

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT  
BUCHAREST**

**DOCTORAL SCHOOL**



**ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Title of the doctoral thesis: THE IMPACT OF MASS  
MEDIA IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL**

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## **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, UEFA, FRF).

In Romania, women's football has not enjoyed a development that could ensure this sport a high level of competitiveness. Unlike men's football, women's football did not enjoy the same interest from specialised institutions in Romania until 2014, when this sport 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, this reform policy, along with many other programmes focused on the selection of children and juniors, has proven to be suitable for increasing the number of female football players but insufficiently stimulating to attract sponsors and media coverage.

## **Motivation and purpose**

*The main reason* for selecting this topic is to provide a theoretical background (in terms of analysis and synthesis) of the key points of interest (communication, investments, and marketing strategies) in the relationship between mass media and women's football.

*The first objective* was to assess the development level of women's football by investigating the perspectives of coaches and sports journalists in Romania regarding this sport, as well as the level of competitiveness in international women's football competitions.

*The second objective* was to observe the dynamics of sports consumers across media channels and to advocate for the inclusion of women's football within television programs, aiming to garner quantitative insights into viewers' interest in women's football.

## **Part I of the thesis**

### **The theoretical background**

*Part I* of the thesis includes *seven chapters* in which we wanted to highlight the most important aspects of women's football both as a social phenomenon and as a performance sport, all presented in close correlation with mass media.

*In the first chapter*, our objective was to highlight that despite the growing scholarly interest in women's football, as evidenced by Valenti et al. (2018), the exploration of this sport has predominantly relied on qualitative methodologies, particularly sociological and historical approaches involving interviews and document analyses. Consequently, the availability of quantitative data remains relatively constrained. In Romania, studies on women's football provide a modest literature in terms of both qualitative and quantitative scientific data.

*In the second chapter*, we aim to elucidate the intricate relationships between mass media and sports. Over time, the media has greatly influenced sports. On the other hand, sport played a significant role in the development of mass media, especially with the advent of television, which became a dominant means of communication globally between 1960-1980 (Whannel, 2009). Globalization in sports has accelerated the professionalization of various sports (Dziubinski et al., 2012). The academic literature has indicated that the media does not pay as much attention to women's sports, which denotes not only insufficient media coverage, but also the existence of existing gender biases in sports journalism (Bernstein, 2020; Schmidt, 2018; Oates, 2012).

*In the third chapter* we highlight the beginnings of women's football in four European countries. Women have been playing football since the early 9th century, in most European countries, especially in England and France while in Germany, opposition to the sport led to the abandonment of initiatives to establish women's football clubs (Pfister, 2015). The exclusion of women from this sporting field was particularly based on the close association between football and masculinity, but also on gender role norms (Pfister, 2003). In Romania, during the communist period, women's football remained predominantly amateur in nature, lacking validation as a professional sport by the governing regime at the time.

*In the fourth chapter*, our aim was to achieve a comprehensive overview of media coverage of women's football. At an international level, there has been a significant increase in media interest in women's football in recent years, attributed to the competitive balance observed among teams in major competitions (Scelles, 2021). However, media coverage in Romania remains notably limited. Nevertheless, the coverage of women's football in sports media continues to pale in comparison to that of men's football, a trend that extends to other

sports disciplines as well. Moreover, this chapter examines the initiatives of sports institutions aimed at enhancing the visibility and media coverage of women's football.

*In the fifth chapter*, we highlighted the performance in women's football. By exploring existing studies, we endeavored to identify the peculiarities of women's football as depicted in academic literature and to present researchers' perspectives on the distinctions between men's and women's football. Moreover, we aimed to emphasize the importance of coaching in elite women's football training.

*In the sixth chapter*, we highlighted the main objectives regarding the development of women's football strategies of the international bodies FIFA and UEFA, which include stimulating participation, developing the women's football game, transforming competitions, increasing visibility and commercial value, and strengthening governance structures by enhancing the representation of women.

*In the seventh chapter*, we summarized the most significant conclusions drawn from the theoretical background. Sports performance continues to remain both the best way to attract investment and sponsors, and the best strategy to educate a society for a particular sport. The growing popularity of women's football worldwide has led relevant international and national institutions to implement regulations 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 coverage and develop this sport.

## **Part II of the thesis**

*Part II of the thesis comprises three studies grounded in the objectives delineated by the strategies developed by FIFA, UEFA, and FRF. These studies enabled us to assess the extent to which these objectives have been implemented in Romania and to understand the socio-cultural context within which women's football evolves.*

### **Study on the perception of first division coaches in Romania regarding the development of women's football**

*The purpose* of the study is to identify the perception of the coaches from the first women's football division regarding the development of Romanian women's football, the media coverage of this sport on national and international level and also regarding the challenges of coaching.

The sample comprised 12 coaches, consisting of 1 female and 11 male individuals, with an average age of 42 years. Their coaching experience averaged approximately 12 years, with

approximately 7 years specifically in women's soccer coaching. They were selected to participate in an online questionnaire consisting of 24 items. The statistical analysis was both quantitative (SPSS) and qualitative (NVivo). On a scale of 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement), respondents rated several statements regarding the development and promotion of women's football and the need for further education on women's coaching. With respect to media coverage of women's football, coaches perceive that this sport enjoys higher visibility in other countries compared to Romania.

### **Research Questions**

- 1. To what extent can the implementation of FIFA, UEFA and FRF strategies contribute to the development of Romanian women's football?*
- 2. What are the coaches' perceptions of the promotion of women's football through the media and the challenges of coaching?*

### **Results**

Regarding the development of women's football, the respondents agree to a very high extent (mean 4.25) that the UEFA and FRF strategies for the development of women's football will contribute to increasing interest in this sport. However, coaches are dissatisfied with the level of development of Romanian women's football and 9 out of the 12 respondents consider the lack of finances to be the main impediment in the development of women's football in Romania. Also, the coaches believe that the development of the visual and practical consumption of this sport would be accelerated by a greater involvement of the mass media. Respondents identify the need for additional education for women's football coaching.

### **Study on the perception of sports journalists regarding women's football in Romania**

*The purpose* of this study is to identify the role of the media in promoting women's sport in general and Romanian women's football in particular and to explore perceptions of the status of professional female football players and the ways in which existing mentalities can be changed. 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.

## **Research Questions**

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

## **Results**

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.

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 practicing women's football.

## **Study regarding technical and tactical analysis of the Romanian Women's National Team in the qualification campaign for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup**

*The purpose* of the research is to examine the technical-tactical level (certain technical procedures and technical-tactical actions) of the women's national football team by comparing it mainly with the Italian team (ranked first) and the Republic of Moldova team (ranked last) in the qualification campaign for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

The investigated technical and tactical parameters were provided by the Wyscout platform. Using the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test, we aimed to identify the existence of significant differences between the results obtained by the six football teams in Group G (Romania, Switzerland, Italy, Republic of Moldova, Croatia and Lithuania) in the matches played in both the first half and the second half of the championship, with a view to the following technical indicators: number of fouls committed, fouls received, possession, successful passes, duels won, aerial duels won, sliding tackles. To identify possible significant differences between the six groups (women's football teams) analysed two by two for the mentioned indicators, the Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner (DSCF) pairwise comparison test was used.

## **Research questions**

1. *What are the differences in the technical-tactical level (certain technical procedures and technical-tactical actions) between the national team, the Italian team (ranked first) and the Republic of Moldova team (ranked last) in the qualification campaign for the 2023 Women's World Cup?*

2. *What significant associations can be found between the technical-tactical indicators recorded for the Romanian team and the Italian team in the matches played during the qualification campaign for the 2023 Women's World Cup?*

## **Results**

Regarding the Romanian team, there is a significant positive correlation between the number of counterattacks and the number of duels won, which means that the Romanian team manages to initiate a higher number of counterattacks when the number of duels won is greater. This aspect suggests that the Romanian team has an increased tendency to counterattack due to winning duels against the opposing team. In the case of both Romania and Italy, there is a significant positive correlation between possession (value calculated as a percentage) and the number of shots on goal, which means that the two teams manage to shoot more on goal when they keep possession for a longer time. Longer possession time favours the increase in the number of shots on goal, which has a positive influence on creating goal-scoring opportunities in the case of the Romanian and Italian teams.

The results of the study can be used by female football players and football coaches to raise awareness on the dynamics of the game and the technical-tactical elements used by successful women's football teams.

## **Broadcast Project**

The broadcast project *Fotbal la Feminin* includes three interviews closely related to the research carried out in this paper and a short presentation of the main parameters analyzed in the *Study regarding technical and tactical analysis of the Romanian Women's National Team in the qualification campaign for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup*.

Each of the guests interviewed in this broadcast project (Cristi Dulca - head coach of Romania women's national football team; Camelia Ceasar – goalkeeper of AS Roma; Ovidiu Herea – retired football player) brings, through testimonies and their direct involving in women football, a personal touch to the main ideas developed both in the theoretical background and in the studies contained by this research.

The results obtained from the broadcast interviews (ratings and shares) served for a correlational study within the present thesis. The objective was to evaluate the interest of the Romanian public in women's football, given the insufficient media coverage of this sport. The feedback that we received regarding our pioneering broadcast project encouraged us also to include a few testimonies from sports journalists and coaches.

### **Personal contributions**

The doctoral thesis "*The impact of mass media in promoting women's football*" represents the first Romanian research that examined the biunivocal relationship between mass media and women's football. As such, we strongly believe that our findings will contribute to a deeper understanding about the development of this sport in the context of reinforcing this sector not only at the level of performance, but also at the level of media coverage.

The broadcast project *Fotbal la Feminin* is the first television production dedicated exclusively to this sport practiced by women, which has been broadcast on one of the Romanian TV channels since the appearance of this sport until now. The format of the show follows the specific model of productions made for any other sports branch and reflects the editorial policy adopted by Digi Sport programs.

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 for broadcasting.