Indian writer Siddhartha Vaidyanathan of *ESPN's Cricinfo* (the editor-in-chief is also Indian) in his article 'The grand piano has left the building' remembers Tendulkar as a breath of fresh air during the 1990's when the whole nation was bored watching the same old ads and soap operas on national

TV⁵. The rest of the article just talks about a few innings of Tendulkar that remains in his memory. An article by Nagraj Gollapudi titled 'Tendulkar: composure amid chaos' in the same website discusses a minute-by-minute description and analysis of Tendulkar's last day on the cricket field. The article emphasizes the mood of the crowd and had metaphorical comparisons to 'slaves in olden times' (raising arms like crying out for help) and Tendulkar as their 'savior'⁶.

On the other side, Gideon Haigh, a 'non-Indian' writer and reputed journalist, wrote in his article 'Defining Tendulkar's greatness' that it is this association with our childhood days that makes us 'lose perspective' of Tendulkar or force us to be 'hyperbolic' when we talk about him. Haigh strongly feels Tendulkar had been 'struggling' for form in the last few years and says that his retirement comes as a 'relief' rather than sadness. The second half of the article, once again, follows the 'non-Indian pattern of retirement articles', which the researcher discussed before.

Haigh critically points out two key aspects in Tendulkar's career. He praises Tendulkar on his consistent form for many years but like 'other non-Indian writers', stresses he should have retired right after the 2011 World Cup. Haigh says the Indian selectors would have faced 'challenges' as a result of this but 'Tendulkar' would be in every team-sheet because of his reputation. Haigh also does a comparison of Tendulkar with former Australian captain Ricky Ponting, who has been part of a winning team more times than the Indian. He mentions in the article that the Indian teams that had Tendulkar in the playing eleven managed to hold the number one status in Tests only for a very short while and could never be on top of One-Day International charts, despite having good teams with great players⁷.

The only slight variation to the 'Indian pattern' could be 'Sachin Almighty' written by Shamy Dasgupta, which discusses some of the 'accusations' against Tendulkar during the course of his career. However, the author uses words like 'model sportsperson' and 'infallible' to describe Tendulkar, showing similarities to the 'pattern' adopted by some of the other Indian writers mentioned earlier. True to the 'Indian pattern', the author gives explanations to all the accusations and concludes saying that despite all that Tendulkar remains 'a giant of the modern game' (Dasgupta, 2013).

It is to be noted that the approach of 'non-Indian media/writers' could not be because of the fact that Tendulkar does not belong to their nation. This can be proved by considering how they dealt with the retirements of other Indian greats like Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and Anil Kumble who played during Tendulkar's era. The 'non-Indian' articles on Rahul Dravid at the time of his retirement, for instance, have all followed a different 'pattern'. *The Guardian's* article by Rob Smyth talked about Dravid's genius, his 'mastery with the bat' and his 'humble nature on and off the pitch'⁸. Former England cricketer, commentator and columnist Nasser Hussain wrote in *Daily Mail Online* about why he 'didn't want Dravid to retire' with the kind of knocks he produced on tough pitches⁹. Derek Pringle, in *The Telegraph*, wrote about Dravid's greatness, 'courtesy', and had statistics which showed that he's better than Tendulkar when Indian played abroad¹⁰. Pringle's colleague in *The Telegraph*, Alan Tyers wrote how and why Dravid, with his batting skills, is 'more popular than Tendulkar in England'. There was no criticism in any of these articles¹¹.

In the section on findings and discussions, this paper will analyse how the retirement of some of these cricketers, Dravid, Ganguly and Kumble, were specifically dealt with in the 'non-Indian' newspapers, namely *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, in contrast to Tendulkar's retirement. This paper identifies three theories, which are applicable to the study, to demonstrate media framing. The first of them, media discourse analysis talks about the discourses shown by media to create a particular image or to make them

interpret the content in a particular way. It can be with regard to the structure, style or even with the words and phrases used (1807 Commemorated, The abolition of the slave trade, 2007). The racist discourse adopted by the British presses to show their white 'class domination' is an example of this sort of framing. The use of pronouns like 'us', 'them', 'we' clearly demonstrates the pattern adopted by newspapers (Van Dijk, 1991). The application of the theory is clearly seen in this paper where the 'Indian pattern' has adopted discourses in showing Tendulkar as an 'icon' and 'God' in all his retirement articles.

The second theory applicable to this study is frame analysis. Communication sources like news organizations use the frame analysis method to define and construct an issue or controversy to create public opinion (Nelson, Oxley and Clawson, 1997). It is a related method to analyse discourses (Scheufele, 1999) and creates a situation where the facts or idea in the content may be interpreted in a particular way (Kuypers, 2009). In this paper, we see how the 'Indian pattern' frames sports persons as 'heroes' and 'role models'. The mindset of the writers/editors can clearly be marked out with this type of framing.

Agenda setting is another theory that is highly applicable to the concepts discussed in the paper. The theory discusses the ability of media to influence public agenda and opinion (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The Indian pattern's attempt to impose their agenda on the readers can be clearly identified with the help of this theory. The researcher argues that the 'Indian pattern' comes to the conclusion that it is the only way to approach Tendulkar's retirement and tries to create an impression that it is the desired approach from the audience point of view, with an idea of satisfying them.

These three theories can be aggregated to study the mediated sport theory, which constitutes the most important aspect of this paper. Sport and media is so much associated these days that it is very important to discuss their relationship (Bernstein and Blain, 2002). Blain, in particular, points out the importance of integrating aspects like sport, media, culture and ideology for better results. This paper, as explained previously, blends sport and media in a slightly different manner from previous researches in this area.

Methodology

The Hindu is used as a representative of all Indian newspapers for this study to show the 'Indian pattern' of news treatment and analysis in Tendulkar's retirement. It explains how *The Hindu*, like almost all Indian newspapers/news websites idolised Tendulkar through their articles and how they limited their content to mere epitomizing Tendulkar's game and personality. The paper discovers the contrasting approach of some of the other 'non-Indian articles' on the web, where all of them discussed certain other key aspects and diverse analysis, which includes some criticism as well. The researcher has used content analysis as the research method. To do a comparative analysis with *The Hindu*, the paper uses *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* as representatives of 'non-India articles'. *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, like *The Hindu*, are leading national dailies from UK and US, respectively. The variety in the structural content of those articles was also another reason for taking them for the study. The time frame for content analysis was chosen as October 10 to November 16, the day he announced his retirement to the last day of his career, as it would cover almost all the stories related to his retirement. However, a couple of articles after his retirement date have also been considered because of some interesting observations in them.

The paper also looks to discuss the variables and non-variables used for the study of the various online editorials and online articles dealing with Tendulkar's

retirement. The researcher has identified two patterns - 'Indian' and 'non-Indian', which will be the variables. The sub-variables would be 'style adopted', 'words used', 'presentation structure' and 'mood creation'. The analysis of the variables and sub-variables is done in findings and discussions.

Findings and Discussions

It is important to discuss the difference in approach of these (*The Hindu*, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*) newspapers (online versions) while dealing with the retirement of other Indian greats like Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and Anil Kumble. This is to show that the Indian newspaper had no change in its one-dimensional approach while the non-Indian newspapers adopted a different style. Still being neutral, these non-Indian newspapers discussed about all aspects of these cricketers, including some interesting analyses and observations. The neutrality in the approach can be observed from the fact that there was no intention to unreasonably question these cricketers, in terms of skill or timing of retirement, at any point. The approach is decided based on various factors and circumstances leading to the retirement of the cricketers. This is unlike the Indian pattern, which focused on factors like 'image' of the cricketer or the 'feel good' factor of the readers.

The Hindu's editorial (published on 11 October 2013) titled 'The legend bids adieu' calls Tendulkar a 'phenomenon' and 'cricket's biggest icon'¹². So did Vijay Lokapally, special correspondent of the same newspaper, who even says his poor stint as a captain was because of the limited commitment and intensity offered by his teammates, who were 'lesser mortals'¹³. Nirmal Shekar, Sports Editor of this newspaper, recalls Tendulkar as someone who 'defined the possible and the impossible'¹⁴. His article during Dravid's retirement had a similar approach, where he described him as a 'warrior', 'marvel' and even compared him to Steve Waugh, Pete Sampras, Marlon Brando and Picasso¹⁵.

The non-Indian newspapers (online versions) had a different approach from Tendulkar's articles even though it had variety and mix in their content. These newspapers also didn't have much disagreement on the timing of their retirements, except in Kumble's case only because he bowled out after a drawn Test match. Even there, the writer wrote 'it was always on the cards'. *The Guardian* lauded Kumble's achievements as a leg-spinner, his 'bravery' by recalling his 'fractured jaw' incident in an old Test match and his abilities as a true 'match winner'¹⁶. The article was a good analysis of a variety of aspects including his skills, past battles, and his records as India's lead bowler for many years.

On another former Indian captain Ganguly, *The Guardian* wrote a lengthy retirement piece on why he will remain 'one of the most significant and influential Indian cricketers of all-time'. The article, true to the 'non-Indian pattern' of having variety in content and approach, also talks about the writer's surprise meeting with the cricketer at a shop in England, his attitudes on and off the field and about his hometown, Kolkata¹⁷. *The Guardian's* retirement article on Dravid also had interesting discussions about the respect Steve Waugh had for him and his 'humble' nature, apart from his abilities as cricketer and his qualities as a selfless team-man¹⁴. *The New York Times'* retirement article on Dravid, like the newspapers approach to Tendulkar's retirement, discussed interesting quotes about him from various cricketers like Rohit Sharma, Jason Gillespie, Ed Smith and British filmmaker Sam Collins, apart from facts and figures on his career¹⁸. Even the Tendulkar articles in these 'non-Indian' newspapers had variety in content and approach. It will be discussed further in the analysis of variables and sub-variables.

Analysis

Variables : (i) Indian pattern (ii) Non-Indian pattern; Sub-variables: (i) Style, (ii) Words used, (iii) Variety in content, and (iv) Mood

Style – In the Indian pattern, we can identify idolizing in the writing style adopted. It also has many instances of writers praising Tendulkar's greatness, highlighting his game and personality. The non-Indian pattern is identified as neutral, objective and straightforward. Certain negative aspects are pinpointed and there is also some reality check about his slump in form.

Words used – Many mythical words like 'God', 'savior' and 'marvel' have been used in the Indian pattern whereas a more realistic approach is made in the non-Indian pattern. It also uses words like 'great' but doesn't go to the extent of raising Tendulkar to a God-like status.

Variety in content – As the Indian pattern went on narrating how great Tendulkar was (in multiple ways), the non-Indian pattern discussed other key and interesting observations that could be of interest to the readers. *The Guardian* online sketched the differences between his hometown Mumbai of the past and the present, in an effort to show how much the city has changed during the span of his career ¹⁹ while *The New York Times* online focused more on his game and discussed about how he could have timed his retirement to perfection. The paper also talked about how Tendulkar represents India globally and how different he is from all the other public figures in the country ²⁰.

Mood – The Indian pattern attempted to create a sense of loss by recalling Tendulkar's past and present and how badly he will be missed by the public. The non-Indian pattern, on the other hand, observed people's reaction to the news and compared their feelings (mourning) to that at the time of Mahatma Gandhi's (*The New York Times* online) and Princess Diana's (*The Guardian* online) death.

Conclusion

The arguments in this paper was on the difference in approach of the Indian and non-Indian media in the online editorial coverage of Sachin Tendulkar's retirement. The paper discusses why and how Tendulkar's retirement was covered in selected Indian and non-Indian media. The researcher cited facts and figures to discuss the rise of celebrity coverage in newspapers, which included portrayal of sport and sport-related personalities in media. The paper also mentions about the media coverage of Tendulkar during his career and the style adopted in some of the articles written about him.

The central focus of the paper is the contrasting approach of the 'Indian' and 'non-Indian patterns' in the coverage of Tendulkar's retirement. The researcher does a comparative study of online articles and op-eds from both patterns to identify and demonstrate the contrast. A study of the articles and editorials in the three main national dailies (*The Hindu*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*) chosen for the study is also done to show the difference in treatment. The retirement articles of other Indian greats in these newspapers is also analysed and compared them with the ones on Tendulkar. A number of variables and sub-variables are identified and analysed to discuss the key differences in the two 'patterns'.

The paper concludes that the approach of the 'non-Indian pattern' is objective and neutral in their approach and at no particular juncture, idolised Tendulkar. Neither did they give comparisons to 'God' nor did they say he was mediocre. Accepting his greatness

as a player, the non-Indian pattern pointed out certain things that would have made him greater. The 'Indian pattern' focused on highlighting Tendulkar's brilliance as a cricketer, showering endless praise on his humble nature and repeatedly re-establishing his already-accepted status as 'one of the greatest public icons of India' (Kidambi, 2011).

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