






# GATS Commitments and Liberalization of the Sports Service Industry: WTO Compliance and Policy Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) has created major changes to global service sector liberalization by including the sports service industry within its scope. The sports service industry refers to those responsible for the administration and delivery of a multiplicity of services concerning professional and amateur sport, including event handling, athlete preparation, dissemination, arena management, and overseas service within the entertainment and economic arena. Understanding the impact of GATS commitments on sports services is important as the sports industry plays a significant role in the global development of the economy, methods of trade liberalization, and cross-border services facilitation. Currently, scholars lack extensive research on how the sports service sector meets GATS commitments through WTO compliance and policy implementation procedures. The study of this research gap is pertinent to helping establish export policies for sports services that suit their unique attributes. The study brings to the fore new findings concerning the diverse implementation of GATS by WTO countries and the differences between the global policy expectations and the local regulations. The author seeks to eliminate this research gap through an examination of GATS regulations alongside sports services industries to study the domestic policy management and WTO compliance issues experienced by countries. A qualitative approach consisting of a systematic literature review (SLR) serves as the methodology to analyze academic and policy-oriented documents used for this study. The outcomes reveal that the minimal sports services sector liberalization within GATS principles and struggles between trade mandates versus local policy guidelines along with varying GATS commitment follow-up by WTO members. The results demonstrate the necessity for governments to develop specialized policies that integrate both worldwide market liberalization practices and sports services sector characteristics when pursuing international obligations and domestic priorities.

**Keywords:** Sports Service Industry, GATS, WTO, Liberalization, Policy Challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) functions as a WTO-established regulatory system that controls international services trade, consisting of banking, together with telecoms and transportation sectors. GATS works to develop free market conditions through both simplifying trade restrictions and making service sectors available to international operators. Against the background of increasing globalization and increased trading in sports services, a GATS's inclusion of sports services has been a source of challenging policy issues. Although sports are important economically and culturally, academic works have focused minimally on how countries shape their domestic laws to further comply with trade rules of the world, leaving the need for the research urgent. GATS effectively assists worldwide market growth for many sectors but the sports services sector

faces growing complexity when applying GATS principles (Khaskheli & Zhao, 2025). The sports service industry containing professional sports alongside sports broadcasting with event management and sports-related tourism has developed substantially in the global economy. Entertainment along with health promotion, employment opportunities, and regional development belong to the essential functions of this vital service domain (Nsour, 2023). The prevalence of the sector does not match its limited pace of liberalization because it must overcome distinct regulatory and policy obstacles.

Member countries face simultaneous possibilities and obstacles regarding sports service liberalization through their GATS commitments (Panizzon & Bisong, 2024). Through GATS members can establish international sports sector competition but these regulations present challenges to domestic public interests and cultural values along with local industries. WTO compliance requirements interfere with national policy authority in sports services because these requirements create a core problem when implementing liberalization policies (Meyer, 2021).

The study focuses on analyzing how WTO member countries interpret and implement GATS agreements, especially pertaining to the sports service sector, in order to show differences between international trade demands and domestic policies. The research focuses on the compliance with policies and the particular problems of the sports services segment, with the aim of explaining the approaches to trade liberalization corresponding to the individualities of sports industries.

The scholarly work lacks focused studies about GATS implementation in the sports service industry mainly through examination of regulatory obstacles and adherence requirements. Several studies examine GATS' general effects on service industries yet only limited research exists about how countries handle WTO requirements in sports service activities. This review investigates the compliance challenges that countries experience when they implement GATS commitments for liberalizing their sports services industries.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **An Overview of GATS and Its Impact on Service Sectors**

The World Trade Organization (WTO) framework established GATS in 1995 to serve as a fundamental multilateral arrangement for trading services internationally (Citaristi, 2022). Through global service trade regulations, the agreement fosters the progressive market opening for services across different industries. Through its framework, the agreement expands domestic markets to foreign competition so service providers win equal opportunities with local enterprises. GATS consists of three central principles which include Market Access provisions and National Treatment standards together with a Specific Commitments framework (Gari, 2024). Market Access and National Treatment represent two fundamental principles of GATS while Specific Commitments form the third core principle. The Market Access provision in GATS establishes that foreign service providers must have equal freedom to develop their businesses within the domestic market space (Daza, Delimatsis, & Molinuevo, 2022). GATS guarantees that the treatment of foreign service providers is equivalent to that of native service providers (Elliott, 2019). The implementation of GATS proves challenging for distinctive sectors especially sports services because these sectors receive limited recognition within the framework (Dash & Bhattacharjee, 2024). This produces an insight deficit regarding how GATS influences market liberalization in such industries. All service sectors fall within the scope of GATS, although the major practical effects resulted from the reforms in telecommunications finance and transportation industries. GATS enables major market deregulation in every service sector while allowing foreign businesses to enter domestic markets (Benz & Rozensteine, 2021). National sensitivities usually protect the cultural policies sectors of agriculture entertainment and sports from full liberalization, while other services face more open competition under GATS. The sectors are subject to GATS coverage, yet limited progress in liberalization emerges because of the conflict between trade freedom and cultural and public well-being safeguards.

### **Sports Service Industry: Characteristics and Liberalization**

Under the GATS framework sports service industry activities span from professional sports down to sports management through sports broadcasting and sports tourism (Gounden, 2020). The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) categorizes sports services through business, recreational, and cultural divisions which include sports management and event organizing alongside fitness facilities and broadcasting live sports and international tournaments. The unique regulatory and cultural aspects of sports services have limited liberalization measures even though they fall under GATS categories (Chaitoo, 2020). Several service sectors have benefited from the GATS framework, but its effect on the sports services industry remains insufficiently documented. Studies indicate that the sporting service deregulation, which focuses on cross-border investments and professional sports

league partnerships strengthened worldwide sports competition (Sayeg, 2018). The emergence of liberalization concerns threatens to weaken sports industry growth in countries at different developmental stages, particularly among emerging economies. Sports broadcasting rights and media partnerships have undergone internationalization which has increased foreign investments within national sports leagues. The field of research about sports services remains underdeveloped because GATS effects on less commercial segments, including local sports leagues and youth development have not received sufficient attention (Zhou, 2024). The GATS framework needs deeper analysis to establish the relationship among cultural aspects, national identity, and local sports infrastructure protection.

### **WTO Compliance and Policy Challenges**

The WTO operates compliance procedures that force member countries to follow GATS and other agreements' rules (Wolff, 2022). The Dispute Settlement Body forms part of these mechanisms by acting as the primary body for settlement between member states while they enforce WTO agreements. Failed countries regarding GATS commitments must face WTO dispute resolution which might result in either penalties or corrective measures. The enforcement mechanisms showing effectiveness for trade rules operate mostly to the benefit of established economic powers due to better ability to progress through dispute resolution processes. Sports services under GATS face many difficulties when countries adopt this liberalization framework (Ahmed, 2024). Market entry and treatment provisions of GATS have created difficulties for countries seeking to maintain their regulatory independence. The implementation of domestic sports regulations which address player transfer systems together with broadcast rights and major event hosting regulations, comes into conflict with GATS obligations because countries want to retain authority over their sports markets (Ononye, 2024). Under GATS, Mode 4 allows professional services including sporting professionals to experience short-term relocation for service provision in foreign territories (Gupta, 2024). The temporary worker provisions under GATS create anxieties about professional sports talent moving from developing nations toward wealthier nations, thus removing key workforce capabilities from local sports businesses. Sports broadcasting rights liberation created public discussion about media monopoly power and broadcasting earnings distribution because it benefits large multinationals more than local stations. National sovereignty emerges as one of the most disputed matters within the scope of sports services and GATS (Schubert, 2024). Nations continually support their ability to make sports industry regulations that uphold domestic priorities which protect home athletes and establish fair competitors while aiding local sports programs.

### **Comparative Evaluation of Case Studies**

Research on the effects of GATS commitments in sports services is inadequate, but analysis already conducted indicates a large variation in liberalization outcomes among different nations. Regulatory prowess and smooth WTO participation are common in developed economies, but developing ones are hampered by a lack of institutional support and opposing cultural perspectives. Tough compliance issues in developing economies are ignored, while the cultural hindrances in Western societies still persist (Zhang et al., 2024). The analysis of these scenarios together may demonstrate the impact that geopolitical and economic environments have on GATS implementation.

### **Synthesis of Findings Across Themes**

The literature body indicates that there are related challenges occasioned by the implementation of GATS in areas such as digital trade, cultural preservation, and regulatory standards compliance. Studies highlight that increased access to the market, thanks to liberalization like expanded digital trade, often opposes domestic cultural guarantees and local industry protection (Azmeah, Foster, & Echavarri, 2020). If digital platforms facilitate the opening of markets, then cultural policies often constrain the expansion. The results' convergence suggests that the successful implementation of GATS in sports-services relies on the combination of economic liberalization with actions protecting cultural heritage and domestic policy freedom.

### **Literature Gap and the Need for Further Research**

The sports service industry lacks research regarding the effects of GATS on the sector despite an expanding body of literature about the impact of GATS on the service sector. Studies mainly concentrate on well-established service sectors like telecommunications and finance, even though this leaves an unknown area about the impact of GATS on sectors including sports. The literature currently lacks a comprehensive analysis of GATS's sports service effects and its effects on national freedom to set policies together with the balance between market openness and domestic sports advancement. Studies about the direct effects of GATS on sports services remain scarce, particularly in developing nations, because these countries struggle with implementing local regulations while preserving local culture and achieving economic development goals in sports. Studies about the sustained effects of sports liberalization remain thin regarding the movement of athletes, media rights control, and worldwide

sports market entry processes. Research must focus on this omitted area to understand GATS's specific effects on sports services while evaluating its relation to local sports growth. To effectively address the special challenges sports services face, there is a necessary research effort to improve WTO compliance mechanisms that preserve regulatory powers for countries while fulfilling their multilateral obligations. GATS has brought substantial liberalization to many service sectors, but there is insufficient research about its effects on sports services. Further targeted analysis must explore the intricate aspects of sports industry reform through GATS, whereas countries must develop plans to handle WTO requirements. Future trade policies and negotiations targeting the sports service sector need the findings from this research to make informed decisions.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Method**

This study uses qualitative methodology to analyze GATS commitments and determine their impact on the sports service industry. There are dimensions of policy provisions, economic structures, and regulatory mechanisms that are missed in quantitative analyses and that can only be spotted using qualitative approaches. Focusing on WTO compliance and the policy limits faced in sports services, the research methodology is very similar to the study's aims, in terms of looking for an in-depth analysis of GATS' impact on the industry and the regulatory problems it creates. The method proves advantageous since it uncovers complex systems that quantitative methods typically miss during assessments of multifaceted and changing international policy regulations (Skarbek, 2020).

### **Research Design**

The review utilizes a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design method to achieve complete data collection along with analysis. SLR enables researchers to organize their approach when they collect and merge academic findings spanning multiple sources. This review uses systematic methods to find and analyze scholarly articles about the WTO's GATS framework together with its consequences for sports services industry liberalization and the policy difficulties that come from WTO compliance requirements. The review gathers data from different credible sources to consolidate their findings without dismissing relevant perspectives. The research design follows recognized guidelines for SLR to ensure methodological transparency as well as developmental precision and reduction of researchers' bias throughout the article selection phase.

### **Data Collection**

The review relies on secondary data obtained from academic sources, including Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, and JSTOR. The research relies on peer-reviewed publication databases, which provide reliable academic information for analysis purposes. This paper makes efforts to study documents examining GATS commitments together with WTO compliance and the framework of international trade laws for sports services liberalization. The usage of peer-reviewed literature enhances the research findings' reliability because it verifies the official sources included in the study. The research started by reviewing fifteen publications that are related to the study context. Systematic review procedures evaluated these publications to validate their connection to primary research subjects. The selected research looks at GATS elements as well as sports service sector liberalization and WTO regulations and compliance challenges.

### **Data Synthesis**

The studies were categorized based on theme areas such as compliance with the WTO rules, culture heritage maintenance, as well as the various regulatory hitches affecting nations opening their sports services market. The synthesis demonstrated how different countries' contexts define the implementation of commitments under the GATS, with positive results observed and barriers in liberalization outlined.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

The selection framework for research papers followed the main goals of the study. The research selection requires two main conditions.

1. The research needs to appear in peer-reviewed journals or indexed conferences which are available in Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, and JSTOR databases.
2. The research should concentrate on service liberalization through GATS commitments while specifically examining the sports services industry.
3. Valuable research on this topic should either present theoretical findings or provide empirical evidence about WTO compliance difficulties, along with their policy implications and how GATS affects sports services

markets.

4. The research needs to explore the mutual influence of trade policy along with international law, as well as economic aspects that affect sports services during their global market integration.

### Exclusion Criteria

Research completion followed the predetermined exclusion criteria. Research articles were excluded if:

1. The focus of the study remained restricted in scope because it failed to directly connect GATS with international trade law in the sports services framework.

2. This paper failed to deliver significant empirical results that addressed either service market liberalization or WTO compliance issues in sports sectors.

3. The research appeared in non-academic or unverified sources and an insufficient level of data failed to support the reported findings.

4. The paper moved away from its central research scope with regard to WTO compliance and policy difficulties during sports service liberalization.

A series of studies was eliminated through the application of these criteria which led to the selection of relevant papers that fulfilled all required conditions. The reviewed research papers focus on fundamental aspects of the study questions which enhances our comprehension of the discussed material.

### Justification of Methodological Choices

Systematic literature reviews (SLRs) require a transparent methodology according to the PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Boolean logic operators "AND", "OR", and "NOT" formed the basis of the search methodology which retrieved suitable research findings from various databases. The conducted study selected 20 fit-for-inclusion results from its predetermined screening process. The screening process resulted in reviewing in depth the 15 studies that survived the assessment. Fifteen finalized studies survived assessment procedures because other studies did not meet the standards of relevance or methodology. Quality standards followed by the final set of studies produced reliable outcomes for the review.

### Ethical Considerations

The review follows ethical guidelines through its practice of accurately recognizing and citing all original authors and sources. The research explores secondary information from public academic publications because it collects no original human or proprietary information. The systematic review included findings only from chosen studies that maintained safe parameters for eliminating data collection and analysis biases. The review, avoids working with unpublished or confidential data since it maintains intellectual property rights and academic integrity at every step. The chosen methodology establishes a firm approach that enables researchers to tackle research aim while uncovering key discoveries regarding GATS commitments and sports services industry liberalization, specifically concerning WTO compliance and policy challenges.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Table 1. Summary of Selected Studies

Citation	Aim/Title	Findings	Theme
Ramazanov (2021)	"World Trade Organization: The Role of Developing Countries in the WTO"	GATS compliance remains challenging for developing nations, particularly when it comes to the sports industry.	WTO Compliance & Developing Countries
Banerjee, Mukherjee, and Srishti (2024)	"E-commerce in Trade Agreements: Strategies and Options"	The limitations found in GATS commitments work to restrict the ability for countries to liberalize their digital and sports service sectors.	E-commerce & Trade Agreements
Krishnan and Nair (2024)	"Economic and Legal Impact of Free Trade Agreements on the"	The liberalization brought by FTAs creates higher market competition which	Economic Impact of FTAs



Citation	Aim/Title	Findings	Theme
	Economy"	harms smaller business sectors, including sports services operations.	
Gagné (2024)	"Preferential Trade Agreements and Cultural Products"	The establishment of FTAs promotes cultural homogeneity which causes negative effects on parts of the economy like sports services.	Impact of FTAs on Cultural Products

Theme 1: GATS Commitments in Trade Liberalization

Studies under this theme examined how GATS commitments affect liberalization processes in several service sectors with a special focus on the sports industry. Banerjee, Mukherjee, and Srishti (2024) analyze how India utilizes WTO framework rules for its trade agreement negotiations. The research demonstrates how India encounters obstacles with its e-commerce industry because of its restrictive GATS commitments which limit its trade liberalization prospects. The sports services sector benefits from these results because digital sports venues through online platforms are expanding. The changing landscape of world trade and sports services liberalization demands that India modify its policy approaches according to Banerjee et al. (2024). They emphasize focusing on sectors that need minimal trade restrictions (Table 1).

Ramazanov (2021) explains how developing nations encounter difficulties because of their struggle to match domestic policies with WTO requirements, particularly within the service sector. According to his analysis, GATS promotes potential gains, but developing countries encounter various compliance hurdles when they open the sports services sector for trade. The complete GATS compliance demands substantial investment into infrastructure along with financial resources for these developing nations.

Sub-Theme 1.1: Impact of Trade Agreements on Domestic Economies

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) create various economic effects on national economies, with sports services as a part of the analysis. The economic and legal analysis by Krishnan and Nair (2024) specified the difficulties of micro, small, and medium enterprises in Kerala which are affected by Free Trade Agreements. Their analysis indicates that service sector deregulation through these agreements creates more competition that brings advantages to some sectors, yet presents challenges for sports service providers who struggle to compete with international rivals.

Gagné (2024) studies the negative effects of preferential trade agreements on cultural products in ways that mirror sports industry concerns about protecting national identity. Gagné identifies preferential agreements as promoters of trade yet they produce standardized outputs which pose difficulties for sports services whose delivery depends on local cultural elements. Presently, the sports service sector fights against the challenges stemming from liberalization because the introduction of foreign sports content threatens to disrupt local market patterns.

Table 2. Represents the Summary of Selected Studies

Citation	Aim or Title	Findings	Theme
Zhao (2023)	Examine the liberalization of cultural and recreational services	Sports services encounter resistance to liberalization as a result of different national cultural policies.	Liberalization's Impact on Sports
Leal-Arcas, Balzano, Deethae, and Skybova (2020)	Evaluate challenges in GATS implementation.	Multiple nations experience obstacles in meeting their GATS commitments, especially when dealing with sports-related sectors.	GATS and Sports Industry Challenges
Chandy and Bhardwaj (2020)	Investigate the regulatory challenges of GATS non-discrimination in sports	States face barriers in their power to implement cultural regulations related to sports under non-discrimination standards.	GATS and Sports Industry Challenges
Noonan and Plekhanova (2020)	Assess the impact of liberalization on tourism and related sectors like	The process of liberalization creates external stress that disrupts	Liberalization's Impact on Sports

Citation	Aim or Title	Findings	Theme
	sports.	local sporting systems in sports industries.	

The research findings from available studies explore the multiple perspectives of sports service market liberalization which occurs with GATS commitments as well as associated WTO compliance and policy factors.

### Theme 2: WTO, GATS, and Sports Industry Liberalization

The sporting industry encounters distinct difficulties in opening up under the GATS section of WTO since specific service sector commitments prove challenging to liberalize. The close relation between sports services and national cultural traditions and public policies causes several WTO member nations to resist their liberalization. The study of Zhao (2023) demonstrates that nations apply different measures regarding cultural and recreational services during trade negotiations, as these services tend to remain protected by binding national restrictions. Non-discrimination clauses in the GATS restrict national policy choices, especially regarding sports services which face competition between trade liberalization and cultural preservation needs (Noonan & Plekhanova, 2020) (Table 2).

#### Sub-Theme 2.1. Enforcement of GATS Commitments

GATS Commitments face multiple obstacles during their enforcement phase for numerous nations. The general obligations found in GATS present major challenges during implementation, particularly when it comes to sports, because nations resist surrendering control of domestic events and policy regulation (Leal-Arcas, Balzano, Deethae, & Skybova, 2020).

#### Sub-Theme 2.2. Impact of Liberalization on Local Sports Systems

Liberalization policies create unknown effects which limit domestic sports industries from maintaining self-governance according to some scholarly opinions. Liberalization creates external influences on local sports organizations which affect the complete spectrum of talent recruitment to team selection (Chandy & Bhardwaj, 2020).

Table 3. Represents the Summary of Selected Studies

Citation	Aim/Title	Findings	Theme
(Ravuvu, Gounder, & Smith, 2021)	“Assess the effects of trade agreements on local service sectors, focusing on small nations”	International economies, large and small, struggle to preserve their sports authority while fulfilling WTO membership obligations.	Small Nations and WTO Adherence
Araujo (2022)	“Investigate the export of EU regulatory models in global services agreements”	All worldwide sporting service providers must adapt their policies according to EU regulations at the expense of certain local interests.	EU Regulations and Global Sports Services
F. Stock and A. Stock (2024)	“Examine the role of creative sectors, including sports, in global trade liberalization”	Strengthening involvement of sports services in creative economies generates challenges for sustaining authentic cultural aspects through the process of globalization.	Sports in Creative Economy and Trade Liberalization
Gulotta (2024)	“Analyze the impact of WTO frameworks on emerging technologies”	Research and development in sports neurotechnology present barriers when attempting to apply GATS provisions in this field.	Emerging Technologies and WTO Frameworks

### Theme 3: Challenges in GATS Compliance and the Impact of External Influences on Sports

Sports services under GATS face distinctive problems regarding both WTO regulatory compliance and national interest protection. The sports service sector experiences challenges under GATS because it requires countries to find a balance between their responsibilities toward international regulations and their domestic

policy requirements (Table 3).

According to Gulotta (2024), sports-related novel technology innovations, such as neurotechnologies, make it difficult for states to fulfill their commitments under GATS. Technological change progresses quickly enough to create difficulties for following GATS regulations because sports-related services crossing traditional boundaries frequently struggle to meet policy requirements (Gulotta, 2024). Araujo (2022) shows how the European Union employs its policy power to force developing nations into adopting service standards that oppose their domestic sports requirements (Araujo, 2022). According to F. Stock and A. Stock (2024) the creative economy embraces sports along with other components while they observe how external cultural and regulatory conflicts represent prevalent liberalization challenges (F. Stock & A. Stock, 2024). According to Ravuvu et al. (2021) small countries deal with complex issues of sustaining independent sports policy control and meeting GATS requirements when tourism sports form a prominent sector of their economy (Ravuvu et al., 2021).

Table 4. Represents the Summary of Selected Studies

Citation	Aim	Finding	Theme
Pant and Chakraborty (2024)	“To investigate the impact of service orientation on manufacturing exports.”	The implementation of service-oriented sports services enhances export capabilities to strengthen economic performance as GATS advances its strategies for market deregulation.	Impact of Service Orientation on Manufacturing Exports.
Gao (2022)	“To explore the role of digital services in enhancing trade in Asia-Pacific.”	Streaming platforms along with sports broadcasting activities function as major digital services to boost regional growth through market liberalization of sports services.	Digital Services and Trade Agreements in Asia-Pacific.
M. N. Rahman and N.Rahman (2022)	“To assess the impact of digital trade provisions in RTAs on service sectors during crises.”	Through digital provisions of RTAs, sports services can continue operations during crises while meeting GATS requirements and fostering market openness.	Digital Trade Provisions in RTAs during Crises.

The economic liberalization of sports service industries under GATS subjects three main aspects to evaluation: digital services trading, regional trade agreements and manufacturing export dynamics enabled by services. These themes provide detailed examinations of the mentioned aspects to explain their relationship with WTO commitments and emerging trends in sports service industries.

Theme 4: Digital Services Trade and Trade Agreements

Digital services trade within Asia-Pacific represents a vast market that affects sectors including sports industry. Gao (2022) establishes digital services act as fundamental elements that advance regional economic integration through sports broadcasting and digital platforms which drive the sports service industry toward liberalization. Studies show that proper digital trade policies should facilitate cross-border service operations that promote sports media rights and streaming platforms, fundamental to GATS commitments (Table 4).

Sub-Theme 4.1. Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) and Crisis Management

M. N. Rahman and N. Rahman (2022) investigate in their study how Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) affect sports services along with other services during times of crisis. India, together with Asia-Pacific nations, has started applying digital trade measures as a tool to manage pandemic-related challenges in their economies. These provisions boost digital service delivery because they support the WTO's initiative to liberalize sports sectors under GATS regulatory standards. The authors stress that efficient trade measures should enable sports services to operate without interruptions during crisis situations.

Sub-Theme 4.2. Service Orientation and Manufacturing Exports

The paper by Pant and Chakraborty (2024) examines the positive influence of a service-centered approach on industrial export activity in developing countries. The research demonstrates how service-centric industries which encompass sports services generate major export development. Sports event management, together with



broadcasting services, enables manufacturing industries to boost their economic performance while supporting WTO service liberalization goals under GATS commitments.

The integration between digital services and RTAs and service orientation creates the mechanism through which countries liberalize their sports service industry in compliance with GATS commitments. Each single piece of research demonstrates how different elements of service provision function to expand sports sector worldwide market integration and development.

## Discussion

Research focuses on displaying both positive and negative consequences that sports services encounter after accepting GATS commitments through trade agreements. Banerjee et al. (2024) and Ramazanov (2021) explain that nations making GATS commitments potentially encounter barriers that might restrict the development of their sports markets. The authors of Krishnan and Nair (2024) and Gagné (2024) identify how Free Trade Agreements produce economic stress on local industries and cultural identity loss that presents main concerns to sports service operators. These results match the analysis goals of this study because they reveal the balance points between liberalization and protectionism, which aid policy development that combines WTO compliance and support for homegrown sports businesses.

Studies about GATS commitments and sports service liberalization present vital difficulties that nations encounter when upholding WTO regulations with their native sports industries. Zhou (2023) points to cultural considerations that shape how countries handle the legalization of sports services because they tend to block trade deals that could damage their traditional sports heritage. The GATS non-discrimination obligation creates regulatory barriers that oppose national interests to regulate sectors possessing cultural importance, such as sports (Leal-Arcas, Balzano, Deethae, & Skybova, 2020). Executing GATS agreements proves challenging for high-priority sectors since increasing openness might potentially damage domestic management structures. National sports organizations feel increased pressure from market liberalization, and this strain reduces their local control (Chandy & Bhardwaj, 2020). The study confirms that although GATS enables trade freedom, it brings substantial obstacles to states attempting to manage their sporting and cultural domains within the international framework.

Research shows that GATS brings sports service liberalization although national policy-making faces various complications during this process. The complex regulatory environment for sports services results from both global trade agreements' technological requirements and their regulatory standards, according to Gulotta (2024) as well as Araujo (2022). According to F. Stock and A. Stock (2024) sports cultural values and economic value regularly oppose GATS liberalization standards which threatens authentic sports identities in local communities. Ravuvu et al. (2021) show that smaller countries maintaining sports tourism face excessive impacts from trade agreements that create conflicts between global liberalization and local protective policies. The research objectives centered on analyzing WTO compliance obstacles and policy conflicts in sports service deregulation under GATS because new research confirms these analytic goals.

The analyzed studies deliver essential knowledge about how GATS commitments connect to sports service industry deregulation. According to Gao (2022), digital services serve a vital role since they strengthen sports broadcasting and media, thereby supporting GATS' liberalization measures. Due to its increasing digital infrastructure, sports service sectors experience important advancements because this infrastructure streamlines cross-border trade and makes access easier while improving market ranges. RTAs with digital trade provisions, according to M. N. Rahman and N. Rahman (2022), play a vital role by enabling sports services to keep working as per WTO standards during crisis situations. Maintaining stability across borders for sports services becomes possible through this flexibility during challenging periods.

Pant and Chakraborty (2024) show that service-oriented approaches lead to economic growth when manufacturing sectors adopt sports services because these integrated sectors create export possibilities. The overall WTO goals find support from this service expansion because of the GATS commitments to which member states must adhere. The literature shows that GATS liberalization of sports services enables economic advantages through digital interconnectivity and flexible geographic agreements along with service-based approaches to worldwide trade.

## Synthesis of Findings Across Themes: Analysis and Key Takeaways

A review of the research identifies a pattern, inconsistencies, and significant findings that describe the role of GATS in the sports services sector.

## Regulatory Challenges and Cultural Protection

Many reports highlight the challenges that arise when GATS tries to balance liberalization with national cultural and regulatory safeguards. Those developing, as is the case in India, are weighed down with resource

constraints and challenges of embracing modern regulations. The GATS pressure for freedoms to trade often opposes maintaining cultural identity and local values (Banerjee et al., 2024; Gagné, 2024).

#### Disparities in Compliance among Nations

An improved regulatory structure facilitates compliance with GATS commitments more easily for developed countries. Developing countries, however, experience major obstacles in making their policies conform to GATS commitments, much of which has to do with their financial and institutional restrictions. Such differences showcase the enormous range of conformity to GATS among nations based primarily on their economic and regulatory capacities (Ramazanov, 2021; Leal-Arcas et al., 2020).

#### Pros and Cons of Advancing the Economy over Preservation of Culture

The local cultural heritage at times gets compromised by the economic win ascribable to liberalization. The results are always showing that the entry of imported sports content and sports multinational corporations tends to endanger domestic sports businesses. This leads to a state of affairs whereby generating higher economic growth is in conflict with protecting the national cultural heritage (Krishnan & Nair, 2024; Zhou, 2024).

### CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complex issues presented by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and its effect on the sports service sector. Although GATS has enhanced market entry and liberalization in many aspects, the application of the same to sports services has been especially difficult. Specifically, countries that are developing tend to struggle to harmonize the GATS obligations with their cultural regulations and local regulatory systems. The level of adherence to obligations stipulated by GATS differs among countries, with countries' economic and institutional strengths determining the level of compliance with these rules. There is a distinct need for personalized policies that can mediate between the initiatives of liberalizing global markets and protecting the cultural values of the nation and internal sports establishments. Global liberalization of sports services reveals mixed results in sports service liberalization across the world, and some countries have managed to implement GATS, while others are forced to delay or resist for cultural, economic, and political reasons. The struggle between international trade liberalization advancement and the preservation of cultural identity locally continues, particularly in sports industries that are dominated by cultural values.

#### Future Direction

Researchers should think about the long-term analysis of GATS obligations and their effects on the sports service industry of advanced and underdeveloped countries. Comparative study of sports service industries according to the different levels of economic maturity may reveal the specific roadblocks the different groups of countries face. Further research on the role of digital services, including sporting streaming platforms in the GATS structure, may provide insight into the liberalization of sporting services in the digital era. More research is needed to analyze the relationship between GATS compliance, local sport infrastructure, and the clash between international commitment to high ideals and national policy sovereignty in developing economies where cultural and economic considerations intertwine.

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