



## **The Value in Sponsoring Women's Football World Cup for Companies**

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<p>This study explored the potential benefits for companies sponsoring the Women's World Cup, focusing on the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. It emphasized the need for companies to leverage the rising popularity of women's football for brand promotion and societal impact. Expanding on the thesis background, the study looked at why it is valuable to sponsor women's football events by considering their history. The research investigated the advantages of sponsoring the Women's Football World Cup, examined marketing differences between men's and women's football, suggested strategies to enhance sponsorship opportunities, and assessed brands' contributions to women's football growth.</p> <p>The study employed personal interviews with football players and a company interview. The interviews and research spanned from January 2023 to December 2023.</p> <p>Drawing on inequality theory, the study critically analyzed how women's football sponsorships can challenge traditional gender norms and contributed to the empowerment of female athletes. Furthermore, by integrating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the study explored how companies, through sponsorship, can align their values with societal expectations, promote gender equality, and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of women's sports.</p> <p>This study highlighted the importance of companies shifting their sponsorship focus to women's sporting events, asserting that investing in women's football goes beyond a mere financial arrangement. Instead, it underscored the significance of a value exchange, where companies can actively contribute to positive societal changes, challenge stereotypes, and foster a more inclusive and diverse sporting landscape. Emphasizing not only the potential financial gains but also the anticipated growth in women's football, the study underscored the vital roles played by players, teams, and companies in sustaining progress.</p> <p>In conclusion, the research issued a clear call to action for companies to redirect their sponsorship efforts, recognizing the broader impact beyond financial gains and advocating for positive societal contributions in women's sports.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Women's sponsoring, Sports marketing, Football, World Cup 2023

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	Sponsorship of Women's football on the rise.....	1
1.2	Research question .....	2
1.3	Table 1: Overlay Matrix .....	2
1.4	Benefits .....	3
1.5	Demarcation.....	4
1.6	Key concepts.....	4
2	Sponsorship equality in sports .....	6
2.1	Breaking the tradition .....	7
2.2	Real investments .....	9
2.3	Implementing ESG in sport sponsorships.....	10
3	Research Methods .....	12
3.1	Research design.....	13
	Research phase    Phase 1    Phase 2    Phase 3 .....	13
4	Discussion.....	14
4.1	Interview analysis.....	14
4.2	A valuable demographic .....	15
4.3	A value exchange .....	15
4.4	What can we learn from the UEFA business case for women's football?.....	16
4.5	Player's, companies' and team's role in the future events.....	18
4.6	Conclusion - Beyond the World cup.....	19
5	Sources list.....	21
6	Appendices .....	23
6.1	Appendix 1. GANTT chart .....	23
6.2	Appendix 2 interview questions.....	24
6.3	Appendix 3. ....	26
6.4	Appendix 4 .....	32

# 1 Introduction

In this thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business, specializing in Marketing at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, the value of sponsoring the Women's World Football Cup for companies will be discussed. Due to the traction in recent years of women's football and its viewership increase, and more recently with the FIFA Women's World cup of the summer of 2023. It has undoubtedly become a platform where companies should and need to use in order to sponsor teams and thus advertise their brands as the World cup is the biggest stage for the development of Women's football.

In this chapter, the improvements needed in women's football sponsorship and its importance for businesses will be discussed. This study will show how companies can raise awareness of this issue and avoid missing future sponsorship opportunities during these competitions. These opportunities include financial gains, brand image enhancement, and contributions to social sustainability for companies.

## 1.1 Sponsorship of Women's football on the rise

This thesis aims to highlight the value that sponsoring women's sporting events can bring to companies, with a focus on the women's Football World cup. In recent years, women's sporting events are becoming more and more a representation of safe spaces and family friendly events (Hayes 2022). More and more companies are shifting their sponsorship deals in order to also improve their brand image and company values. For instance, Arkéma, a French chemical company has extended their sponsorship deal with the Women's Ligue 1, to pay €1.2 million each year.

These are endless opportunities for companies to improve their image, put action into words as well as keep up with societal issues. Professional women's sporting teams are struggling with sponsoring even with millions of viewers, we can't begin to imagine how amateur teams struggle as well, thus affecting their performance and viewership. This issue can hopefully be solved by the top up, with professional teams leading the way, as we have seen the US women's national team fighting for equal play, we can strive towards a new fight for equal sponsoring.

## 1.2 Research question

This thesis aims to address the issues surrounding the sponsorship of the Women's Football World Cup and the opportunities it presents for companies. The research questions will be explored through interviews and research.

Research Question: What are the benefits for companies in sponsoring the Women's Football World Cup?

Investigative Question 1: How is marketing for women's football different from men's football?

Investigative Question 2: What strategies can be employed to enhance sponsorship opportunities for women's football during the World cups?

Investigative question 3: In what ways do brands contribute to the growth of women's football?

Investigative Question 4: What advantages do companies gain from sponsoring women's football events like the Women's Football World Cup?

## 1.3 Table 1: Overlay Matrix

Investigative Question	Knowledge base	Research Methods	Interview / Measurement Questions	Results
<b>IQ 1. How does women's football marketing differ from men's football marketing?</b>	Closing the gap in sponsoring & Marketing between Men's / Womens s football	Interview	Research / interview of qualitative data	Chapter 2

<b>IQ 2. How to improve women's sponsoring issues?</b>	Why companies miss the opportunity	Interview	Research / interview of qualitative data of company x	Chapter 2-4
<b>IQ3: In which way do brands contribute to the growth of Women's football?</b>	Company responsibility	Study	interview of qualitative data of company x & sports players	Chapter 4
<b>IQ 4. What are the benefits for companies to sponsor women's football?</b>	What companies gain	Interview	Interview of qualitative data of company x	Chapter 4

#### 1.4 Benefits

This study provides companies with suggestions for improving their awareness regarding equal sponsorship opportunities for both men and women. As well as for individuals and the author of this thesis to understand the complexity in sponsoring and how to break the cycle of poor sponsoring opportunities for women's sports and football.

## 1.5 Demarcation

This study is delineated by specific parameters, ensuring a focused application of the value that women's football sponsorship brings to companies. For instance, the interviewees are Europeans only due to limited time and resources. While Europe is big in women's football, this isn't fully representative of the global landscape encompassing women's football. Indeed, the experiences and challenges faced by women's football teams and sponsors in other regions are not explicitly addressed. This therefore narrows the research outcomes applying to each geographical region.

This study puts a focus on the FIFA Women's Football World Cup, especially the 2023 event. This event is crucial, but it leaves out other women's sports events. While this event serves as a pivotal platform for the development of women's football, it excludes insights from other women's sporting events. The demarcation acknowledges that the dynamics of sponsorship may vary across different sports and events, and the findings may not be directly transferable to non-football contexts. These limits enable the study to stay on track and within the boundaries of the IQ's.

## 1.6 Key concepts

**Sponsorship** is defined as "an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity." ([29] Meenaghan, 1991)

**A sporting event** means an athletic activity requiring skill or physical prowess, usually competitive in nature and governed by a set of rules provided by a nationally recognized sanctioning body. (law insider, 2022).

**Gender inequality** refers to the unequal distribution of societal resources, opportunities, and privileges between individuals or groups based on their gender. It involves the systematic discrimination and disadvantage of individuals based on perceived gender norms and expectations. Gender inequality manifests in various forms, including disparities in economic opportunities, educational access, political representation, social status, and the enforcement of traditional gender roles. (United Nations Development Programme, 2019)

**FIFA** or the "Fédération Internationale de Football Association, is the international governing body for the sport of soccer (association football). Established in 1904, FIFA's mission is to promote and govern the development and progress of international football. It is responsible for organizing and overseeing major international competitions, including the FIFA World Cup, which is the premier tournament in men's and women's football." (FIFA, n.d)

**UEFA** “or the Union of European Football Associations, is the administrative and controlling body for European football. It is one of six continental football governing bodies and is responsible for organizing and overseeing football competitions in Europe. UEFA's primary competitions include the UEFA Champions League for clubs and the UEFA European Championship for national teams.” (UEFA, n.d)

**Gender bias** “refers to the unequal treatment or representation of individuals based on their gender, often resulting in unfair advantages or disadvantages for one gender over the other. It can manifest in various aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and social interactions. Gender bias may be explicit or implicit and can contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes, discrimination, and unequal opportunities for individuals of different genders.” (International Labour Organization, ILO, 2019).

**Sportswashing** is a strategic practice that involves using sports, particularly major sporting events or investments in sports, to divert attention from and mitigate the negative impact of moral violations or controversial actions associated with a country, organization, or individual. Similar to the concepts of "whitewashing" and "greenwashing," sportswashing seeks to present a favorable image by leveraging the positive associations and widespread appeal of sports to overshadow or minimize the attention given to moral violations. It operates through various effects, including distracting, minimizing, and normalizing moral violation, and often involves creating positive associations with sporting events, clubs, or organizations to influence public perception. (Fruh, Archer, Wojtowicz, 2022)

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** is a business approach that goes beyond the traditional focus on profit-making and emphasizes the ethical, social, and environmental impacts of a company's operations. It involves integrating sustainable and socially responsible practices into business strategies, decision-making processes, and interactions with stakeholders. CSR initiatives may include ethical labor practices, environmental sustainability, community engagement, philanthropy, and transparency in business operations.” (Carroll, 1999)

**Brand Image**, refers to the perception and impression that consumers have of a brand, encompassing the unique set of associations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings associated with the brand. It is shaped by the brand's visual elements, messaging, product quality, customer service, and overall brand experience. A positive brand image can enhance customer loyalty, trust, and preference, while a negative brand image can lead to distrust and a decline in consumer confidence. (Keller, 1993).



## 2 Sponsorship equality in sports

Sponsorship is defined as "an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity." (Meenaghan, 1991). For sports teams to function properly, sponsoring is key. UCFB describes football sponsorships as "fundamental" as it provides more opportunities to play as well as providing clubs with "the opportunity to improve the fan experience". Furthermore, it is described that long term reliable sponsorships can improve the quality of the game no matter the level. This is ever more so important as how often do we hear the argument that Women's football isn't at a high enough level in order to drive viewership. The reality is that this sponsorship will increase the visibility of women's football as a whole and increase the interest in it, as well as allowing more young players to get involved. This will increase the level as the athlete pool will automatically be larger and more experienced. This has already been visible in leagues where women's football is being taken seriously, such as in the US and in England. Year by year the level is improving, and the numbers are only showing progress to come. A UEFA report on the business case for women's football states that "Women's football could see a sixfold increase in its commercial value over the next decade, reaching an annual value of €686m by 2033" (UEFA, 2022). This increase would further emphasize that companies need to invest and sponsor women's football if they want to profit from the upcoming success. Sponsorship disparities are as follows. According to Time magazine (2023), men's FIFA world cup in Qatar generated 1.7 billion \$ revenue through sponsorships, whereas women's revenue generated was 300 million \$. Although the women's world cup in 2023 has gathered immense corporations' sponsors such as Unilever, McDonalds and Budweiser, this is still only 18% of the men's competition in 2022 according to Time magazine (2023).

Throughout this thesis we will demonstrate how companies can benefit from shifting their sponsoring towards women's sporting events rather than stick to their usual traditions of only sponsoring men's events. For instance, many companies don't even consider women's sports as they are based on viewership, and many events have inequality in the prize pool which promote different prize money for men and women. However, we may wonder how sponsoring in turn drives viewership, thus improving sponsorship in women's sports as well as women's sports situation as a whole. These societal issues are fundamental in companies' growth towards social sustainability. Indeed, as equal pay remains essential in social sustainability, we may argue that equal

sponsorship is just as important. For instance, women's sport receives 7% of media coverage and a low 0.4% of commercial investment is directed to women only sport (The conversation, 2022). These figures can be brought up and improved through equality in sponsoring. As well as fill the gap that women and girls feel when looking to have role models in sports.

## 2.1 Breaking the tradition

Traditionally, the landscape of sports viewership has leaned heavily towards a predominantly male audience. According to recent data from YouGov in 2023, as illustrated in Figure 1, a significant 58% of men are likely to have engaged with professional sports in the last month, while only 33% of women fall within the same category. This gender disparity highlights a clear imperative to foster greater interest and engagement among female viewers, indicating the potential for untapped markets in the sports industry.

### Global: Women less likely to watch professional men and women's sports compared to men

In the last month have you... (% of adults who agree with the following statements)



YouGov

Jan 2023

Figure 1. Women less likely to watch professional sports (Yougov, 2023).

Moreover, an intriguing aspect surfaces when examining viewership patterns in women's sports. Statista's data for 2023, depicted in Figure 2, reveals that globally, 57% of viewers of women's sports leagues are male, and 43% are female. This dynamic emphasizes the importance of expanding women's sports leagues to not only cater to a growing female audience but also to address the existing trend of higher male viewership in this domain.

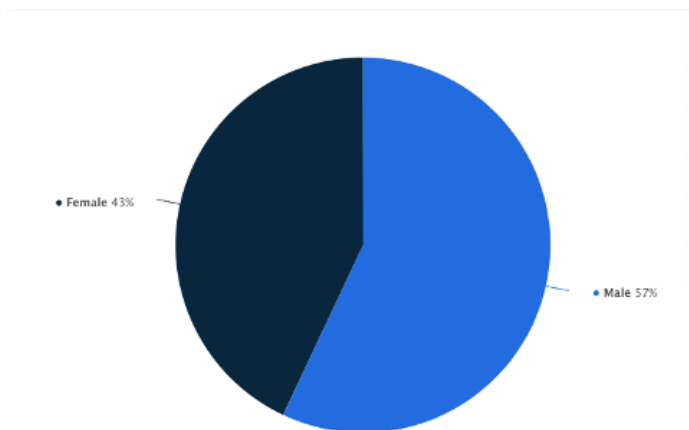


Figure 2, Share of TV viewers of women's sports leagues worldwide as of 3rd quarter 2018, by gender, Statista, 2023.

Furthermore, Cooky (2021), Highlights the inequality of airtime that female sports receive. For instance, according to Cooky, women's sports coverage only totaled 5.4% of airtime in 2019, as compared to the 5% in 1989 and 5.1% in 1993. This further shows the slow progression of viewership in comparison with sports airtime. When the airtime is low for sports, the viewership opportunities are slowed down considerably. Indeed, according to figure 3, the airtime proportion devoted to women's sports is marginal and has remained nearly the same since 1989, with peak years in 1999 and 2004. This further enhances the need for urgency in terms of airtime in women's sports. The data highlights a clear gender divide in sports viewership, emphasizing the need to engage more female fans. Additionally, addressing the imbalance in airtime for women's sports is crucial

for fostering equal opportunities. As the sports industry aims for inclusivity, addressing these issues will lead to a more balanced and fair future for fans of all genders.

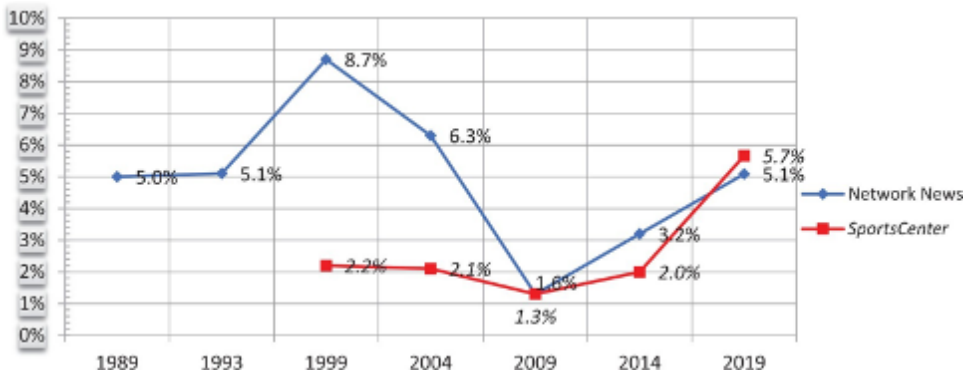


Figure 3, Proportion of airtime devoted to women's sports on three network affiliates' sport news, and on ESPN's SportsCenter (Cooky, 2021)

## 2.2 Real investments

More than just financial investments, women's football has proven to be an investment into communities and culture. Companies and brands need to leverage this opportunity in order to invest in ESG and especially for the social aspect and social inclusivity.

Some brands are at the forefront of women's football, for instance brands such as Unilever, McDonald's and Coca-cola have sponsored the women's world cup in 2023, however these sponsorships have proven to be a fraction of what male competitions receive. In fact, according to BNN Bloomberg (2022), the Women's FIFA world cup sponsors equate to only 18% of the 1.2 billion dollars generated by the Men's world cup in 2022.

Some other brands truly invest in the long term and not just for single competitions as those mentioned above. For instance, Johnnie Walker in the US regards sponsorship as a true long-term

partnership (Gotham FC 2023). These are the investments required in the long run for women's football to grow sustainably and acquire a true, consistent following. Brands that truly invest because they care, help players become advocates. Furthermore, teams that gain investment can then pay it forward for the sport to grow, create camps, have more equipment for teams, and donate to schools. These real investments matter truly in the sport's growth and for future World Cups, and it is not just about having a logo on a billboard, more so about the growth from youth development to supporter awareness. Finally, an important matter to mention is that investing in women's sport is not a charity, more so a profitable investment. More than 2 billion viewers were forecasted to watch the Women's World cup in 2023 (Statista 2023), that is more than the summer Olympics and the winter Olympics.

### **2.3 Implementing ESG in sport sponsorships**

According to Carroll (1999), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) represents a business approach that goes beyond the traditional focus on profit-making and emphasizes the ethical, social, and environmental impacts of a company's operations. It involves integrating sustainable and socially responsible practices into business strategies, decision-making processes, and interactions with stakeholders. CSR initiatives may include ethical labor practices, environmental sustainability, community engagement, philanthropy, and transparency in business operations. This concept is tightly linked with CSR duties linked to sponsorships. In fact, the European Sponsorship Association listed its 2022 top sponsorship trend as ESG and Sustainability. According to ESA (Morris, 2022), Sustainability was the number one sponsorship trend in 2020 and in 2022. This further enhances the importance of CSR in companies' sponsorship strategies. Morris, 2022 also mentions the opportunity for sponsorships to enhance reputation as well as creating beneficial societal impact and sustainability. Furthermore, Morris, again mentions the need for identifying and mitigating risks linked to CSR sponsorships when mentioning responsible marketing as a corporate value.

Thus, CSR sponsorships can minimize the impact of environmental impacts or social issues that arise in a company.

Moreover, as highlighted by Medium (2022), supporting women's football sends an important message towards gender equality and breaking barriers. This aligns with the growing emphasis on social and environmental issues in the corporate world, as reflected in the increasing integration of CSR principles into sponsorship decisions. By actively engaging in initiatives that promote positive societal impact, companies not only contribute to meaningful causes but also reinforce their commitment to responsible business practices.

Furthermore, through sponsoring with a clear social responsible strategy, companies are able to improve their brand image. Brand Image refers to the perception and impression that consumers have of a brand, encompassing the unique set of associations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings associated with the brand. It is shaped by the brand's visual elements, messaging, product quality, customer service, and overall brand experience. (Keller, 1993). A positive brand image can enhance customer loyalty, trust, and preference, while a negative brand image can lead to distrust and a decline in consumer confidence. This brand image is closely linked to the brand's equity and shapes the brand's perception by consumers. This is reflected in figure 4, with Keller's brand equity model. Through this model we are able to see the relationship between brand equity and consumer perceptions and responses to a brand. For instance, corporations willing to implement CSR to their sponsorship strategies will need to focus on consumers' perception of their brand. This perception will create harmony for their brand's equity.

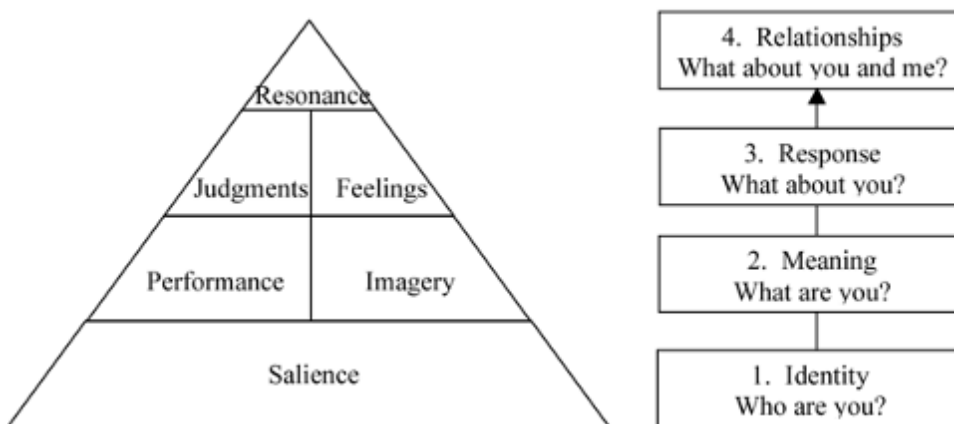


Figure 4. Strategic Brand Management (Keller, 1993)

### 3 Research Methods

The thesis employs qualitative research, utilizing interviews as a primary method for ongoing investigation. This method is chosen for its effectiveness in conducting research, allowing direct interaction with sports players affected by sponsorship issues and the companies responsible for sponsorship. To ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings, procedures are applied. The interviews, serving as the primary data collection tool, follow a structured approach to maintain consistency. Standardized questions are employed to gather comparable responses, enhancing the reliability of the collected data.

The research design also incorporates strategies to establish the validity of the findings. This includes triangulation, where multiple sources of data, such as interviews with both sports players and sponsoring companies, are used to corroborate and validate the information obtained. In addition to qualitative methods, Excel is utilized for ongoing data collection and analysis. This tool facilitates the systematic organization and interpretation of qualitative data gathered during the research process.

The information collected dives into how companies derive financial benefits and create value for themselves. Furthermore, an exploration of the impact of sponsorship on sports players, including their value and performance, provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

The collection tools, primarily personal interviews, are designed to extract nuanced insights from sports players and companies involved in sports sponsorship. These interviews are conducted online using Zoom, offering a convenient and efficient platform for engagement. The questions posed during these interviews cover the personal experiences of female football players and the perspectives of companies on sponsorship issues.

The interview sample includes the company interviews undertaken in September. Additionally, four player interviews were conducted in July and August 2023, in order to enrich the depth and diversity of perspectives gathered.

### 3.1 Research design

Research phase      Phase 1    Phase 2    Phase 3

Respondent	Sports enthusiasts	Sports players / companies	
Data collection method	Research	Interviewees	
Data analysis	Statistical analysis	Qualitative	
Relationship to IQ	IQ1	IQ2	IQ3



## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Interview analysis

Following the interviews of female football players as well as a sports goods company CEO, key data and common themes have been outlined. First of all, regarding the players' interviews, recognition and visibility is the first aspect outlined. Where all three players emphasize the importance of recognition and visibility in marketing to bridge the gap in women's and men's football. This is followed by the players' personal journeys, where all three players mention how the professionalization of women's football has an undeniable impact on young girls' development as to having role models to look up to. Thirdly, the athletes mention the marketing and media portrayal of the sport and how narratives are important. Furthermore, these narratives have to resonate with players and fans as well as be positive in order to better promote viewership. The athletes interviews further proved that women's football is key in promoting societal change by challenging stereotypes and developing gender equality beyond the field.

Additionally, Company X's CEO interview provided an important insight into how companies address the sponsoring of women's football and how sports companies view the issues surrounding it. For instance, what was highlighted is the historical focus on men's football due to the larger global focus and the lack of interest in women's football until recently. Furthermore, the importance of values was highlighted as to responsible forward thinking for companies and the emphasis on brand values regarding gender equality and diversity. This shows the responsibility that companies face in choosing to sponsor women's football rather than staying with old patterns rooted in an inability to grow and change past habits.

These interviews provide an important insight into aligning players' experience and corporate strategies with societal shifts. Companies have a duty to listen to players' stories and follow societal shifts if they want to take part in change.

## **4.2 A valuable demographic**

The 2023 Womens' World cup attracted outstanding viewership numbers as predicted since the 2022 Women's Euro took place. The traction taking place has been predicted and mentioned but few have truly believed in what the women's game can achieve. As previously stated, by 2023 women's football could reach an annual value of 686 million.

Women's football has a positive image and unique fan base. As mentioned by Hayes J, women's football games are more family oriented than men's games and safe spaces. Women's games couldn't be further way from the hooligan culture. In order to compare the two, it is quite simple to just look at the different chants, in men's football games, chants are violent and vulgar whereas in women's games they are about coming together and winning as a team. Chants have been a big issue in men's football, with references to sexism and racism to state a few. Another aspect with this negative image is the constant sponsorships in men's football from gambling brands, this even needed to be banned in 2023 as it was becoming too prevalent in the men's football scene. Indeed, gambling is not seen as having a positive societal impact.

Additionally, as for the World cup sponsorships, companies should and need to capitalize on this safety aspect of women's football. This in turn can improve their brand image with associations with safe spaces for women.

## **4.3 A value exchange**

As previously stated, investments in Women's football is more than just a financial monetary exchange. There is further impact on the sport than a single events sponsorship such as the FIFA World cup. The sponsorship investments rely on a value exchange for companies and football teams. If companies put their efforts into women's football teams, then the teams will in turn provide the companies with the ability to showcase their values. This is important as more than ever we are faced with sportswashing, a concept where an organization, a government, a country, etc.

Supports a sport or organizes a sports event as a way to improve its reputation. This has been seen over and over in football especially recently with the Qatar World cup and the newly booming Saudi Arabian football league. It is more important now than ever for companies to truly show what they believe in and where their values lie. The implication of sponsorships shows a company's true colors and if they truly put their money where their words are. Nowadays, so many companies are claiming to be equal, diverse, believing in equal pay and fair treatment of women. How can we as consumers believe these so-called statements that companies are making if they are not sponsoring and investing their money in a fair value exchange.

#### **4.4 What can we learn from the UEFA business case for women's football?**

According to figure 3 below, we are able to see all the key figures relating to women's football sponsorship opportunities. The report says that right now is the best time to get involved in women's football. Being a part of it now can bring benefits to the game itself, make money, and help change football and society for the better. The number of women's football fans could double in the next ten years, reaching 328 million by 2033. In Europe alone, there are already 144 million fans, and this number is growing faster than in other sports.

As stated previously, women's football has a positive image. It's seen as inspiring, empowering, and family friendly. Clubs that get involved with women's football can boost their reputation. In fact, 87% of clubs that have women's teams say it's had a positive impact on their reputation.

There's a growing expectation in society and sports that all clubs should have a women's team, especially among people under 35. Almost one in three fans of women's football are new to football, showing that it's bringing in new fans. Investment in women's football is making it more professional. Leagues report a 77% increase in the number of professional players. The fan base is diverse, mostly young, and supports progressive values.

The report suggests that the commercial value of women's football could increase six times in the next ten years, reaching €686 million annually by 2033. Sponsorship is the fastest-growing way for clubs to make money, expected to increase sixfold to €295 million by 2033. Success in women's football is important to fans, with 84% saying domestic success matters. Player standards are improving too, with at least half of the players on successful teams being professional. The UEFA Business case for women's football is a great start for companies willing to learn more about investing in women's football. However, there's still work to be done in raising standards off the pitch.



Figure 3. Business case for women's football key findings (UEFA. Business Case for Women's Football)

#### **4.5 Player's, companies' and team's role in the future events**

As the previous football world cup has proven extremely hopeful for women's football sponsorships. It is extremely important for all parties to prepare adequately for the upcoming major football events. The next women's world cup is in 2027 and the host cities will be announced in May 2024. FIFA has addressed these events and have stated that following the bidding process they are "In line with FIFA's commitment to women's football, this bidding process sets new standards and puts us on track to host an outstanding event in 2027 on and off the pitch." These further showcase FIFA's interest in the Women's world cup and how eager they are to set new standards. Players' involvement in the World cup relies on them using their platforms in promoting the sport and working as hard as possible for the games to be entertaining leading up to the world cup. The player's performance is key in providing entertainment for viewers and sceptics. However, their performance can only be enabled by teams allowing them to grow and have all the equipment needed to do so. Womens professional teams cannot be expected to over perform when they are not paid adequately nor have the training facilities to do so. This is the major aspect on which teams need to focus.

Additionally, it is crucial that companies support teams' development leading up to events and not only during the event. The upcoming four years will show immense progress in women's football on all fronts, and with adequate sponsorships and youth development, teams will be ready for women's football growth on a global stage like they have never seen before.

#### **4.6 Conclusion - Beyond the World cup**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the crucial role of sponsorship in advancing women's football, not only as a financial investment but as an incentive for positive societal change and sustainable growth. The findings reveal that sponsorship not only benefits the sports teams financially but also fosters community development, gender equality, and social inclusivity. Real investments in women's football go beyond one-time events, influencing youth development, equipment accessibility, and even societal perceptions.

The disparity in sponsorship revenue between men's and women's football remains a significant challenge, exemplified by the vast difference in revenue generated by the FIFA World Cups. However, companies stand to gain more than just financial returns by investing in women's sports. The 2023 Women's World Cup, with its anticipated 2 billion viewership, signifies a growing interest that companies can leverage.

Furthermore, the positive image and unique fan base associated with women's football present an opportunity for companies to enhance their brand image, especially in contrast to some negative aspects of men's football, such as violent chants and gambling sponsorships.

This thesis further emphasizes that sponsorship in women's football is not only a financial exchange; it is a value exchange. Companies that align their values with women's football contribute to societal shifts and demonstrate a commitment to gender equality and diversity. With the rise of sportswashing concerns, the importance of transparent and genuine sponsorships becomes even more evident. Consumers increasingly examine companies' actions, challenging them to translate statements of equality and diversity into tangible support for women's sports.

The research methods employed in this thesis, provide a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of both female football players and sponsoring companies. However, the scope of the research is limited, and the information may not represent the whole spectrum of the findings regarding women's football sponsorships. The key themes derived from these interviews highlight

the importance of recognition, visibility, and positive narratives in bridging the gender gap in football. Companies, as revealed by the CEO interview, face the responsibility of adapting to societal shifts and embracing values like gender equality to contribute meaningfully to the sponsorship environment.

Looking ahead to the future of women's football, the significant upcoming growth shows the importance of adequate preparation for upcoming major events. As well as the various roles of players, teams, and companies in the years leading up to major events are crucial for sustained progress.

At the core, this thesis serves as a compelling argument for companies to shift their sponsorship focus towards women's sporting events. By doing so, not only can companies reap financial benefits, but they can also contribute to positive societal changes, challenge stereotypes, and foster a more inclusive and diverse sporting landscape. As women's football continues to gain momentum, embracing these changes in sponsorship practices is not only a wise business decision but also a significant step towards advancing social sustainability in the world of sports.

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## 6 Appendices

### 6.1 Appendix 1. GANTT chart

TASK	Week 52	W 1	W 2-4	W 5-7	W 8-10	W 11-13	W 14-16		Week 20-22	Week 22-
Thesis plan finalized										
Back-ground re-search										
Back-ground re-search										
Interview research										
Interview implemen-tation										
Interview process										
Interview process										
Collecting interview data										

Analyzing results										
Writing final version										

**6.2 Appendix 2 interview questions**

**Interview questions players:**

Q 1: In your experience, how does women's football marketing differ from men's football marketing, especially in high-profile events?

Q2: How has your personal journey in women's football influenced your perception of its marketing?

Q3: From your perspective, how does women's football marketing differ from men's football marketing, especially when it comes to raising awareness about the sport?

Q4: How has the portrayal of female athletes in the media evolved, and what role does it play in promoting women's football?

Q5: What role do fans play in the marketing of women's football, especially in building excitement and engagement around the sport?

Q6: what role do you believe women's football can play in promoting gender equality beyond the field, especially when it comes to societal change?

**Interview questions company:**

Q 1: Can you elaborate on the internal discussions within Company X that have led to the reconsideration of sponsoring women's football? What were the key factors that prompted this reevaluation?

Q2: You've mentioned the Women's World Cup in 2019 as an example of women's football's increasing popularity. Can you provide specific numbers or examples to illustrate the differences in reach and returns between men's and women's football?

Q3: Given the growing popularity and potential of women's football, when does your company plan to make a decision on sponsoring women's football? Is there a timeline or specific event that might influence this decision?

Q4: When considering sponsoring women's football, what specific goals or objectives do you aim to achieve through this potential partnership? Are there any particular aspects of women's football that align with your brand's values or mission?

Q5: In terms of practical steps, can you share any insights into you're your company plans to engage with the women's football community and contribute to its growth beyond financial sponsorship? Are there strategies in place to actively support and promote the development of the sport?

### 6.3 Appendix 3.

INTERVIEW transcript:

Interviewee 1: Emma, Finnish Football Player

IQ 1: Emma, in your experience, how does women's football marketing differ from men's football marketing, especially in high-profile events?

Emma: Women's football marketing often faces unique challenges compared to men's football, particularly during high-profile events. Historically, men's football has received more attention and resources, which has led to a larger fan base and higher revenues. However, the key difference lies in the need to showcase the women's game as distinct and equally exciting. Highlighting the skill, dedication, and competitiveness of female players can attract a broader audience and foster a sense of equality.

Personal Example: When I started playing football as a kid, there were limited opportunities for girls, and I often had to wear hand-me-down equipment from my brother. Today, I see young girls with access to better facilities and gear, but there's still work to be done in terms of recognition.

IQ 4: Emma, how has your personal journey in women's football influenced your perception of its marketing, especially during major events?

Emma: My journey has made me more aware of the need for visibility and investment in women's football, especially during major events. As I progressed in my career, I realized that I could be a role model for young girls who aspire to play professionally, and this becomes even more crucial during major tournaments.

IQ 12: Emma, considering the historical disparities in resources and opportunities between men's and women's football, can you shed light on the

challenges women have faced in accessing the same level of support and recognition? Emma: Historically, women's football has faced substantial challenges in accessing resources and recognition comparable to men's football. In the past, women often played without proper facilities or equipment. Opportunities for young girls to engage in the sport were limited. The lack of investment and exposure contributed to a significant gap between the two genders. The efforts to bridge this gap have been substantial but are far from complete. IQ 13: Emma, how do you think professionalization has transformed women's football compared to the earlier days when players were not considered professional athletes? Emma: The transition to professionalization has been transformative for women's football. In the earlier days, when players were not considered professional athletes, we faced considerable challenges, including balancing full-time jobs with our passion for the sport. With the advent of professionalism, women's football has gained access to better resources, more opportunities, and improved training environments. This shift has accelerated the growth of the women's game, but it's essential to recognize that the historical disparities continue to influence the present landscape.

Interviewee 2: Sarah, UK Football Player

IQ 1: Sarah, can you share your thoughts on how women's football marketing differs from men's football marketing, especially during high-profile events?

Sarah: Women's football marketing, particularly during high-profile events, has made significant strides in recent years but still faces disparities compared to the men's game. Men's football traditionally had more investment and exposure, which is even more pronounced during major events. However, the women's game emphasizes different values like inclusivity, teamwork, and community involvement. Highlighting these aspects in marketing can differentiate women's football and appeal to a broader audience, particularly during major tournaments.

Personal Example: When I was growing up, there were hardly any female football role models in the media. Today, my niece looks up to female players and dreams of becoming one herself. Major events are fantastic opportunities to inspire more young girls.

Interviewee 3: Lucy, UK Football Player

IQ 1: Lucy, from your perspective, how does women's football marketing differ from men's football marketing, especially when it comes to raising awareness about the sport?

Lucy: Women's football marketing, especially in terms of raising awareness about the sport, has evolved but still faces disparities compared to men's football. While men's football often emphasizes spectacle and tradition, women's football marketing highlights the skill, determination, and relatability of female players. It's about creating a narrative that resonates with fans on a personal level, especially when striving to raise awareness.

Personal Example: I grew up watching my older sister play football, and she was my first football hero. This personal connection is something we want to highlight in women's football marketing to attract more attention.

IQ 4: Lucy, in your experience, how has the portrayal of female athletes in the media evolved, and what role does it play in promoting women's football?

Lucy: Over the years, there has been a shift towards portraying female athletes as strong, determined individuals. This portrayal plays a pivotal role in promoting women's football as it showcases us not just as athletes but as role models who can inspire the next generation.

IQ 5: Lucy, can you provide examples of creative marketing strategies you've seen effectively promote women's football and contribute to its growth?

Lucy: Certainly. The "This Girl Can" campaign in the UK was a game-changer. It celebrated women of all backgrounds and body types participating in sports, including football. Such campaigns send a powerful message of inclusivity and have a significant impact on growing women's football.

IQ 6: Lucy, what role do fans play in the marketing of women's football, especially in building excitement and engagement around the sport?

Lucy: Fans play a vital role in the marketing of women's football by supporting their favorite teams and players, attending matches, and passionately sharing their enthusiasm on social media. Their engagement helps create a buzz around the sport and contributes to its growth.

IQ 7: Lucy, could you share a personal story where you felt the impact of women's football marketing on your career and its potential to inspire others?

Lucy: Receiving letters from young fans telling me they started playing football because they saw me on TV reinforces the importance of women's football marketing. It underscores that our visibility not only influences aspiring athletes but also inspires the next generation.

IQ 8: Lucy, what role do you believe women's football can play in promoting gender equality beyond the field, especially when it comes to societal change?

Lucy: Women's football can serve as a catalyst for change by showcasing strong, successful female athletes. It challenges stereotypes and paves the way for greater gender equality in all aspects of society, extending its influence beyond the field.

I hope these questions for Interviewee 3 help provide a more complete perspective on the topic.

IQ 9: Lucy, with the Women's World Cup gaining increasing attention and significance, how do you believe this prestigious tournament can impact the marketing and perception of women's football on a global scale?

Lucy: The Women's World Cup is a tremendous opportunity to elevate the marketing and perception of women's football on a global scale. When such a prestigious tournament captures the world's attention, it not only showcases the incredible talent and dedication of female players but also demonstrates that women's football is a force to be reckoned with. The Women's World Cup creates a platform to reach a broader international audience and break down stereotypes about women in sports. It can inspire girls and women worldwide to pursue their football dreams and promote gender equality both in sports and beyond. Additionally, it encourages corporate sponsors and media outlets to invest further in women's football, which, in turn, contributes to its growth and recognition on a global stage.



## CEO Interview

Question 1: Historically, Company X focused its sponsorships predominantly on men's football due to several factors. Firstly, men's football enjoyed a significantly larger global following, which translated into a broader reach for your brand. For example, the FIFA Men's World Cup in 2018 had a global viewership of over 3.5 billion people, providing immense exposure. Secondly, the investment in men's football offered measurable returns through jersey sales, increased merchandise, and higher viewership, which justified the allocation of resources. However, in recent years, you've closely monitored the growth of women's football and recognize its potential. The Women's World Cup in 2019, for instance, garnered over 1 billion viewers worldwide, illustrating the sport's increasing popularity. Additionally, initiatives to bridge the gender gap in football and the strong grassroots movements have piqued your interest. Can you elaborate on the internal discussions within Company X that have led to the reconsideration of sponsoring women's football? What were the key factors that prompted this reevaluation?

Answer 1: Certainly. The reconsideration of sponsoring women's football has been the result of several factors. Firstly, the changing landscape of sports and corporate responsibility has led us to reflect on our brand's values. Society, as a whole, has become more conscious of issues related to gender equality and diversity, and these topics are now at the forefront of discussions. We believe that as a responsible and forward-thinking company, we need to align our actions with these values.

Secondly, the remarkable growth of women's football in recent years cannot be ignored. The Women's World Cup in 2019 was a turning point, drawing a global viewership of over 1 billion people. This demonstrated not only the sport's popularity but also the potential reach for our brand. We believe that women's football has immense growth potential, and as a sports company, we want to be a part of that journey.

Additionally, grassroots movements and initiatives to close the gender gap in football have been gaining momentum. We see an opportunity to contribute positively to these efforts, not just as sponsors but as advocates for equality in sports. These discussions and realizations within our company have prompted us to seriously consider our involvement in women's football sponsorship.

Question 2: You've mentioned the Women's World Cup in 2019 as an example of women's football's increasing popularity. Can you provide specific numbers or examples to illustrate the differences in reach and returns between men's and women's football?

Answer 2: Certainly. Let's look at some key figures. The FIFA Men's World Cup in 2018 had a global viewership of over 3.5 billion people, making it one of the most-watched sporting events worldwide. In contrast, the Women's World Cup in 2019 drew in more than 1 billion viewers. While the men's event still had a larger viewership, the women's event's numbers demonstrate a substantial and growing fan base.

Moreover, considering the recent 2023 Women's World Cup that took place three months ago, we saw significant growth in viewership and engagement. The 2023 Women's World Cup shattered previous records with over 1.2 billion viewers tuning in globally. This indicates a remarkable upward trajectory in the popularity of women's football, and we believe it presents a tremendous opportunity for sponsors.

Question 3: Given the growing popularity and potential of women's football, when does Company X plan to make a decision on sponsoring women's football? Is there a timeline or specific event that might influence this decision?

Answer 3: We understand the urgency and importance of this decision. While I can't provide an exact date, I can assure you that we're actively exploring the possibilities and conducting thorough evaluations. The recent success of the 2023 Women's World Cup has accelerated our discussions. We're considering various factors, including potential partnerships, alignment with our brand values, and the impact we can have on the sport and its community.

While I can't provide a specific timeline at this moment, rest assured that we're committed to making an informed decision in the near future.

Question 4: As Company X considers sponsoring women's football, what specific goals or objectives do you aim to achieve through this potential partnership? Are there particular aspects of women's football that align with your brand's values or mission?

Question 5: In terms of practical steps, can you share any insights into how Company X plans to engage with the women's football community and contribute to its growth beyond financial sponsorship? Are there strategies in place to actively support and promote the development of the sport?

## **6.4 Appendix 4**

### **UEFA Business Case for women key data relating to thesis**

Women's football has a unique image. It is strongly linked with positive, progressive values, which all stakeholders and brands can leverage to grow the game.

Expectations are growing for stakeholders across society and sport, including men's football clubs, sponsors and broadcasters, to play their part in helping to develop women's football. Those that do not or are slow off the mark run the risk of being perceived negatively.

**5.1 A UNIQUE IMAGE DEFINED BY POSITIVE, PROGRESSIVE VALUES**

Women's football is associated with inspiration and positivity. As discussed in the 'Engagement' section, emotional engagement with the game is particularly pronounced among female fans, a significant number of whom follow the sport because the players are inspirational.

As part of the research carried out for this report, when asked for a word or phrase to describe the women's game, the top answer given by women's football fans in Europe was 'entertaining'. Other popular replies were 'inspiring', 'the players are good role models' and 'family-friendly'.

**PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL FANS ASSOCIATING THESE WORDS AND PHRASES WITH WOMEN'S FOOTBALL**

Word/Phrase	% of total
ENTERTAINING	74
INSPIRING	72
GOOD ROLE MODELS	71
FAMILY-FRIENDLY	69
PROFESSIONAL	67

**PERCENTAGE OF MEN'S FOOTBALL FANS ASSOCIATING THESE WORDS AND PHRASES WITH MEN'S FOOTBALL**

Word/Phrase	% of total
ENTERTAINING	76
INSPIRING	61
GOOD ROLE MODELS	63
FAMILY-FRIENDLY	59
PROFESSIONAL	85

Understanding the value of our women's team is really important. We conduct a brand survey every 2-3 years that evaluates the contribution of the women's team to our overall brand value and measures the success of our content strategy: fan growth, reach, impact and engagement.

Omer Barreda  
Chief Football Operations  
Officer, City Football Group

**6.43 | IMPROVING THE STANDARD OF TECHNICAL STAFF**

Improving the standard of technical staff is critical to the growth of the game and its sporting quality.

All women's football clubs employ people in core technical roles, such as coaches and physios, but specialised technical staff, such as nutritionists and analysts, are less likely to be in place.

**WOMEN'S FOOTBALL STAFF BY TECHNICAL ROLE AND COUNTRY TIER**  
Percentage of clubs that have someone in the position

Technical Role	Overall	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Head coach	99%	100%	96%	100%
Assistant coach	88%	98%	94%	77%
Goalkeeping coach	80%	90%	94%	62%
Physio	78%	98%	92%	55%
Doctor	66%	88%	77%	45%
Technical/performance director	60%	65%	67%	52%
Sports science/strength and conditioning coach	59%	85%	71%	35%
Performance analyst	40%	63%	54%	17%
Sports psychologist	27%	50%	35%	7%
Nutritionist/lifestyle coach	24%	35%	35%	9%
Other	29%	28%	35%	25%

## 8.2 FANDOM ESTIMATES

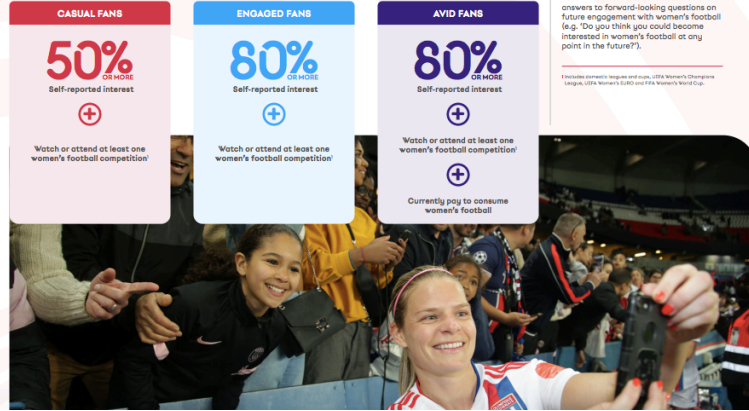
Estimates of the current size of the women's football fan base and its projected growth are based on consumer research data.

Data from 14 markets was extrapolated to all 55 countries in the UEFA territory. This extrapolation was carried out using comparable countries as a proxy based on the level of maturity and the results were calibrated using existing UEFA data.

Current fandom, viewership and attendance were calculated according to attitudinal and behavioural answers in the consumer research. A larger survey was conducted in 6 of the 14 markets to gather more specific data on potential future consumption to support forward-looking analysis and on men's football fans for benchmarking purposes.

The analysis of survey data is consistent across countries, assuming that there is no significant difference between how participants might define and perceive themselves to be a fan of women's football in different socio-cultural environments.

This report covers fans from across the game, at both the club and international levels, as defined by a combination of behavioural and attitudinal factors in line with the recommended approach in academic literature. Fan groups are defined as follows:



The future size of the market for women's football is based on estimates of latent demand derived from consumer research data. These estimates are based on the answers to forward-looking questions on future engagement with women's football (e.g. 'Do you think you could become interested in women's football at any point in the future?').

1 Includes Germany, France and Italy, UEFA Women's Champions League, UEFA Women's EURO and FIFA Women's World Cup.

