

**EDU WORLD 2022**

Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues

**THE PERCEPTION OF SPORTS JOURNALISTS REGARDING  
WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN ROMANIA**

Andreea Trușcă (a)\*, Silvia Teodorescu (b)

\*Corresponding Author

(a) National University of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Bucharest, Romania, andreeatrusca777@gmail.com

(b) National University of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Bucharest, Romania, teo.silvia@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

Based on the UEFA and FRF strategies aimed at increasing the visibility and development of women's football as well as changing the perception of this sports branch, the paper will present the opinions of journalists on the positioning of women's football in the Romanian media and will also identify various issues related to the stimulation and promotion of this sport. To build an overview of this sports sector, data on women's football were collected through a 24-item questionnaire that was completed by 63 journalists (producers, writers, editors, moderators, presenters, reporters) from the Romanian sports press using the Google Forms platform. The analysis and processing of quantitative data were performed with the help of SPSS statistical software, and for the qualitative data, the NVivo-Qualitative Data Analysis software was used. On a scale of 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement), respondents rated several statements regarding the role of the media in promoting women's football at national level and their perceptions of the status of professional female football players. Most journalists believe that the media contributes to the socialisation of individuals by broadcasting sports events, but this aspect does not necessarily leads to the practice of sport. Almost half of respondents have a positive perception of the role played by the media in shaping consumer preferences for women's football, with most of them (71.4%) thinking that the media is an important actor in promoting women's football, while 49.2% agree that the media promotes an image gap between men and women.

2672-815X © 2023 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Media, sports journalists, social context, women's football

## **1. Introduction**

Of all the fields promoted by the media, sport has experienced the fastest development, and this is not only due to the popularity of certain sports branches, but especially to the exorbitant budget allocated to major sports competitions. For these reasons, the presence of sport in the media has grown exponentially in recent decades.

However, some sports branches have not enjoyed the same media coverage over time, as is the case of women's football. But the growing popularity of women's football worldwide has led relevant international and national institutions to implement regulations and communication and marketing strategies dedicated to this sports sector. The declared purpose of these campaigns aimed at promoting and reforming women's football is to increase media visibility and develop this sports sector, as evidenced by the strategies of competent international and national bodies (FIFA, 2018; FRF, n.d.; UEFA, 2019).

### **1.1. Development of women's football in Romania**

Unlike men's football, women's football did not receive the same attention from relevant institutions in our country until 2014, when it has become a strategic objective of the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) and the Professional Football League (LPF) as a result of reforming the competitive system, increasing the number of female players and making investments in this sector as well.

In Romania, women's football was born in the 1970s, being played by female employees working in large factories. The enterprises of those years, namely ICIM Braşov, CFR Craiova and FARTEC Braşov, rewarded their female players with salaries and bonuses. The communist political regime was the main factor that led to a decrease in the practice of this sport among women, and a timid resumption of indoor matches occurred only around the 1980s. On 5 April 1990, women's football is made official in Romania by the Decision of the Ministry of Sport and the Romanian Football Federation.

According to the FRF (n.d.), this sport had a promising trend between 2014 and 2019 due to the reforms implemented in this sector. The data provided by the above federation highlight that: 26 new teams were registered in women's competitions in 2020 compared to 2014; 66,054 female football players were registered in Romania in 2020 compared to only 330 in 2013; 7,110 spectators attended the match between Romania and Portugal at the EURO 2017 playoffs; 290 female referees were registered in Romania in 2020; 487 Romanian women were registered as Grassroots licence holders in 2020; 28 female coaches were registered in Romania in 2020.

### **1.2. Influence of the media on promoting sports competitions**

At the societal level, the media manages to give the concept of physical activity an indisputable value and tends to follow a specific pattern when addressing sport, which includes broadcasting sports competitions and presenting elite athletes as contemporary legends (Puertas-Molero et al., 2019).

In order to both attract the largest possible audience and meet the new demands in the digital age, competition calendars have been adapted taking into account the optimal dates and times to broadcast the matches so that the main events in various sports branches do not overlap.

When talking about the media, an important component to consider is the audience. Audience measurement is relevant for the design of editorial guidelines and the purchase of advertising products. The interest in a certain sport also determines the media to adapt to the specifics of the audience, and the choice of competitions to be covered as well as the importance given to them will implicitly reflect the preferences of the public. (Andrews, 2006) For example, the 1974 FIFA World Cup in West Germany “was the first event to be seen on television by over 1 billion people. Twice as many viewers watched the World Cup in the United States twenty years later”. (Zbigniew et al., 2012) In 2019, the FIFA Women’s World Cup in France was watched by 993.5 million people, and in 2022, a historical record was set in women’s football: at the Barcelona - Real Madrid match in the Champions League quarterfinals, 91,553 supporters were present in the stands and approximately 1.8 million viewers watched it live on DAZN’s YouTube channel (Jones, 2022).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Although Romanian women’s football has developed significantly in recent years due to the increased number of both female athletes and competitions dedicated to this sports sector, the promotion of this sport through the media is still low. This paper aims to identify the opinions of sports journalists on increasing the visibility of women’s football in the media and the possible impact of this action on sports consumers.

## **3. Research Questions**

- i. To what extent do the media influence consumer preferences and interest in a sport that is collectively perceived as being predominantly played by men?
- ii. How could the media contribute to the development of women’s football?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

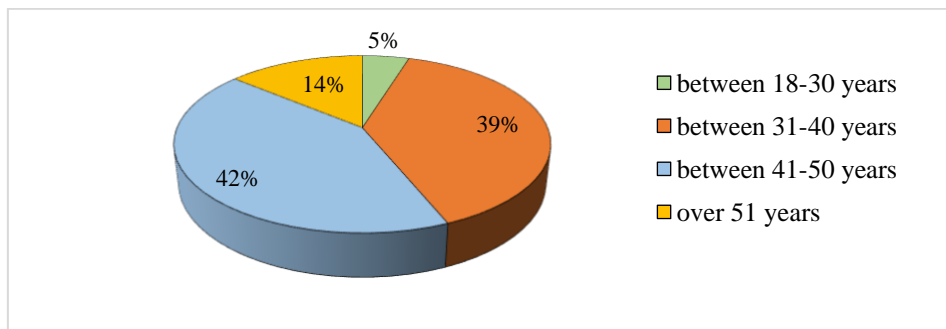
Through the questionnaire addressed to a representative sample of 63 sports journalists, this study has two objectives: (1) to identify the role of the media in promoting women’s sport in general and Romanian women’s football in particular; (2) to explore perceptions of the status of professional female football players and the ways in which existing mentalities can be changed.

## **5. Research Methods**

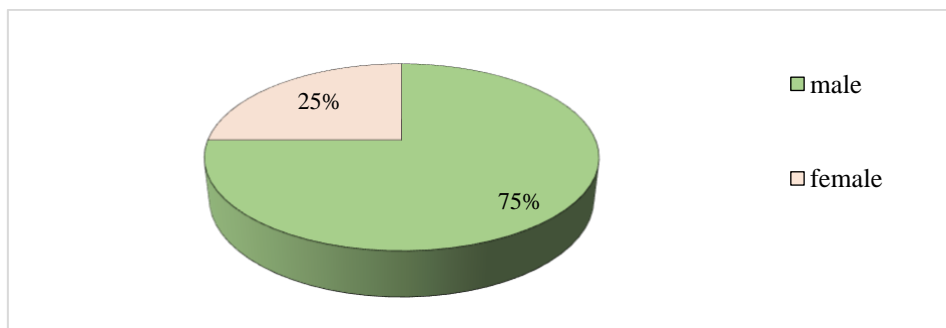
Scientific documentation, questionnaire survey, mathematical statistics and graphical method were used in this study. In order to build an overview of this sports sector, the research includes both qualitative and quantitative data on women’s football. These data were collected through a 24-item questionnaire that was completed by 63 journalists (producers, writers, editors, moderators, presenters, reporters) from the Romanian sports press using the Google Forms platform. The analysis and processing of quantitative data were performed with the help of SPSS statistical software, and for the qualitative data, the NVivo-Qualitative Data Analysis software was used.

## 6. Findings

Demographic data on the structure of the respondents included in the sample show that most of them are aged between 41 and 50 years (42%), followed by those aged between 31 and 40 years (39%), the fewest being in the age groups over 50 years (14%) and between 18 and 30 years (5%) (Figure 1). The gender distribution of respondents reveals that a quarter of them are women (Figure 2). The low number of women in the sports press has been reported over time by several authors (Sullivan, 2012). In the category of “sports journalists”, we included producers of sports shows, news and competitions, writers, editors, moderators, presenters, reporters and commentators. According to a 2011 ISPS survey (“The International Sports Survey 2011”), 92% of sports articles are written by male journalists and only 8% by female journalists. A study conducted in 2021 investigates the racial and gender-based employment practices used by more than 100 newspapers and websites and reveals that 83.3% of sports editors are male and 85.6% of reporters are also male, as pointed out by Lapchick (2022). The same author shows that the percentage of female sports editors increased significantly from 10% in 2018 to 16.7% in 2021, highlighting the need to hire more female journalists in the sports press. Numerous authors (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Jakubowska, 2013) suggest that giving due importance to women’s sports competitions and hiring more women in the sports media will ensure better representation of women’s sports.



**Figure 1.** Age of respondents



**Figure 2.** Gender of respondents

In order to highlight the perceptions of sports journalists regarding the impact of the media on consumers, respondents rated several statements about the role played by the media on a scale of 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement). The average scores of responses to the statement that The media is

an important actor in the socialisation of individuals by broadcasting sports events is 4.08, which suggests an increased agreement on this issue; however, respondents believe to a lesser extent that the media has a positive impact on the practice of sports activities by the consumer, which leads us to state that journalists think that the media contributes to the socialisation of individuals by broadcasting sports events, but this aspect does not necessarily leads to the practice of sport. However, through press reports, individuals know about the lifestyle of athletes, how they train and eat, and can thus be motivated to exercise, which leads to the development of grassroots sport or recreational sport (Puertas-Molero et al., 2019).

**Table 1.** The role of the media in promoting sport

Items	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
The media outlines consumer behaviour regarding sport.	63	3.63	.848	.107
The media is an important actor in the sports socialisation of individuals.	63	4.08	.809	.102
The media influences individuals' perceptions of sport.	63	3.76	.962	.121
The media outlines the image of sport in the collective mind of consumers.	63	3.87	.871	.110
The media has a positive impact on the practice of sports activities by the consumer.	63	3.57	1.088	.137

The above indicators show a positive correlation between the statements that the media outlines the collective mind and has an impact on consumer behaviour (correlation coefficient: .657 in range -1, +1). The media has a positive impact on the practice of sports activities by the consumer is a variable that correlates the least with the other variables, which suggests that respondents do not believe that the impact of the media has necessarily a positive effect (Table 1).

**Table 2.** Impact of the media on society

		The media outlines consumer behaviour regarding sport	The media is an important actor in the sports socialisation of individuals	The media influences individuals' perceptions of sport
The media outlines consumer behaviour regarding sport	Pearson Correlation	1	.607**	.564**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	63	63	63
The media is an important actor in the sports socialisation of individuals	Pearson Correlation	.607**	1	.584**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	63	63	63
The media influences individuals' perceptions of sport	Pearson Correlation	.564**	.584**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	63	63	63
The media outlines the image of sport in the collective mind of consumers	Pearson Correlation	.657**	.633**	.637**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	63	63	63
The media has a positive impact on the practice of sports activities by the consumer	Pearson Correlation	.282*	.387**	.317*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.002	.011
	N	63	63	63

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Female respondents believe to a great extent that the media can have an influence on consumers, with a mean of 3.91, while the mean is 3.74 for male respondents (average scores were calculated in the range 1-5). It is also observed that respondents aged 18-30 years consider to the greatest extent that the media has an impact on consumers' lives, with a mean of 4.0 in range 1-5, the least convinced of this fact being journalists aged between 41 and 50 years (Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 3.** Association between gender and average perceptions regarding the impact of the media on consumers (Variable 1)

Gender	Mean	N	Standard deviation
Male	3.7404	47	.77338
Female	3.9125	16	.46744
Total	3.7841	63	.70875

**Table 4.** Association between age and average perceptions regarding the impact of the media on consumers (Variable 1)

Age	Mean	N	Standard deviation
Between 18-30 years	4.0667	3	.61101
Between 31-40 years	3.8400	25	.51316
Between 41-50 years	3.6444	27	.92376
Over 51 years	3.9750	8	.32842
Total	3.7841	63	.70875

Respondents who rate women's sport as being largely represented in the media believe that the impact of the media on consumers is lower (mean: 3.2 in range 1-5) (Table 4).

**Table 5.** Association between the extent to which respondents believe that women's sport is sufficiently represented in the media and their average perceptions regarding the impact of the media on consumers (Variable 1)

To what extent do you think women's sport is sufficiently represented in the media?	Mean	N	Standard deviation
to a very small extent	3.7615	26	.92437
to a small extent	3.8286	14	.68773
to a moderate extent	3.8625	16	.41773
to a large extent	3.7600	5	.16733
to a very large extent	3.2000	2	.28284
Total	3.7841	63	.70875

The analysis of respondents' perceptions regarding the representation of women's sport in the media reveals that almost half of them think that it is underrepresented and only 3.2% say that it is largely present in the media (Table 5, Table 6).

**Table 6.** To what extent do you think women’s sport is sufficiently represented in the media?

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
to a very small extent	26	41.3	41.3	41.3
to a small extent	14	22.2	22.2	63.5
to a moderate extent	16	25.4	25.4	88.9
to a large extent	5	7.9	7.9	96.8
to a very large extent	2	3.2	3.2	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Almost half of respondents have a positive perception of the role played by the media in shaping consumer preferences for women’s football, with 45% of them saying ‘to a large extent’ and ‘to a very large extent’ (Table 7).

**Table 7.** To what extent do you think the media can influence consumer preferences for women’s football?

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
to a very small extent	5	7.9	7.9	7.9
to a small extent	8	12.7	12.7	20.6
to a moderate extent	19	30.2	30.2	50.8
to a large extent	22	34.9	34.9	85.7
to a very large extent	9	14.3	14.3	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Respondents who believe that women’s football is sufficiently represented in the media have much lower scores regarding the perception of the extent to which the media can influence consumer preferences for women’s football, with the means 1 and 2.8, respectively, in range 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent) (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Association between the perception regarding the influence of the media on consumer preferences for women’s football and the perception regarding the representation of women’s football in the media

To what extent do you think women’s sport is sufficiently represented in the media?	Mean	N	Standard deviation
to a very small extent	3.65	26	1.198
to a small extent	3.36	14	.842
to a moderate extent	3.31	16	.873
to a large extent	2.80	5	1.304
to a very large extent	1.00	2	.000
Total	3.35	63	1.124

Table 9 shows the association between the perception regarding the influence of the media on consumer preferences for women’s football and the media coverage of women’s football. It can be noted that those who believe that there is sufficient information about women’s football in the media consider to a lesser extent that the media can impact consumer preferences for women’s football.

**Table 9.** Association between the perception regarding the influence of the media on consumer preferences for women’s football and the media coverage of women’s football

On a scale of 1 (insufficient) to 5 (sufficient), how do you rate the media coverage of women’s football?	Mean	N	Standard deviation
1 insufficient (very little)	3.48	29	1.243
2 little	3.56	16	.892
3 pretty little	3.45	11	.688
4 almost sufficient	3.00	3	.000
5 sufficient	1.50	4	1.000
Total	3.35	63	1.124

Most respondents (71.4%) believe that the media is an important actor in promoting women’s football and only 12.6% say that it promotes women’s football to a small extent. The overall average of this variable (mean: 3.79 in range 1-5) suggests that respondents think the media is an important actor in promoting women’s football (Table 10).

**Table 10.** To what extent do you think the media is an important actor in promoting women’s football?

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	to a very small extent	4	6.3	6.3
	to a small extent	4	6.3	12.7
	to a moderate extent	10	15.9	28.6
	to a large extent	28	44.4	73.0
	to a very large extent	17	27.0	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Correlating the variable regarding the extent to which respondents believe that the media can influence consumer preferences for women’s football and the variable regarding the perception of the role played by the media in promoting women’s football, a positive association is observed (correlation coefficient: .434 in range -1, +1), which indicates that sports journalists believe that as the media is an important actor in promoting women’s football, it can also influence consumer preferences for this sport (Table 11).

From the corroborated analysis of the above aspects, we can state that the media coverage of competitive women’s football through a communication and promotion campaign in the press and the online environment can change the mentality on the practice of this sport by women in Romania.

**Table 11.** To what extent does the media influence consumer preferences for women's football

Items		To what extent do you think the media is an important actor in promoting women’s football?	To what extent do you think the media can influence consumer preferences for women’s football?
To what extent do you think the media is an important actor in promoting women’s football?	Pearson Correlation	1	.434**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	63	63
To what extent do you think the media can influence consumer preferences for women’s football?	Pearson Correlation	.434**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	63	63

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



The data shown in Table 12 highlight the perceptions of sports journalists on the development of consumer interest in women’s football at national and international levels, the differences being quite significant: the interest in this sport reaches the score 2.89 internationally and 1.89 nationally.

These results are justified by the growing popularity of women’s football competitions all over the world. Thus, in 2019, women’s football recorded significant increases in terms of both competition participation rate and media coverage. The 2019 Women’s World Cup in France was watched for the first time by more than 1 billion people, according to the BBC, and thus the interest in women’s sport reached a new record. However, this rise was overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the postponement of major women’s football competitions and domestic championships.

**Table 12.** Appreciations on the interest in women's football

	To what extent do you think that consumer interest in women’s football has increased in recent years at an international level?	To what extent do you think that consumer interest in women’s football has increased in recent years at a national level?
Mean	2.89	1.89
N	63	63
Standard deviation	.918	.698

**Table 13.** To what extent do you think that consumer interest in women’s football has increased in recent years at an international level?

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
to a very small extent	3	4.8	4.8	4.8
to a small extent	20	31.7	31.7	36.5
to a moderate extent	22	34.9	34.9	71.4
to a large extent	17	27.0	27.0	98.4
to a very large extent	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

**Table 14.** To what extent do you think that consumer interest in women’s football has increased in recent years at a national level?

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
to a very small extent	19	30.2	30.2	30.2
to a small extent	32	50.8	50.8	81.0
to a moderate extent	12	19.0	19.0	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Data analysis shows that no respondent believes that the development of women’s football in recent years has occurred to a large or very large extent at the national level (Tables 13 and 14).

Analysing respondents’ perceptions about the media coverage of women’s sport, it can be seen that 34.9% believe that the image of women’s sport in media coverage reinforces gender bias among consumers, and almost half of them (49.2%) think that the media promotes an image gap between men and women (Tables 15 and 16).

**Table 15.** On a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), specify the extent to which you believe that the image of women’s sport in media coverage reinforces gender bias among consumers

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1 to a very small extent	12	19.0	19.0	19.0
2 to a small extent	12	19.0	19.0	38.1
3 to a reasonable extent	17	27.0	27.0	65.1
4 to a large extent	18	28.6	28.6	93.7
5 to a very large extent	4	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

**Table 16.** On a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), specify the extent to which you believe that the media promotes an image gap between men and women

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1 to a very small extent	10	15.9	15.9	15.9
2 to a small extent	5	7.9	7.9	23.8
3 to a reasonable extent	17	27.0	27.0	50.8
4 to a large extent	16	25.4	25.4	76.2
5 to a very large extent	15	23.8	23.8	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

The averages of the two indicators suggest a somewhat undecided perception of respondents regarding both the way in which the image of women’s sport in media coverage reinforces gender bias among consumers (2.89) and the promotion of an image gap between men and women (3.33) (Table17). There is however a difference between these two indicators in the sense that, although respondents believe to a greater extent that the media promotes an image gap between men and women, they believe to a lesser extent that this could reinforce gender bias among consumers. This conclusion is supported by the results shown in Table 18 where, although a positive correlation is observed between the two variables, the association is not very strong (correlation coefficient: .344 in range -1, +1).

As noted by Scraton et al. (1999), perceptions of femininity has diversified as women gained access to sports traditionally recognised as being dominated by men. Thus, in the collective consciousness of many countries, female football lovers have managed to go beyond gender boundaries to practise this sport that is associated with masculine features. But, as Pitti (2019) points out, these biases also extend to female supporters who, for being part of an ultras community, have to give up certain feminine traits.

**Table 17.** Women’s sport – gender bias

	10. On a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), specify the extent to which you believe that the image of women’s sport in media coverage reinforces gender bias among consumers	11. On a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), specify the extent to which you believe that the media promotes an image gap between men and women
Mean	2.84	3.33
N	63	63
Standard deviation	1.221	1.356

**Table 18.** Gender bias correlations – promoting an image gap between women and men

	10. On a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), specify the extent to which you believe that the image of women’s sport in media coverage reinforces gender bias among consumers	11. On a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), specify the extent to which you believe that the media promotes an image gap between men and women
Pearson Correlation	1	.344**
10. Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
N	63	63
Pearson Correlation	.344**	1
11. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
N	63	63

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 19 shows respondents’ perceptions of various issues related to gender equality in football and sport in general, with the statements being rated on a scale of 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement). According to the results obtained, respondents claim that football is a male game (mean: 2.56) rather than a discriminatory sport (mean: 2.49), but on the other hand, they believe to a greater extent that the game of football has characteristics associated with masculinity (mean: 3.32), being even more convinced that men are more involved in football compared to women (mean: 3.76).

The principle of gender equality is implemented in many European Union projects (Erasmus+ Sport) and presents sport as the most suitable field for promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion but also for developing the skills, knowledge and competences of those involved in this field (European Commission, n.d.).

Although respondents think that the public can be educated to increase interest in women’s football (mean: 3.84) and the media can do more for the development of women’s football (mean: 4.05), they believe only to a moderate extent that the future of women’s football is optimistic (mean: 3.16).

**Table 19.** Respondents’ perceptions of various issues related to gender equality in football and sport in general

<b>13. Please specify the extent to which you agree with the following statements:</b>				
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Standard error</b>
Football is a men’s game.	63	2.56	1.202	.151
Football cannot be played as well by women as it is played by men.	63	2.95	1.373	.173
The financial disparity between male and female football players is justified.	63	3.48	1.268	.160
Football is a discriminatory sport.	63	2.49	1.176	.148
Opportunities in women’s football are growing.	63	3.40	.976	.123
The media could do more for the development of women’s football.	63	4.05	1.054	.133
Women need to work harder than men to be noticed in the sport they play.	63	3.11	1.333	.168

The future of women's football is optimistic.	63	3.16	1.081	.136
The characteristics of the game of football are associated with masculinity.	63	3.32	1.090	.137
Women's football does not have the potential to make an audience in Romania.	63	3.49	1.061	.134
Women have more notoriety in individual sports.	63	3.52	1.030	.130
The public can be educated to increase interest in women's football.	63	3.84	1.066	.134
Men are more involved in football than women.	63	3.76	1.103	.139
Men make more effort when playing football compared to women.	63	3.05	1.099	.138

**Table 20.** Gender difference correlations in football

		<b>Football is a men's game.</b>	<b>The financial disparity between male and female football players is justified.</b>	<b>Football cannot be played as well by women as it is played by men.</b>	<b>Men are more involved in football than women.</b>
Football is a men's game.	Pearson Correlation	1	.533**	.564**	.211
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	.097
	N	63	63	63	63
The financial disparity between male and female football players is justified.	Pearson Correlation	.533**	1	.458**	.405**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	63	63	63	63
Football cannot be played as well by women as it is played by men.	Pearson Correlation	.564**	.458**	1	.152
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		.234
	N	63	63	63	63
Men are more involved in football than women.	Pearson Correlation	.211	.405**	.152	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.097	<.001	.234	
	N	63	63	63	63

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed);\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 20 shows the correlations between the above variables and it can be seen that those who generally believe that football is a male game also think that football cannot be played as well by women as it is played by men (correlation coefficient: 0.564). Those who believe that football is a men's game also share the opinion that the financial disparity between male and female football players is justified (correlation coefficient: 0.533). Given that women's football is most often investigated in relation to men's football, Pedersen et al. (2019) point out in their study that there are obvious anthropometric/physiological differences between male and female football players, which leads to differences in their play styles that "are logical and strategic adaptations to those differences" (p. 9). Thus, one cannot expect women's football to be similar to men's. However, in order to make them more alike, a number of regulation changes are required as follows: "The pitch would have to be some 93 × 61 m, with

goals of  $6.78 \times 2.26$  m. The ball would have to be a size 5, slightly heavier than a volleyball [...], and the duration of the game would have to be 70 min” (Pedersen et al., 2019, p. 9).

As for the financial disparity between men’s and women’s football, the biggest success in this regard is represented by the lawsuit filed against a national football association in 2019, which had as object the cash prizes awarded to the two US teams, men’s and women’s, on the occasion of the 2014 and 2015 World Cups: the Men’s National Football Team received 5.375 million dollars for reaching the 2014 World Cup Round of 16, while the Women’s National Team received 1.725 million dollars to win the 2015 tournament. Thus, even if a national football association has no obligation to repair acts of discrimination committed in the past by that association, they may be expected to take responsibility for repairing and eliminating gender inequalities, including the pay of female players (Archer & Prange, 2019), regardless of social mentalities. On the other hand, while FIFA can be held responsible for differences in World Cup cash prizes, FIFA-affiliated federations and associations are accountable for distributing money to football players (Poppelwell-Scevak, 2022).

Table 21 shows a number of measures that could contribute to increasing the visibility of women’s football in Romania, the surveyed respondents expressing their opinions on the potential that each mentioned measure could have in this regard. Most of the measures presented are considered appropriate to increase the visibility of women’s football, but the strongest effect could be produced by the involvement of sponsors in women’s football (mean: 4.11) and the involvement of the sports press in the media coverage of women’s football (mean: 4).

Meenaghan (1991) defines sponsorship as “an investment, in cash or kind, in an activity, in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with this activity” (p. 37), and in sport, this activity is considerably influenced by the existing sociocultural mentalities on the sports branch that will benefit from this association (Keshkar et al., 2019). For example, in order to conclude sponsorship contracts for the Iranian women’s football championship, social and religious norms regarding women are taken into account, and negotiations usually take place with socially and politically influential groups (Bagheri et al., 2021). Things are completely different in other geographical areas such as Australia, where sponsors financially support this sport played by women from a desire to promote gender equality in the sports industry, considering that this is a social responsibility (Morgan, 2019). In Romania, the most visible campaign to support women’s football was conducted in 2021, when the Fortuna Bookmaker became the official sponsor of the Women’s National Football Team and initiated a campaign aimed at promoting gender equality in the football sector. The performance of women’s football clubs in Romania should also be improved to increase the commercial value and attractiveness of this sport, especially as the best results of Romanian women’s football were obtained in 2012, when the U19 Women’s National Team managed to pass the Elite Tour and qualify for the European Championships, and in 2016, when the same team managed to qualify for the Euro 2017 playoffs. At the same time, we consider it appropriate to associate this sports sector with important names in Romanian professional sport, such as Simona Halep, a former world leader, thus following the model of Serena Williams who, since 2020, has become an investor for a US women’s football team (Grež, 2020).

Respondents believe to a lesser extent that the higher frequency of women’s football matches could lead to an increase in the visibility of this sport (mean: 3.3). Also, both the press and sponsors are

known to mostly offer visibility and support to sports and teams with good performance (Carvalho & Fazenda, 2018) and although Romanian women's football is still at its beginning, the number of sponsors for club teams and the Women's National Team has increased in the last two years.

From the corroborated analysis of the aspects mentioned above, it results that attracting sponsors and promoting women's football through appropriate marketing campaigns will lead to the development of this sports sector.

**Table 21.** Measures to increase the visibility of women's football

14. Please specify the extent to which you believe that the following aspects could contribute to increasing the visibility of women's football in Romania

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
Higher frequency of women's football matches	63	3.30	1.213	.153
Media promotion campaigns	63	3.92	1.021	.129
Higher frequency of TV broadcasts of women's football matches	63	3.87	.975	.123
Involvement of national sports federations in the promotion of women's football	63	3.94	1.045	.132
Involvement of international sports organizations (FIFA, UEFA) in the promotion of women's football	63	3.89	1.033	.130
Involvement of sports clubs in the promotion of women's football	63	3.97	.967	.122
Involvement of the sports press in the media coverage of women's football	63	4.00	1.000	.126
Involvement of sponsors in women's football	63	4.14	.981	.124

On a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), respondents rated the factors influencing lower consumer interest in women's football. Thus, they believe to a very large extent that reduced publicity and popularity lead to low interest among consumers; however, reduced accessibility (frequency of match broadcasts) is one of the least important factors in influencing consumer behaviour (Table 22).

**Table 22.** Factors influencing lower consumer interest in women's football

15. To what extent do you think the factors below influence lower consumer interest in women's football?

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
Reduced accessibility (frequency of match broadcasts)	63	3.57	1.160	.146
Qualitative discrepancy between women's and men's matches	63	3.68	1.119	.141
Lack of notoriety of female players	63	3.63	1.168	.147
The social context regarding biases about women's participation in this sport	63	3.67	1.107	.139
Lack of consumer willingness to change their consumption habits	63	3.75	.933	.118
Reduced publicity	63	3.97	1.031	.130
Low popularity	63	3.97	.933	.118
Predominant dissemination of information on men's football in the media	63	3.73	1.019	.128

Research participants believe that the most effective way leading to the development of women’s football is to increase investment by attracting new sources of funding (mean: 4.27), and the new FRF regulations will have an average efficiency in developing women’s football in Romania (mean: 3.56) (Table 23). The most important FRF regulation for the development of women’s football in our country is the obligation of men’s football clubs in League I to integrate a women’s team in the U15 National Championship starting with the 2020-2021 season. The research conducted by Valenti et al. (2021) claims that national associations of different countries have recently implemented the same policy “demanding men’s football clubs to integrate a women’s team within their structure” (p. 1). The above authors examined in their article “the context, timing and conditions leading to the implementation of the policy of integration in three different countries: Brazil, China and Italy” (Valenti et al., 2021, p. 1). Thus, Italy started implementing this policy in 2015, and Brazil and China adopted it in 2019, just as Romania, but it is important to note that promoting collaboration between men’s and women’s football clubs has been a popular practice for decades in countries such as England, France and Germany, where this sport played by women has often been present in international football competitions (Aoki et al., 2010). In Romania, although this initiative has resulted in establishing new women’s football teams (approximately 10) and concluding collaboration protocols with already existing teams (FRF, n.d.), gender differences persist in both amateur and professional sports, which leads to reduced career opportunities, visibility and funding at the national level (Hills et al., 2021).

**Table 23.** Measures aimed at leading to the development of women’s football

Specify on a scale of 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent) the extent to which you agree to the statements below:

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
The involvement of sports federations and organisations in organising women’s football competitions at all levels will lead to an increase in the number of female players at national/ international level.	63	4.16	1.050	.132
Media coverage of competitive women’s football through communication and promotion campaigns in the press and the online environment will lead to a change in mentality regarding the practice of this sport by women.	63	4.14	1.090	.137
The new FRF regulations will lead to the development of women’s football in Romania.	63	3.56	1.044	.132
Increased investment in women’s football by attracting new sources of funding will lead to the development of this sports sector.	63	4.27	.846	.107
The development of women’s football has a positive impact on Romanian society.	63	3.78	1.054	.133

Regarding the positive aspects of the development of women’s football, respondents identified several effects with a beneficial impact on society and the development of sport in general, such as reducing discrimination and biases or promoting the sports phenomenon (Box 1).

**Box 1. Examples of positive effects specified by respondents**

Sports diversity  
Equal opportunities  
Mitigation of gender bias  
Playing any team sport, regardless of gender, is a positive activity  
Diversity - probably people would like to see a sports show in women's football as well  
Greater opportunities for women  
A national team that could have good results at international level  
Reducing the image gap between women's and men's football  
People would be more open-minded  
Attracting the female audience to football matches  
The development of any male or female sport is beneficial; there can never be anything negative in sport  
Health

Respondents were asked to specify three measures they considered to be the most appropriate for the development of women's football, and one of the most important actions identified by them was related to the promotion of this sport, which strengthens the need for media involvement in this process. Box 2 shows the main measures identified for the development of women's football.

**Box 2. Main measures identified by respondents for the development of women's football**

A vast talent search, attracting communities to create and promote teams, persuading traditional clubs of the benefits of having women's teams, including through financial incentives  
Promotion in schools and on social networks, involvement of local communities  
Funding, funding and funding over and over again  
Funding, broadcasting matches, creating competitions and idols  
1. Media coverage 2. Infrastructure 3. Promotion  
Clear regulations on ethics, discipline and respect  
Attracting sponsors  
Media coverage, funding, professionalization  
Investment, publicity, deep competitive reform  
Co-opting at the federation level of some coaches with results in women's football  
Association with famous names in men's football  
TV campaigns  
Attracting sponsors  
1. The financial issue  
2. Establishment of the Romanian Women's Football Federation  
3. Excessive media coverage and creation of role models  
1. Coach training 2. Stimulating coaches 3. Organising competitions for children  
Media and online promotion, UEFA rules on women's football integration  
Stronger promotion of women's football, attracting sponsors, attracting skilled coaches to help the



#### development of female athletes

A women's section in each club, TV promotion of matches, promotion of female players as role models

1. Media coverage
2. Development of the phenomenon in rural areas
3. International results

Media promotion, attracting sponsors, attracting broadcasters

Promotion in schools, involvement of sponsors, TV broadcasts

Establishment of sections in youth clubs, promotion in schools and a strong League 1 to create models for young people

Promotion, debates on this topic, TV broadcasts

1. Investments made by federations and through government programmes
2. Sale of TV rights for women's football in a package with League 1
3. Promoting the practice of elite sport through the development of infrastructure

Attracting sponsors, publicising the most talented female players, TV broadcasting of women's football matches

Publicity, more teams, more money for female athletes

Based on the data presented in this research, we consider it necessary to mention a study that is closely related to the editorial policy also used in other European media trusts. Thus, during the pandemic, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) maintained its editorial policy for the promotion of women's sport and, in this regard, conducted the largest opinion survey using the Eurovision platform owned by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). The survey was sent to female athletes through the governing sports bodies, and the data obtained provided relevant information; thus, 85% of respondents believe that the media does not do enough to promote women's sport, and 86% think that the media treats men's sport differently from women's sport. The journalistic material collected from this study was published on the BBC Sport website during a week and generated impressive results: 1.7 million unique visitors and 2.5 million views were recorded for the UK audience alone, and the number of female visitors increased significantly. Therefore, although the audience for sports websites and televisions is traditionally dominated by male consumers, and the most promoted sports are those played by men (Giulianotti & Collison, 2020), the media should also take into account the potential of the female public interested in sport and pay more attention to women's sport in general (Menevşe & Ablay, 2019).

## 7. Conclusion

Although the results presented in this research show that women's football in Romania has considerably increased in recent years, the main problems identified in this sports sector remain the financial ones and the poor media coverage of this sport played by women. According to the research, when it comes to knowledge about this sports sector, journalists up to the age of 30 are much better informed, which shows that they identify more with the generations that are currently practising women's football. At the same time, younger journalists highlight the poor representation of women's football, as

opposed to journalists aged 30-55. However, most of the surveyed journalists acknowledge the contribution of media promotion to increasing the popularity of this women's sport by producing materials in the press and online and promoting female athletes but also the role of the media in shaping mentalities at the societal level.

Nonetheless, journalists who highly consider football to be a men's game and that this sport cannot be played by women on the same professional level, so the financial discrepancy between men and women regarding football is justified. Although the poor media coverage of women football is perpetuated by gender inequality in sports, attracting sponsors and creating role models among female soccer players, can lead to an increase in popularity of this sport regardless of the institutional norms and procedures.

Although the respondents do not foresee a very optimistic future for women's football in Romania, the positive effects can still be observed, one of the main benefits being the diversity in sports, increased opportunities for women in sports, shifting mindsets, health through movement, but also the larger number of fans in stadiums or the achievements and merit of Romanian women's football teams at an international level.

The performance of women's football clubs in Romania should also be improved to increase the commercial value and attractiveness of the women's championship when it comes to attracting sponsors and advertising contracts. In our opinion, a marketing campaign suitable for Romanian women's football would be represented by the involvement of the lower secondary education system in promoting this sport among children. Another aspect that deserves to be investigated is whether the increase in the number of female journalists in the sports press would lead to an increase in the visibility of women's sport. The present study aims to illustrate that female journalists have a greater belief that media coverage of a sport can lead to its practice

A limitation of the present study is the impossibility to demonstrate the concrete impact that the media promotion of Romanian women's football would have on the consumption trend of the public. In this regard, we believe that it would be necessary for the media trusts to adopt editorial policies aimed at promoting this sports sector and measure audiences with the help of tools specific to the communication channel used for broadcasting.

## References

- Andrews, P. (2006). *Jurnalismul sportiv. O introducere* [Sports journalism. An introduction]. Polirom.
- Aoki, K., Crumbach, S., Naicker, C., Schmitter, S., & Smith, N. (2010). Identifying best practice in women's football: Case study in the European context. FIFA Master 10th edition, Final Project. *International Masters (MAS) in Management, Law and Humanities of Sport*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008. [https://www.cies-uni.org/sites/default/files/identifying\\_best\\_practices\\_in\\_women\\_football.pdf](https://www.cies-uni.org/sites/default/files/identifying_best_practices_in_women_football.pdf)
- Archer, A., & Prange, M. (2019). 'Equal play, equal pay': Moral grounds for equal pay in football. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 46(3), 416-436. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2019.1622125>
- Bagheri, H., Zare, S., & Alimohammadi, H. (2021). Identifying strategies for attracting sponsors in the Women's Football League of Iran. *Research in Sport Management & Motor Behavior*, 11(21), 143-159. <http://doi.org/10.52547/JRSM.11.21.143>

- Carvalho, P., & Fazenda, T. (2018). Media influence on elite football performance: A literature review to develop a model. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 18(Supplement 5), 1980-1985. <http://doi.org/10.7752/jpes.2018.s5293>
- European Commission. (n.d.). *Gender equality*. <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/policies/sport-and-society/gender-equality>
- FIFA. (2018). *Women's football strategy*. <https://www.fifa.com/womens-football/strategy/strategy-details>
- Football Romanian Female [FRF]. (n.d.). *Strategia pentru dezvoltarea fotbalului feminin românesc 2021-2026* [Strategy for the development of Romanian women's football 2021-2026]. <https://www.frf.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Strategie-dezvoltare-fotbal-feminin.pdf>
- Giulianotti, R., & Collison, H. (2020). Sport and the Covid-19 pandemic: A structuralist analysis of key themes in the UK mass media. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 2, 578472. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2020.578472>
- Grez, M. (2020). *Natalie Portman and Serena Williams are among investors in new Los Angeles soccer team*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/21/football/los-angeles-womens-soccer-team-serena-williams-natalie-portman-spt-intl/index.html>
- Hardin, M., & Shain, S. (2005). Strength in numbers? The experiences and attitudes of women in sports media careers. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(4), 804-819. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900508200404>
- Hills, L. A., Maitland, A., Croston, A., & Horne, S. (2021). 'It's not like she's from another planet': Undoing gender/redoing policy in mixed football. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 56(5), 658-676. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690220934753>
- Jakubowska, H. (2013). Are women still the 'other sex': Gender and sport in the Polish mass media. *Sport in Society*, 18(2), 168-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.854464>
- Jones, R. (2022). *Barcelona's Women's Champions League win over Real Madrid sets records for DAZN*. <https://www.sportspromedia.com/news/barcelona-real-madrid-womens-champions-league-dazn-youtube-viewership/>
- Keshkar, S., Lawrence, I., Dodds, M., Morris, E., Mahoney, T., Heisey, K., Addesa, F., Hedlund, D., Dickson, G., Ghasemi, H., Faruq, A., Naylor, M., & Santomier, Jr., J. (2019). The role of culture in sports sponsorship: An update. *Annals of Applied Sport Science*, 7(1), 57-81. <http://doi.org/10.29252/aassjournal.7.1.57>
- Lapchick, R. E. (2022). *The 2021 Sports Media Racial and Gender Report Card™: Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE)*. University of Central Florida. [https://www.espn.com/espn/story/\\_/id/32254145/sports-media-remains-overwhelmingly-white-male-study-finds](https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/32254145/sports-media-remains-overwhelmingly-white-male-study-finds)
- Meenaghan, T. (1991). The role of sponsorship in the marketing communications mix. *International Journal of Advertising*, 10(1), 35-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.1991.11104432>
- Menevşe, A., & Ablay, M. E. (2019). An investigation of the attitudes of sports media towards women's sports. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 7(1), 87-94. <http://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2019.070112>
- Morgan, A. (2019). An examination of women's sport sponsorship: A case study of female Australian Rules football. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35(17-18), 1644-1666. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2019.1668463>
- Pedersen, A. V., Aksdal, I. M., & Stalsberg, R. (2019). Scaling demands of soccer according to anthropometric and physiological sex differences: A fairer comparison of men's and women's soccer. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 762. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00762>
- Pitti, I. (2019). Being women in a male preserve: An ethnography of female football ultras. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(3), 318-329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2018.1443803>
- Poppelwell-Scevak, C. (2022). The gender pay gap: How FIFA dropped the ball. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moac011>
- Puertas-Molero, P., Marfil-Carmona, R., Zurita-Ortega, F., & González-Valero, G. (2019). Impact of sports mass media on the behavior and health of society. A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(3), 486. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030486>

- Scraton, S., Fasting, K., Pfister, G., & Bunuel, A. (1999). It's still a man's game? The experiences of top-level European women footballers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34(2), 99-111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/101269099034002001>
- Sullivan, H. (2012). *A survey of women in sports media* [Master's thesis]. University of Arkansas. <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/429>
- UEFA. (2019). *Time for action: First ever UEFA women's football strategy launched*. <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/0251-0f8e6ba98884-3dd4ba899f93-1000--time-for-action-first-ever-uefa-women-s-football-strategy-launc/>
- Valenti, M., Peng, Q., & Rocha, C. (2021). Integration between women's and men's football clubs: A comparison between Brazil, China and Italy. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(2), 321-339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1903967>
- Zbigniew, D., Jankowski, K. W., Lenartowicz, M., Murrmann, J., & Rymarczyk, P. (2012). Mass media and professional sport. *Baltic Journal of Health and Physical Activity*, 4(4). <http://doi.org/10.2478/v10131-012-0028-6>