



**THE COMMERCIAL VIABILITY OF WOMEN FOOTBALL CLUBS: A CASE
STUDY OF THE SUNFLOWER WOMEN FOOTBALL CLUB IN
KWAZULU-NATAL**

by

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ABSTRACT

Women's football has seen significant technical and commercial advancements over the last 20 years, with women's club football finally starting to move away from its heavy reliance on national team tournaments and competitions. As such, its commercial viability has come under the microscope as the football governing body Fédération Internationale De Football Association (FIFA) continues to mount pressure on Member Associations (MAs) to formulate national women's football strategies and establish leagues and professional women's clubs. This study investigated the commercial viability of a women's football club in South Africa using the Sunflower Women Football Club in KwaZulu-Natal as a case study, as well as an analysis of journal articles, newspaper articles and reports dating back to 1990 to help understand this phenomenon. Data was collected from interviews with Sunflower Women Football Club officials; women's football stakeholders from SAFA, COSAFA, CAF, FIFA and USSA; Hollywood Bets Super League club administrators; and woman's football sponsorship decision-makers. The thematic sampling of results demonstrated a significant positive correlation between the establishment of a fully professional commercial women's league, key sponsorship and investment, and skilled personnel running the administrative affairs of the club with the commercial success of a women's football club.

DECLARATION

I, Menzi Obed Ngcobo, hereby declare that this mini dissertation is original, and all the contents are explicitly referenced. A bibliography is appended to the thesis. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Durban University of Technology.

I also certify that the thesis has not heretofore been submitted in any of its parts or entirety for a degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA) in any other institution of higher learning locally or internationally.

I hereby give permission for my work to be available for photocopying and/or re-printing, for inter-library loan, and for the title and abstract of this thesis to be made available to other educational institutions and students.

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DEDICATION

This mini dissertation is dedicated to my late parents, Ndaba Felomesus Ngcobo and Ntombizethu Gertrude Ngcobo.

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my ancestors, oNgcobo oFuze fulela, for their support throughout this journey of achieving my goal of completing this mini dissertation.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
CAF	Confederation of African Football
COSAFA	Council of Southern Africa Football Associations
SAFA	South African Football Association
USSA	University Sport South Africa
EFA WSL	England Football Association Women's Super League
USA NWSL	United States of America National Women's Soccer League
PSL	Premier Soccer League

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study explored the commercial viability of women's football clubs in South Africa through studying the commercial affairs of Sunflower Women Football Club. The nature of the investigation and the desired insights led to the selection of a qualitative case study methodology. The development of a commercial strategy for women's football clubs in South Africa has received little academic attention, especially in the context of a traditionally male-dominated sport like football.

Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with coaches, football stakeholders and key commercial sponsorship decision-makers, with an emphasis on contextual comprehension.

1.2 Background to the study

Inadequate funding and restricted access to financial capital continue to plague the growth and sustainability of women's sports in South Africa and throughout Africa (Chinaza 2021: 33). However, it is now abundantly clear that sport can be empowering for young women Sima (2022: 13). In an effort to examine and understand what the best way for women's football would be to grow as a commercial entity and a fully-fledged career for women, the focus area of this research is a commercial strategy for a South African women's football club.

This study employed a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method which involves a technique in which the sample is picked based on the researcher's subjective opinion, as opposed to random selection (Campbell Steve, Greenwood Melanie and Sarah 2020: 25).

The sample size will be categorised as follows: two club officials of Sunflower Women Football Club, two South African Football Association (SAFA) officials, one Confederation of African Football (CAF) and Confederation of Southern African Football Associations (COSAFA) instructor, one Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)

African development programmes official, two South African Football Stakeholders, one corporate sponsorship head sponsorship. The target population is the 144 women's football clubs that compete within the nine provinces of South Africa in the SAFA SASOL Regional League, as well as the sixteen clubs that compete in the SAFA Hollywood Bets Super League, which is currently the semi-professional top tier of women's football in South Africa.

The process of collecting primary data involves conducting interviews, whereas secondary data is obtained through the examination of documents. The interviews are conducted using a semi-structured approach, which enables the participants to freely express themselves within the framework of the questions posed. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were conducted in-person in Durban and involved the chairperson and founder of Sunflower Women Football Club, the team manager of Sunflower Women Football Club, a corporate sponsorship head, and a FIFA women's football stakeholder. Additionally, video conference call interviews were conducted via Zoom and MS Teams with two officials from the South African Football Association (SAFA), one instructor from the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and FIFA, and the two University Sport South Africa (USSA) University Directors of Sport responsible for women's football clubs participating in the SASOL Regional League and the Hollywood Bets Super League.

Formulating a commercial strategy for a women's football club in South Africa has the potential to enhance the worth of the clubs and the sport in its entirety. As per Linda Wijkstrom, the former secretary of Swedish Elite Football Women, the predicament with the majority of women's football clubs lies in their tendency to undervalue themselves by projecting as non-profit entities that rely on philanthropic donations, instead of emphasizing and marketing their inherent worth (Elardt, Hasselgren and Havik 2015: 45).

The recent global expansion of women's football has prompted member associations (national football associations) and football clubs to adopt a distinct approach. Historically regarded as a leisure activity primarily engaged in by young females, the introduction of the Women's Football strategy by the global football regulatory body, Fédération

International Federation of Football Association (FIFA), in 2018, coupled with the triumph of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2019, has instigated a fresh impetus to formalize and monetize women's football on a global scale, with the aim of presenting it to a wider audience and competing with the men's version of the sport (Bareman 2019: 37).

According to FIFA and Deloitte Limited Liability Partnership (2021), stakeholders including fans, sponsors, broadcasters, leagues and men's football clubs have shown great interest in women's football over the past 12 years, thus creating a market for women's football to grow around the world.

Against the backdrop of the rapid growth of women's football globally and the world football governing body's drive to grow the women's game around the world, the suite of FIFA women's football development programmes for 2020 to 2023 is aimed at empowering member associations with the skills and resources to develop and commercialise the game. It therefore becomes crucial for women's football clubs in South Africa to align with that drive by developing their own strategies.

Sunflower Women Football Club is a South African women's football club currently plying its trade in the South African Football Association (SAFA) SASOL Regional and Provincial League. The club was formed in 1996 by football enthusiast, coach and primary school teacher Siyabonga Malinga in the small township of Mpumalanga, Hammersdale, in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. His passion for women's football and the drive to empower young girls through sport birthed a vision to create a football club that would groom and nurture young talent while building a foundation for a professional football club.

The club's vision, mission and aim as enshrined in its business plan states that they want to unearth talent; produce players that can compete at a regional, provincial and national level; promote the development of women's football in South Africa; and contribute to the talent pool for the junior national teams and South Africa's senior national women's team Banyana-Banyana.

Twenty-seven years on, some of these aspirational goals have been achieved, but not without challenges. The biggest challenge that led to the pursuit of this club's commercial strategy is its inability to sustain itself financially, attract sponsorship and investment capital, and to run as a commercial entity outside the normal non-profit organisation strangle-hold of South African women's football clubs.

Several women's football clubs in South Africa find themselves having to resort to donations or contributions from municipalities, the national lottery or other government departments just to survive. In unpacking a strategy on how to make Sunflower Women Football Club commercially viable, it is important to first understand the history of the club; its impact and role in the development of women's football in South Africa; its evolution into a business; and why it is important for the club to have a commercially viable strategy (FIFA and Deloitte LLP, 2021: 18).

The private sector and other mainstream business entities just do not see the attractiveness or the potential for a return on their investment in women's football. For that reason, it is important to develop a strategy to make Sunflower Women Football Club commercially viable to save the club from extinction and use it as a launch pad for the development of the broader South African women's football business economy. A company's commercial strategy is the application of co-ordinated marketing and sales resources targeted at attaining its corporate objectives.

The selection of a commercial strategy is predicated upon an evaluation of the internal strengths and weaknesses of the company, as well as an assessment of its external opportunities and threats. It is imperative for the enterprise to assess its market positioning consistently and meticulously with respect to its operations, initiatives and products (Namvar, Cybulski and Phang 2018: 19). The imperative for a business is to improve its association with customers and collaborators while optimizing its pricing tactics (Chin, 2020: 28).

The realm of women's football has undergone significant expansion beyond the purview of national teams. In recent years, there have been several instances of club attendance

records being surpassed. Notably, in March 2019, a women's club game in Spain between Atlético Madrid and Barcelona drew a crowd of 60 739, thus setting a new record.

FIFA's strategy for women's football consists of three primary objectives, namely enhancing participation rates; augmenting commercial value; and establishing the foundation for professional frameworks. The following discourse pertains to FIFA's strategies aimed at enhancing the professionalization of women's football. An essential aspect of this endeavour would entail acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the present situation in the field of professional women's football business, encompassing leagues, clubs and the athletes themselves. The present lack of data is constraining stakeholders' ability to make informed decisions, as per the report by FIFA and Deloitte LLP (2021: 12).

1.3 Problem statement

The problem with women's football in South Africa is that it is still largely an amateur sport and most women's football clubs that claim to be professional outfits are registered as non-profit organisations in a bid to solicit Corporate Social Responsibility (CSI) and national lottery funding. According to Statistics South Africa's (2022) mid-year population forecasts by population group and sex, in 2022, 81% of South Africa's population, or 49 070 809 people, are Black African, the majority of whom consider football to be their favourite sport. Women's football is less popular in South Africa than the men's version of the game (Mokwena, 2019: 3). As a result, there is a significant lack of information on strategies to make a South African Women's football Club commercially viable.

Men are the predominant demographic in the Sports industry, and the extent of media coverage for women's team sports in South Africa is lower in comparison to that of men's team sports. Given these circumstances, sponsorship has been recognized as the primary revenue stream for numerous sports organizations, including women's football clubs. Consequently, it is crucial for these clubs to establish partnerships and secure supplementary sponsors to foster growth and sustain their operations. The commercial

viability of women's team sports in South Africa is perceived to be lower than that of men's, which poses a challenge for women's football clubs in securing sponsorship, as noted by Dremptetic, Klein and Weigel (2019: 42).

Commercial value refers to the amount of money the market determines it is worth, i.e., the amount the sponsor is willing to pay to be connected with another entity. The biggest problem faced by Sunflower Women Football club, like many women's football clubs in South Africa, is establishing commercial value.

According to Schönberner, Woratschek and Ellert (2020: 52), sponsorship is a fundamental traditional concept in Sports Marketing, whereby the sponsor seeks to establish an association with a club, sport or athlete in order to enhance consumer behaviour and perception within the target market, leading to increased sales of the sponsor's products or services. This is something that Malinga laments is not easy for his club because he believes that women's football has a stigma attached to homophobia because most female footballers tend to look more masculine than feminine when compared with their European counterparts.

An example of a memorable sponsorship that benefited a women's football club in Europe is the story of Liverpool Ladies Football Club, a women's football club playing in the English Football Association (EFA) Women's Super League. In a historic moment for women's football, Avon Products Inc. revealed a ground-breaking sponsorship deal when the cosmetics giant became the principal partner and official beauty partner of Liverpool Ladies Football Club in April 2017.

Consequently, Avon and Liverpool Ladies FC ushered in a new era for women's football, as Avon became the team's first jersey sponsor, independent of its male counterpart. Furthermore, Avon became the first woman-focused company in history to commercially partner with an EFA Women's Super League Club (Avon Worldwide, 2017: 4).

Malinga also claimed that, over the years, he had approached numerous female beauty care businesses in South Africa in an effort to recruit them as club sponsors. The universal

response he received was that the type of athletes in his team did not align with the company's visual appeal and strategy as a female beauty care brand.

Corporate sponsorship is universal within professional sport, and it is normal for athletes and sport clubs to promote and/or endorse a variety of brands. Moreover, a variety of reciprocal benefits accrue to sponsoring entities. Literature on sponsorship has identified numerous potential outcomes for sponsoring companies, including communicating directly with various stakeholders (Brennan and Merkl-Davies, 2018: 19); cutting through the clutter of traditional advertising (Morgan, 2019: 28); increasing brand awareness (Yohana, Meilani and Suryawan, 2020: 11); image and loyalty; and improving financial performance (Maderer, Parganas and Anagnostopoulos, 2018: 30).

As sport entities have become increasingly exploited by sponsors, they have also come to rely on sponsorship financing as a crucial source of funding. These commercial arrangements have proven to be profitable for athletes and clubs. Although some teams' ability to attract corporate sponsors unquestionably helps their bottom lines, there is still a vast gulf between the wealth of the most prominent athletes and clubs, and that of the least commercially viable. Koivisto (2022) looked at the factors that influence companies' decisions to sponsor male or female athletes and found that the choices were influenced by the decision-makers' values and views, as well as media portrayals of the sport and managerial pressures.

Koivisto (2022: 23) also highlighted the vast disparity in sponsorship money received between men and women's sports. Additionally, no women football athlete made it onto the Forbes' list of the one hundred highest paid athletes in the world in 2022, which is a significant indicator of the current global commercial value of women's football.

Despite the fact that women's football clubs may not make as much money as their male counterparts, there has been a marked upsurge in the professionalism of women's football in South Africa, fuelled largely by the success of clubs like Mamelodi Sundowns Ladies Football Club which won the inaugural Confederation of African Football (CAF) Women's Champions League in 2021 and Banyana Banyana, the South African senior

national women's football team that won the Women's African Cup of Nations (WAFCON) in 2022 .

1.4 Aim and objectives

1.4.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the commercial viability of women's football clubs in South Africa using the case study of Sunflower Women Football Club in KwaZulu-Natal to achieve this aim.

1.4.2 Objectives of the study

The study is set to satisfy the following objectives:

- To develop a commercial strategy that can be modelled by all South African women's football clubs;
- To identify the key reasons for the lack of sponsorship drivers;
- To assist club management in addressing revenue and funding concerns by establishing multiple revenue streams; and
- To address the need for the establishment of a professional women's football league in South Africa.

1.4.3 Research questions

- What commercial strategies can be implemented by South African Women's football clubs to make them commercially viable?
- What are the key reasons for the lack of sponsorship drivers in sports?
- What alternative revenue streams can be established?
- How can the establishment of a professional women's football league enable clubs to improve their commercial viability?

1.5 Rationale for the study

Understanding how persistent sexism and misogyny are playing out in today's women's football landscape is crucial to developing a successful business strategy (Fisher, 2018). Sunflower Women Football Club must therefore establish a commercial strategy to ensure that they create a solid identity across all of their football business operations.

This will require an admission that the women's game is not going to develop naturally into a sustainable professional enterprise without football stakeholders like coaches, education practitioners, club owners, sponsorship decision-makers and the national member association's (SAFA's) leadership stepping in and accepting responsibility to kick-start it when in relation to capital. To prepare for the coming transformation in the football landscape from a male-dominated sport to one that sees no gender, women's football clubs must take the lead in commercializing their operations and club structures.

The research is based on an interpretive paradigm that considers human understandings of reality to be socially constructed (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 12). With a focus on contextual awareness, in-depth interviews with the club's management, key football stakeholders and sponsorship decision-makers will be conducted to collect data. Interviewing is one of the most effective methods for gaining insight into human behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Bryman 2008: 35).

Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the requirement for profound insights, a qualitative case study methodology was chosen. When little is known about a phenomenon being studied, case studies are frequently employed (Yin 2018: 12).

1.6 Structure of the mini dissertation

The study is organised into five (5) chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the study. This includes the background to the study, problem statement, research objectives and research questions. Chapter 2 constitutes the literature review. It covers the study outlines and the theoretical base of the study. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology employed in the study. It also explains the rationale behind the choice of research design. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of the results of the study. Data analysis and interpretation of results, conclusions and recommendations are included in this chapter. Chapter 5 constitutes a summary of the study.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research, including the context from which the research problem, purpose, objectives and justification for this study were derived. In addition, this section provided an outline and concise explanations of the dissertation's chapters. The following chapter will review existing literature relevant to the topic under study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW- OVERVIEW OF THE COMMERCIAL VIABILITY OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CLUBS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the investigation. This chapter aims to investigate the process of commercialisation of women's football; the state of women's football in South Africa; sponsorship and its drivers; the modern football business model; and the diverse definitions pertinent to this research. A critical definition of this term is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the commercial viability of a women's football club.

Women's football has gained significant momentum in recent years, with increased attention, investment and participation. However, the commercial viability of women's football clubs remains a topic of interest and debate (Ma and Kurscheidt 2022: 25). This literature review aims to critically analyse existing research on the commercial viability of women's football clubs.

2.2 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework consists of the theories articulated by experts on the topic that one intends to research. Researchers use these theories to give a theoretical hook for their data analysis and interpretation of outcomes (Kivunja 2018: 19). In this framework, several components will be used to underpin the study, namely the commercialisation of professional football as a whole; the state of women's football clubs globally, in Africa and in South Africa; sport sponsorship; and the modern football business model.

Currently, there is no established theoretical framework that presents a cohesive comparative analysis of the commercialization of football. Therefore, in the context of the commercialisation of a women's football club, the term "heterodox approach" refers to a deviation from conventional or standard tactics and strategies (Barkin and Lemus 2013: 30). In other words, the heterodox approach is an innovative strategy. Achieving success and sustainability in this way requires defying the established conventions and looking for alternative ways to accomplish these goals (Ma and Kurscheidt 2022: 30).

The Heterodox method entails numerous components in the process of commercializing a women's football club. In trying to understand them, the following topics were reviewed in the available literature:

2.2.1 Financial model

Instead of relying solely on traditional revenue streams such as ticket sales and sponsorships, a heterodox approach may explore innovative financial models (Welsch 2015: 20). This could include seeking alternative sources of funding, such as crowdfunding campaigns or private investments, or exploring partnerships with non-traditional sponsors or investors who are interested in supporting women's sports.

2.2.2 Marketing and promotion

Marketing and promotion involves creative marketing and promotion strategies tailored specifically for the women's football market (Ma and Kurscheidt 2019: 26). This emphasises that potential strategies for promoting women's sports could involve utilizing digital platforms and social media to expand outreach; collaborating with influential figures and celebrities who advocate women's sports; or implementing grassroots campaigns to foster community involvement and cultivate a fan following.

2.2.3 Equality and inclusivity

The Heterodox approach recognizes the importance of gender equality and inclusivity in women's football. It involves actively challenging discriminatory practices and working towards creating a more equitable environment within the club (Sima 2022: 27). This could include pay parity initiatives; providing resources and support for players' personal and professional development; and fostering a culture that celebrates diversity and inclusivity.

2.2.4 Community engagement

Community engagement includes organising community outreach programs, hosting youth development initiatives, and collaborating with local organizations and schools to promote women's football at grassroots level. By building strong community ties, the club

can create a loyal local fan base and generate support for its commercial endeavours' (Ramchandani, Plumley and Boyes 2018: 34).

2.2.5 Long-term sustainability

This approach takes a holistic view of the club's long-term sustainability, beyond immediate financial gains. It involves developing a comprehensive strategy that considers the growth and development of the women's game as a whole (Shaw and Amis 2001: 36). This includes investing in youth academies, coaching development programs, and infrastructure improvements, which contribute to the long-term success of the club and the broader women's football ecosystem.

Overall, the Heterodox approach in the commercialization of a women's football club seeks to challenge the status quo, embrace innovation, and promote inclusivity and sustainability (Ma and Kurscheidt 2022). By adopting alternative strategies and being creative, clubs can help accelerate the growth and development of women's football whilst achieving commercial success.

2.3 The state of women's football clubs globally

The commercial state of women's football clubs globally has been steadily improving, but there are still significant differences between regions and individual clubs. Women's football has experienced significant growth and increased interest in recent years, which has resulted in improved commercial opportunities for some clubs (Morgan 2019: 14).

Europe has been at the forefront of women's football development, with several top-tier women's leagues, such as the England Football Association Women's Super League (EFA WSL), Division 1 Féminine in France, and the Frauen-Bundesliga in Germany. These leagues have seen increased investment from major clubs, which has helped raise the commercial profile of women's football. Sponsorship deals, TV broadcasting rights, and merchandise sales have improved, although they still lag behind the men's game (McGowan and Downes 2018: 43).

In the United States, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) has gained momentum and seen steady growth in recent years. Major sponsors and investors,

including major sports organizations and individual investors, have shown increased interest and support for women's football. The success of the U.S. women's national team in international competitions, such as the FIFA Women's World Cup, has also boosted the commercial appeal of women's football in the country (McGowan and Downes 2018: 42; Mancini 2023: 35).

In other parts of the world, progress in the commercialization of women's football has been more varied. Some countries, like Australia, have witnessed significant growth in commercial support and fan interest, leading to increased sponsorship and media coverage. However, in many regions, women's football still faces challenges in terms of financial resources, infrastructure and exposure. This often translates into limited commercial opportunities for women's clubs, lower salaries for players, and fewer sponsorship deals (Chiweshe 2019: 17).

Globally, there has always been a historic disparity between men's and women's football competitions. A discernible disparity is observable in the degree of competitiveness, expansion and financial gains. Conversely, it is expected that this disparity will diminish in the coming years, particularly in Europe (Mancini 2023: 36).

The global presence and acknowledgment of women's football is progressively expanding, rightfully encompassing not only media and stadium visibility, but economic and financial aspects. The UEFA Champions League serves as a noteworthy illustration of this novel trajectory. Commencing from the 2021-2022 season, the competition has implemented an innovative structure that encompasses a greater quantity of matches, thereby ensuring augmented and guaranteed revenue for the participating teams (Valenti, Scelles and Morrow 2020: 41).

As per the commercial and audio-visual agreements ratified by UEFA in 2021, UEFA ensured that the Women's Champions League would be able to distribute €24 million in support of women's football in Europe, which is four times the amount allocated in the previous agreement. The significant amendment to this deal meant that 23 percent of the total €24 million would be distributed as "solidarity payments" to those clubs that are not involved in the competition but that are duly registered in the Women's Champions League (Walraven, Koning and van Bottenburg 2012: 29).

Furthermore, UEFA has established and ensured a bonus of €400 000, referred to as the 'entry list', for every club that successfully secures a place in the group stage. Additionally, certain bonuses are paid out to clubs just for qualifying for the competition. In each of the three matches in each team's respective group, a monetary compensation of €50 000 is paid out for each win, and €17 000 for each draw. Furthermore, the team that tops the group at the end of the group stage receives an additional €20 000 (Mancini 2023: 37).

Winning the Women's UEFA Champions League title can accumulate a total prize money of €1.4 million for a club. This amount is noteworthy, particularly because there was no assured monetary compensation in the competition before. It also serves as a base for clubs to build commercial strategies around certain guarantees provided by the potential to place in the competition for European women's football clubs (Valenti, Scelles and Morrow 2020: 22).

2.4 The state of women's football clubs in Africa

According to Bawuah (2022: 6), one can determine that women's football clubs in Africa,, when compared to their American and European counterparts generally struggle with limited financial resources, lack of investment, and insufficient commercialization opportunities. Many clubs face difficulties in securing sponsorship deals and attracting large crowds to their matches, which affects their revenue streams. As a result, the clubs often face financial constraints, making it challenging to provide adequate infrastructure, training facilities, and resources for their players.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) recently launched the inaugural Women's Football Landscape Report, aimed at expediting the commercialization and comprehensive growth of women's football across the African continent. The report has gathered data from CAF Member Associations (MAs) until December 2022, focusing on three crucial areas, namely Development and Participation, League and Competition, and Structure and Governance (Gennaro 2019: 22).

The objective of this report was to provide empirical data and statistical information on women's football, which can be utilized for future reference, assessing and monitoring advancements in programs and initiatives implemented across the region. Additionally,

the report aims to develop practical programs that can enhance the quality of women's football on the continent, as well as enable CAF to identify exemplary practices that can be employed to educate and motivate other MAs in their efforts toward women's football (Bawuah 2022: 33).

To provide an overview of the commercialization of African women's football clubs, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) conducted a survey of 52 out of the 54 Member Associations (MAs). The results of the survey indicate that women's top-division competitions are organized in 91% of CAF MAs. A considerable number of these competitions, specifically 38, are of national scope, wherein teams from across the nation participate in a competition to determine the champions at the national level. Eleven of the competitions are categorized as regional, zonal and provincial, wherein teams are arranged based on their geographical location and participate in a competition to establish a champion for the respective region, province and zone. Out of the eleven regional competitions, eight conclude their competitions with a national final (Chiweshe 2014: 11).

Despite the major gaps that still exist in the commercialisation of clubs in African women's football, CAF has demonstrated noteworthy advancements within the last 24 months, guided by the leadership of CAF President Patrice Motsepe in accordance with their 2021-2025 strategic plan. In an effort to expedite and enhance the development of women's football, CAF has mandated that any men's club without a corresponding women's team will be ineligible to compete in CAF inter-club tournaments, effective as of the 2023-24 season (Baloyi 2021: 3).

The year 2021 marked a significant milestone for women's club football in Africa as the Confederation of African Football (CAF) introduced the Women's Champions League competition, offering a noteworthy prize of USD 1.55 million. This move was considered ground-breaking for women's football on the continent. The Women's African Cup of Nations (WAFCON) has experienced a 150% increase in prize money, rising from USD 975,000 to USD 2.4 million. This development has coincided with the establishment of the African Schools Football Championship, which has provided an opportunity for approximately 180 000 girls from various African nations to participate and engage in grassroots football competitions (Bawuah 2022: 6).

However, there has been commendable efforts to combat the slow commercial growth of club football on the continent, like in the case of Morocco and Senegal as well as the pioneers of women's football in Africa, Nigeria. In 2020, the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (RMFF) adopted a strategic approach to prioritize the development of Women's Leagues and grassroots initiatives, as well as the enhancement of regional and national teams and the administration of these entities (Bawuah 2022: 5)

The objective of the federation was to enhance the economic worth of women's football through the formulation of an inclusive business approach that would effectively involve young girls at the grassroots level, particularly those in educational institutions (McCall and Mountjoy 2022: 48). The RMFF's women's football strategy is founded upon three key areas of advancement, namely athletic development, financial investment and technical growth. These areas encompass the development of talent, financial resources and technical expertise (Tizaf 2020: 25).

2.5 The state of women's football clubs in South Africa

South African women's football is characterized by significant developmental efforts as the South African Football Association (SAFA) endeavours to transition from housing a developmental women's league and a semi-professional league to a fully commercialized structure.

Simultaneously, with the increased opportunities for South African women in football, the sport experienced an explosive rise amongst the female population on a worldwide level. The emergence of fresh prospects in professional soccer leagues on a global scale led to the sponsorship of regional and worldwide championships by transnational governing entities (Gennaro 2019: 39). The emergence of women's football in Africa can be traced back to 1988, when FIFA extended an invitation to Côte d'Ivoire to participate in the inaugural women's football trial tournament held in China, thereby conferring recognition to the sport in the region. The African continent was represented by Nigeria in the inaugural FIFA Women's World Cup in 1991 (Chiweshe 2019: 40).

The broadcasting of these global tournaments on television had a significant impact on the rise in popularity of women's football in South Africa, as it did in numerous other

nations worldwide. The broadcasted game in 1994 featuring South Africa and Nigeria as part of the World Cup qualifying tournament served as a significant mechanism for promoting the sport. Soon after the first broadcast, a significant level of interest was observed. There was a high demand for participation in football. The young women footballers were then exposed to an elevated level of competitive international football with regular national team friendlies and continental qualifiers (Baloyi 2021: 2).

Following the cessation of the international sports boycott and the re-admission of South Africa into the global football community, the inaugural 'official' international match contested by South Africa was held in 1993. The match was played against Swaziland and took place at Milpark Stadium in Johannesburg (Gennaro 2019: 5).

During 2000, the popularity of women's football in South Africa reached its pinnacle due to numerous factors, including the significant presence of local teams; the impressive performance of the national team Banyana Banyana; the notable attendance of spectators at international matches; and the growing financial backing from corporate sponsors (Baloyi 2021: 3).

In the aforementioned year, Sanlam, a prominent South African financial services company, came on board as a dual sponsor for the African Women's Championship and the SAFA Sanlam Halala Leagues, which were national regional leagues. The previous format of regional league competition involved a series of tournaments that culminated in the champions of the nine provincial Sanlam Halala Leagues meeting to determine the national club champion. During the 2002/03 season, Sanlam's financial sponsorship ceased, and Vodacom assumed the role of supporting the provincial leagues. This transition occurred between September and March of that year (Pelak 2010: 14).

Subsequently, during the 2007/08 season, Vodacom withdrew its support for the women's leagues. In February 2009, SAFA established a partnership with South African petroleum giant SASOL as its new national league sponsor. This partnership marked the official launch of SASOL's sponsorship of the SAFA SASOL National Provincial and Regional League, which remains in effect to this day (Chiweshe 2019: 22).

With growing pressure from a wide spectrum of football stakeholders, SAFA decided to go ahead with plans to establish an elite women's football league. After going without a sponsor in the inaugural 2019-20 season of the premier women's league, SAFA and Hollywood Bets, South Africa's largest sports betting company, signed a 1-year R17-million sponsorship deal in 2021 with an option to renew, launching the Hollywood Bets Super League (Pelak 2010; Chiweshe 2014: 6).

The league champions are awarded a monetary prize of R2 million, while the second-place finishers receive R1 million. A participation fee of R150 000 is disbursed to the remaining teams in the league. Moreover, individual prizes of R50 000 are awarded to the player of the year, young player, coach of the year and top scorer at the conclusion of the season (Baloyi 2021: 3).

Over the last two decades, there has been a noticeable rise in the participation of female footballers, both young and old, in the SAFA Local Football Association (LFA) leagues and school leagues. Women's football has evolved from an amateur sport to a semi-professional one (Pelak 2010: 16). Despite the success of Mamelodi Sundowns Ladies and the South African national women's team (Banyana Banyana) in winning the inaugural CAF Women's Champions League in 2021 and the Women's African Cup of Nations (WAFCON) title in 2022, interest from sponsors and the media has not increased, and most clubs in South Africa still struggle to sustain their operational costs as efforts to commercialise their clubs fail to bear any fruit (Bawuah 2022: 6).

2.6 Commercialisation of professional football

The revenue structure of football clubs has undergone significant changes as a result of the commercialization of sports. Traditionally, the principal means of income for a club was derived from the proceeds generated on the day of a match by the vending of match-day tickets. Gate receipts, which include season tickets, constituted the primary source of match-day revenue for the majority of cases. The contemporary landscape no longer exhibits a significant reliance on match-day revenue. Presently, a noteworthy proportion of revenue is derived from broadcasting, commercial sources such as sponsorship and

merchandising, player transfer fees, and non-football activities, as reported by Deloitte (2010) and Forbes (2011).

Gennaro (2019: 36), in his publication *Sports in African History, Politics and Identity Formation*, delves into the contemporary and past occurrences surrounding the commercialization of African football. The author's objective is to highlight that Africa is not effectively leveraging the widespread appeal and commercial potential of football due to numerous factors, including but not limited to corruption, the absence of professional frameworks, insufficient corporate sponsorships, and inadequate government backing.

The phenomenon of commercialization has pervaded all tiers of sports, ranging from grassroots community involvement to the upper echelons of professional elite sports. Corporate sponsorship is a pervasive phenomenon in the realm of professional sports, wherein it is customary for athletes and sports clubs to engage in the promotion and/or endorsement of a diverse array of brands. Sponsorship encompasses a variety of mutually beneficial advantages for entities that form partnerships (Krabbenbos 2013: 26).

The literature on sponsorship has identified several potential outcomes for sponsor firms. These include the ability to cut through the clutter of traditional advertising, as noted by (Garland *et al.* 2009: 27). Other scholars (Bladen *et al.* 2022: 47) and (Zhou *et al.* 2020: 38) have highlighted the potential for sponsors to communicate directly with various stakeholders. Additionally, sponsorship has been linked to increased brand awareness (Jensen and Cornwell 2017: 52), improved brand image, and increased brand loyalty (Tsordia, Papadimitriou and Parganas 2018: 26). Finally, some scholars have suggested that sponsorship can lead to improved financial performance (Cornwell and Kwon 2020: 42).

The growing commercialization of sport properties has led to a corresponding reliance on sponsorship funding as a crucial source of financial support. It is apparent that these contractual arrangements have the potential to yield substantial financial gains for both athletes and clubs.

In the men's Spanish top-flight league, Real Madrid set a new record by securing a five-year contract extension with Emirates, which at the time was valued at €70 million annually, as reported by (Ramchandani, Plumley and Boyes 2018: 9).

Although certain athletes and clubs undeniably generate substantial financial gain through sponsorships, there exists a notable discrepancy between those with strong commercial influence and those with less. The study by (Shaw and Amis 2001: 32) aimed to investigate the factors that influence the selection of male or female sport sponsorship by firms. The findings revealed that the decision-making process was primarily influenced by the values and beliefs of the decision-makers, media portrayal of the sport, and management pressures.

Shaw and Amis (2001: 17) have underscored the noteworthy financial disparity that exists in sport sponsorship agreements between males and females. In addition, no women were included on Forbes' 2018 list of the world's one hundred highest-earning athletes.

Although female athletes and teams may not receive comparable income to their male counterparts, there has been a significant rise in the level of professionalism within women's sports in recent times, which forms a compelling argument for the same commercial instruments to be applied to women's football (McLeod, Xue and Newman 2022: 46).

2.7 Football sponsorship

The fundamental concept of football sponsorship is to enable the sponsor to establish a connection between its brand and the property or undertakings of the club or organization and execute marketing strategies associated with the sponsorship to optimize prospective gains on the investment. Sponsorship can offer numerous advantages, which may vary depending on the nature of the brand association, ultimately setting a brand apart in the market (Morgan 2019: 16).

According to Meenaghan (1983: 28), sponsorship is defined as the act of providing financial or in-kind assistance to an activity by a commercial organization, with the aim of achieving commercial objectives. This definition was commonly used in early sponsorship

literature. This comprehensive definition encompasses a diverse range of sponsored endeavours and pursued objectives or motives.

The sponsorship industry has undergone significant changes over time. Although commercial interests remain a key driver of sponsorship investment, other factors such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) have become increasingly relevant, driving a large majority of South African women's football clubs to register themselves as non-profit organisations to trigger this type of support from corporates (McCullough and Trail 2022: 15). Furthermore, it has been observed that sponsor investment is motivated not only by commercial or altruistic drivers, but also by social identity and tribal association (McGowan, Shiu and Hassan 2017: 17).

Sponsorship is now a strategic business relationship (Demir and Söderman 2015: 23), referred to increasingly as a co-marketing partnership or strategic.

2.8 Football sponsorship drivers

Women's football sponsorship drivers differ. However, there are some consistent characteristics that contribute to attracting sponsors, namely:

2.8.1 Growing Interest

Women's football has grown in popularity in recent years. This increased visibility has given sponsors the opportunity to reach a larger audience and tap into a rising market. Sponsors see the opportunity for brand visibility and involvement in women's football (Morgan, Taylor and Adair 2020: 25).

2.8.2 Positive Brand Image

Companies can associate themselves with a positive and empowering image by sponsoring women's football. By displaying a dedication to gender equality, diversity and inclusion, a brand's reputation can be enhanced by supporting women's sports. Sponsors can demonstrate their principles while also contributing to societal growth (Jensen and Cornwell 2017: 52).

Sponsors can use women's football to reach specific target populations through targeted marketing. Women, families and young people are amongst the many fans of the sport. Sponsors can personalize their marketing efforts and engage with these desired audiences by linking their brand with women's football (Mancini 2023: 39).

2.8.3 Long-term growth potential

Sponsors are drawn to the long-term growth potential of women's football. Increased investment, infrastructure development, and professionalization are occurring in the sport. Sponsors understand the opportunity to get engaged early and build a strong footprint in an industry that is fast expanding (Sherry and Taylor 2019: 46).

2.9 African women's football sponsorship drivers

While some of the sponsorship drivers for women's football in Africa may be similar to those listed above, there may be some that are more prominent or unique to the African environment (Chiweshe 2019: 21).

Women's football in Africa plays a significant role in promoting empowerment and gender equality. Sponsors that embrace these principles may be particularly interested in funding African women's football efforts, since it provides an opportunity to contribute to societal change and fight gender stereotypes (Pelak 2010: 26).

2.10 Modern Football Business Model

The financial stability of a club is crucial to its success in football. According to an empirical study, there is a correlation between budget and team performance (Dejonghe and Van Opstal 2010: 15). The concept of Cumulative Causation developed by Karl Gunnar Myrdal, who was a scholar from Sweden specialising in the fields of economics and sociology, can be used to study the factors that contribute to growing budgets and subsequently, growing success. Myrdal (1978) created the idea of cumulative causality to explain the various development trajectories that developing economic markets and nations may take.

Economies of sport scholar Trudo Dejonghe implemented this concept within the framework of the commercialization of modern football. The model depicted in Figure 2.1.1 was proposed by Dejonghe in 2010 to describe how cumulative causation could work in modern football.

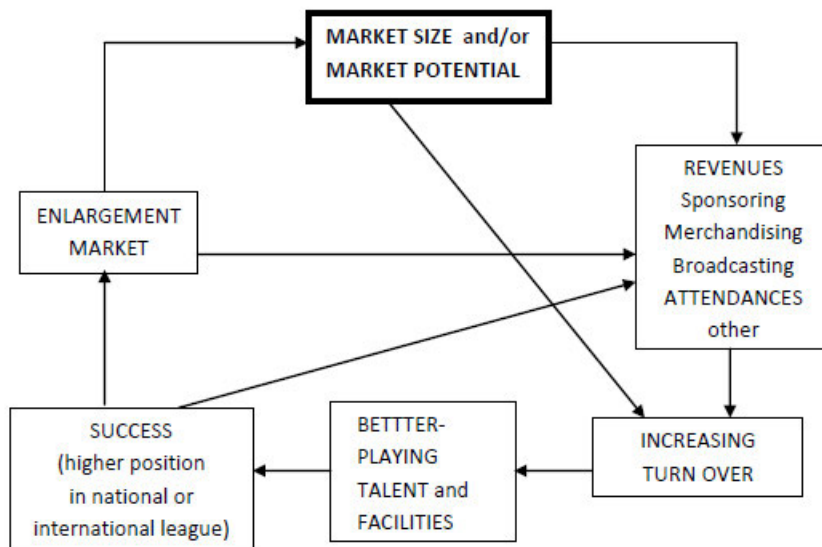


Figure 2.1.1 Cumulative causation of football

Source: Dejonghe and Van Opstal (2010)

The concept of cumulative causation has been developed based on the spread and backwash effects. The theory places emphasis on the perpetuation of poverty by poverty and the promotion of affluence by affluence. In underdeveloped economic markets like Africa, issues tend to compound and exacerbate existing challenges. In developed regions, ready solutions can resolve a wide range of issues as and when they arise.

According to (Beek, Ernest and Verschueren 2018: 28), football clubs are increasingly becoming publicly traded corporations in response to market forces. The clubs are selling an increasing number of items, not simply soccer matches, to fans who are simultaneously characterized as customers, much beyond the local stadium. This form of neo-liberal reorganization has already occurred in other regions of the global economy. Modern football clubs are distinguished by a prominent level of diversification based on a proactive approach to economic prospects (Krabbenbos 2013: 35).

According to the 2019 report on TV viewership analysis by Nielson Sport, a total of 3 795 broadcast hours were allocated to women's sport on the two South African national TV broadcasters, namely SABC and SuperSport, during the period spanning 2018 to 2019 (Nelsen Sport 2019: 10).

According to the data presented in Figure 2.2.1, it can be observed that football constituted 37% of the overall broadcast hours. This phenomenon is similarly observed in the context of overall sports coverage pertaining to both genders, male and female. In 2019, the FIFA Women's World Cup comprised a significant portion of football broadcast hours, specifically 71% or 990 hours. In general, SuperSport broadcasts comprise 98% of the aggregate number of hours devoted to broadcasting. Specifically, SuperSport 3 and SuperSport 10 account for 32% of the entirety of SuperSport's coverage.

The results from (Nelsen Sport 2019: 13) validates that with cumulative causation where broadcasters come on board and finance the commercialisation of women's football ,it can become a win-win situation for all parties involved.

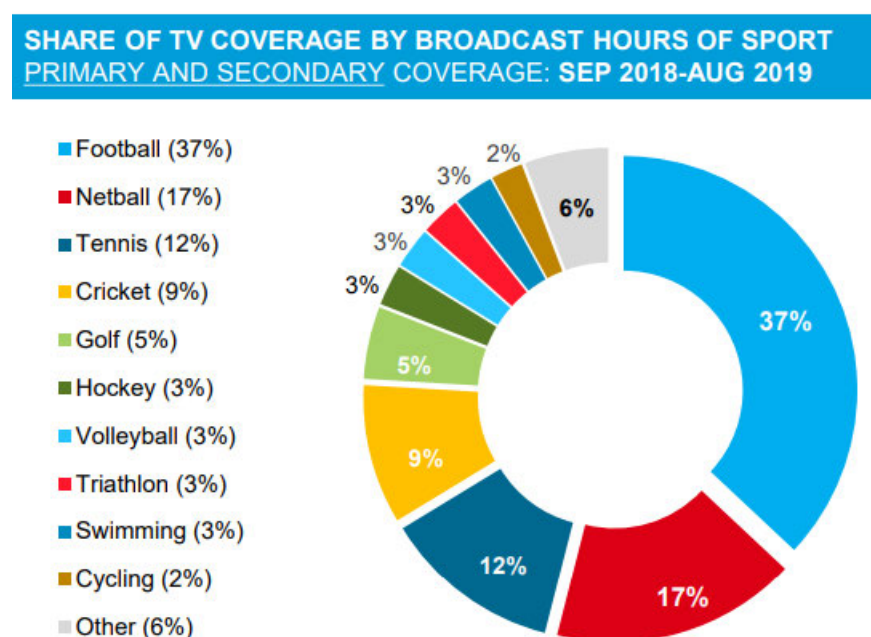


Figure 2.2.1 Nielsen Sport's TV broadcast by hours statistics

Source: NielsenSport (2019)

Women's Football competitions are reported to have the highest unique audiences.

The FIFA U/17 World Cup is the sole Women's Football tournament that is televised on both SuperSport and SABC, resulting in a greater cumulative unique viewership and a more heterogeneous viewership demographic. Figure 2.3.1 illustrates that the Hollywood Bets Super League, formerly known as the national women's football league, garnered a viewership of more than 3.7 million unique viewers, thereby reinforcing its potential for commercial profitability.

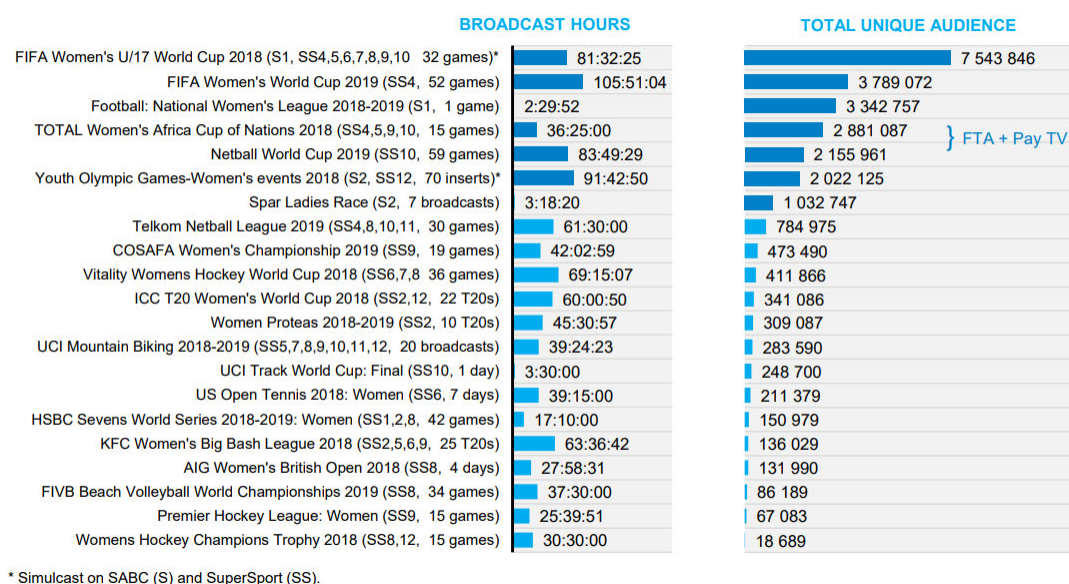


Figure 2.3.1 Total unique TV audience per competition

Source: NielsenSport (2019)

2.11 Conclusion

Chapter 2 has established what commercial viability is and discusses its relationship with football, sponsorship and women's football clubs in particular. Using the literature review, this study will devise an instrument to evaluate the commercial viability of a women's football club. The next Chapter will discuss the methodology employed to conduct the empirical study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

An overview of the literature on the commercial viability of a women's football club and theories was presented in the previous chapters. This chapter explains the research methodology for this study and describes the approach to be used, guided by the study's objectives. Following the research objectives, the study design is presented, along with a full overview of the primary data collection procedures. The chapter explains the design, population, sampling, data collection and data analysis for this research. It also explains how the data will be analysed. Finally, ethical considerations will be discussed.

3.2 Research design

The research is rooted in an interpretive paradigm in which human understandings of reality are considered socially created (Mohajan 2018: 31). With emphasis on contextual awareness, data will be gathered through in-depth interviews with the management of the club, key football stakeholders and sponsorship decision-makers. Interviewing is one of the most effective ways to comprehend human behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Bryman 2008: 36).

Due to the study's exploratory nature and the need for profound insights, a qualitative case study methodology was adopted. Case studies are frequently employed when little information exists concerning a phenomenon in question (Lambert *et al.* 2018: 45).

3.3 Research approach

The explication of the researcher's chosen research approach enhances comprehension of the research design, facilitates the selection of an appropriate research strategy and methodology, and enables recognition of the research's constraints (Saunders 2012: 27).

The deductive, inductive and abductive approaches are the three options available.

According to Saunders (2012: 23), the *deductive* approach prioritizes the elucidation of connections amongst variables and the gathering of numerical data. The present approach endeavours to explicate a causal association between two variables and to ascertain the solution to a "what" inquiry, which will subsequently be either affirmed or negated in a hypothesis.

The *inductive* methodology prioritizes the analysis of qualitative data and seeks to explore the underlying reasons behind a phenomenon, as opposed to simply describing the phenomenon itself. The process of collecting and analysing data is undertaken with the aim of formulating a theory based on the findings obtained from the data. The approach of induction places significant emphasis on comprehending the research context, and it is characterized by a structure that is adaptable, allowing researchers to modify their approach as the research advances (Rahi 2017: 49).

The *abductive* methodology is a hybrid of deductive and inductive methodologies, enabling researchers to seamlessly navigate between theoretical constructs and empirical evidence. The objective is to develop novel theoretical frameworks or to revise pre-existing ones, informed by the data that has been gathered. The researchers are capable of modifying the particular theories they encounter during the course of their investigation through the utilization of the abductive approach (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009: 32). The present investigation scrutinizes qualitative data that was acquired via interviews and subsequently fashioned into a model. Consequently, the abductive methodology was selected for this mini dissertation.

3.4 Target population

According to (Majid 2018: 22), the term "target population" is used to describe the people who would be the focus of a certain study or treatment. Specifically, the participants of this research will be the Sunflower **Women's** Football Club, as well as decision-makers in the South African football industry and South African corporate sponsorship decision-makers. The sample size will be categorised as follows: 2 Sunflower Women Football **Club, club** officials, 2 South African Football Association (SAFA) officials, 4 South African Football Stakeholders, 2 corporate sponsorship CEOs or heads of marketing and

sponsorship. The target population is the 144 women's football clubs that compete within the nine provinces of South Africa in the SAFA SASOL Regional League, as well as the 16 clubs that compete in the SAFA Hollywood Bets Super League, which is currently the top tier of women's football in South Africa.

3.5 Sampling

The sampling method that will be used is non-probability sampling. Non-probability methods involve a technique in which the sample is picked based on the researcher's subjective opinion, as opposed to random selection (Elfil and Negida 2017: 24). Non-probability sampling techniques include quota sampling, purposive sampling, self-selection sampling, and snowball sampling, amongst others.

This study will employ a purposive sampling method. According to Campbell Steve, Greenwood Melanie and Sarah (2020), the aim of purposive sampling is to better match the sample to the aim and objectives of the research, thereby enhancing the rigour of the study and the credibility of the data and results by guaranteeing their credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.5.1 Sampling Approach

The criteria used to select the participants were based on the need to find suitable representatives from three areas: (i) the management of Sunflower Women Football Club, (ii) South African Football Association (SAFA) officials who are involved in South African women's football at an administrative level, (iii) highly knowledgeable women's football stakeholders, and (iv) sponsors of South African women's football. Each of these participants were selected to help meet the objectives of the research. Purposive sampling was chosen as the sample approach for the interviews based on this foundation.

3.5.2 Sample size

The sample size is nine highly knowledgeable participants who will be interviewed.

3.6 Data collection method

During the process of data collection for a research study, researchers have the option to obtain necessary information from primary and secondary sources. In contrast to secondary data, which is material compiled from already-existing sources, Sekaran and Bougie (2019: 27) define primary sources as information that the researcher has personally collected. Instances of primary sources include interviews and focus groups, while examples of secondary sources comprise journals and articles.

3.6.1 Research Instrument

Using both primary and secondary data gathering techniques, data will be measured. The gathering of primary data will consist of interviews, while secondary data will be gathered through document reviews. The researcher will utilize semi-structured questions to provide participants with opportunities to freely express their opinions. Responses to the questions posed during the face-to-face interviews will be recorded by a combination of writing them down and recording them using a podcast microphone and FL Studio audio software. Video call interviews will be recorded via Zoom, and the transcription recorder will be enabled to provide a written response to the interview.

3.6.2 Interview design

The primary data collection method employed in this study is based on conducting interviews. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009: 41), interviews are utilized as a means of collecting reliable and valid data that holds significance to the research questions posed in the study. Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin (2020: 19) suggest that research questions serve to articulate the concepts that one aims to comprehend, while interview questions are the specific questions that one poses to individuals in order to obtain that comprehension.

Various methods can be employed to gather information during an interview, such as face-to-face and video telephone call interviews (Saunders and Townsend 2018: 57). To comprehend the rationales behind the decisions made by research participants, as well as their attitudes and opinions, researchers often employ in-depth or semi-structured

interviews, as suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009: 62). The meticulous planning of interviews is of utmost significance in qualitative research. McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl (2019: 19) assert that precise information that aligns with the research objectives can only be obtained through efficient planning. Semi-structured interviews are a prevalent method in qualitative research. It is anticipated that a meticulously crafted interview protocol not only facilitates the collection of data in crucial domains, but also affords participants the opportunity to elaborate on their individual experiences and perspectives.

3.7 Pilot study

A pilot study is a small, preliminary research conducted to assess the duration, feasibility, cost and adverse events in the study, as well as to improve the study design prior to the execution of a comprehensive research project (Fuller *et al.* 2016: 17). To pilot the interview question prior to commencing data collection, a pilot study was undertaken via personal communication with Siyabonga Malinga, the founder of Sunflower Women Football Club, and Indira Albuquerque, the Senior Football Sponsorship Coordinator of Hollywood Bets.

The purpose of this study was to obtain insights into the South African women's football industry and its sponsoring industry, as well as to clarify various definitions within this field. This facilitated the attainment of a more profound comprehension regarding the domains that necessitated further scholarly investigation in the context of women's football in South Africa, as well as the variations and patterns within the sponsorship sector, particularly in relation to the sponsorship of women's football. Moreover, it facilitated the establishment of the objectives of this mini dissertation.

3.8 Data collection

Due to insufficient research in the field, primary data was gathered through conducting interviews. The present study has utilized secondary data obtained from various peer-reviewed articles and journals that pertain to the commercialization of sports, sponsorship, and the modern business model of football. In order to acquire pertinent data and attain a comprehensive **comprehension** of the examined concepts, the

theoretical framework encompasses a compilation of articles spanning from 1990 to the present day.

3.9 Data analysis

After conducting the interviews, the first step is to arrange and prepare the data for analysis. This entails interpreting the audio recordings and duplicating the audio in writing. The general case analysis will include an explanation of the replies gathered from participants, as well as an examination of the Sunflower Women's Football club stakeholders, and viewpoints of the South African Football Association (SAFA), football stakeholders, and sponsorship decision-makers. Data acquired through face-to-face interviews and video call conversations will be analysed and interpreted using qualitative data analysis. This will allow responses to be coded line by line; notes to be made while coding; and codes to be combined into larger, more abstract codes. This will also generate visual models that connect the codes to form a conceptual model (Deterding and Waters 2021: 18).

The qualitative data analysis method that will be used is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis examines meaning patterns in a dataset, such as a series of interviews or focus group transcripts. Thematic analysis also examines vast quantities of data and arranges them according to themes.

3.10 Validity

Holmes (2020: 25) asserts that researchers must communicate the measures they undertake to ensure the dependability and precision of their findings, despite the ongoing validation process during the research. The chapter on methodology holds significant importance as it enables the reader to comprehend the specific techniques employed for gathering data and the rationale behind selecting such information. The validity of a measuring tool is determined by how well it measures the desired characteristics, and it is concerned with whether the tool actually measures the desired behaviour or quality.

3.11 Reliability

A measurement device's reliability is defined as its stability and consistency across time. In other terms, reliability refers to a measuring device's ability to generate comparable results when employed at separate times (Bashir 2018: 18). A measuring tool's precision and accuracy must first be demonstrated to be valid and dependable (Kimberlin and Winterstein 2008: 38).

To ensure the legitimacy of this study endeavour, Lincoln and Guba (1985) Evaluative Criteria are used. They present a set of ways for conducting qualitative research that fits their defined criteria. Techniques for establishing credibility include triangulation, extended engagement, and persistent observation (Vasileiou, Barnett and Thorpe 2018: 10)

3.12 Anonymity and confidentiality

In all research studies, the protection of human subjects through the application of suitable ethical norms is crucial. Due to the in-depth nature of a qualitative study's methodology, ethical questions have a heightened significance. Information submitted by participants must be held in strict confidence, with care taken never to break or undermine this confidentiality. The collected data will be stored in a locked safe for a period of 5 years. Interview data will also be anonymized: All personally identifiable information will be removed from the data to ensure confidentiality and comply with privacy regulations. Names will be removed and other identifying details replaced with unique identifiers or pseudonyms.

A secure digital storage system will be used that provides adequate security measures, such as encryption and access controls, to protect the confidentiality of the data. A password-protected and encrypted database or cloud storage platform (One Drive) will be used. A well-structured system for organizing interview data will also be used. A consistent naming convention for files, folders and metadata will facilitate easy retrieval. Data will be categorized by participant, interview date and research question.

Participants will be assured of the research's confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher does not request the participants' names or any other personal information. As a result, substantial efforts will be taken to ensure that critical business information will not be disclosed to competitors (Hoft 2021: 23).

3.12.1 Disposal of Hard Copies

Shredding: For physical documents, a cross-cut shredder or professional shredding services to render the information unreadable will be used. Shredding ensures that sensitive information cannot be reconstructed (Hollister and Ferrier 2015: 42).

3.12.2 Disposal of Electronic Research Data

Permanent deletion: All electronic research data will be permanently deleted from storage devices. Simply deleting files or emptying the trash/recycle bin is not enough, as the data may still be recoverable. Specialized software tools to securely erase data will be used.

3.13 Ethical considerations

Participants will be made aware that their participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that they may discontinue at any moment without any consequences. The researcher will make sure that no candidates are misled or coerced in any way. The institution will provide a letter of approval, which will be shown to everyone involved. Participants will not be misled or coerced in any way, and their participation is completely voluntary. Gatekeeper permission will be obtained by writing a formal gatekeeper permission letter to the chairperson of Sunflower Women Football Club.

3.14 Conclusion

The research methodology followed in this study was explained in this chapter. The study design, target audience, sample selection and size, instrument design, methods of data collection and analysis, and validity and reliability were discussed. This mini dissertation employed the qualitative analysis methodology. Non-probability sampling was used to select students and employees. The researcher followed an interview approach that was

conducted with the participants. The issues of validity, reliability, confidentiality, privacy and ethics were also discussed in this chapter, clearly illustrating how these are to be addressed.

A presentation of the research findings and an interpretation of the results are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research methodology used in this study. The data collection and analysis as guided by the research objectives were the fundamental issues discussed.

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the study. The study gathered empirical data and presents the reader with an understanding of the findings derived from the conducted interviews. Table 4.1 below illustrates the interview schedule and the participants who will be referred to as participants, officials or representatives of their clubs or organisations.

Table 4.1 Interview schedule

	COMPANY/ ORGANISATION/CLUB	POSITION
SUNFLOWER WOMEN FOOTBALL CLUB OFFICIALS		
Participant 1	Sunflower Women Football Club	Management Official
Participant 2	Sunflower Women Football Club	Management Official
SOUTH AFRICAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION (SAFA) OFFICIALS		
Participant 3	South African Football Association (SAFA)	Senior Official
Participant 4	South African Football Association (SAFA)	Senior Official
WOMEN'S FOOTBALL STAKEHOLDERS		
Participant 5	Federation of International Football Association (FIFA)	FIFA Official
Participant 6	Women's Football Stakeholder	Official COSAFA, CAF & FIFA
Participant 7	Women's Football Stakeholder University Sport South Africa (USSA)	University Director of Sport
Participant 8	Women's Football Stakeholder University Sport South Africa (USSA)	University Director of Sport
SOUTH AFRICAN WOMENS FOOTBALL SPONSOR		
Participant 9	Sponsors of the South African Women's Football	Sponsorship Official

Source: Author's own table

The results of the study are presented in the following order: commercialisation of women's football, the state of women's football, sponsorship and its drivers. Information

and results summarised in Table 4.1.2 will be discussed in detail under the main participant sections.

Table 4.1.1 Summary of participants' results

Participants	Themes/Topics	Number of mentions
Sunflower Women Football Club	➤ Commercialization of women's football	100%
	➤ The state of women's football	100%
	➤ Sponsorship and its drivers	100%
South African Women's Football Sponsor	➤ Commercialization of women's football	100%
	➤ The state of women's football	5%
	➤ Sponsorship and its drivers	100%
Women's football stakeholders	➤ Commercialization of women's football	100%
	➤ The state of women's football	10%
	➤ Sponsorship and its drivers	100%

Source: Author's own table

4.2 Sunflower Women Football Club

4.2.1 The commercialisation of women's football

According to Sunflower Women Football Club Participant 1, the primary obstacle hindering the complete commercialisation of women's football in South Africa is the lack of a professional women's football league. The absence of such a league prevents comprehensive television and media coverage, which is necessary for the professionalisation of club operations through investments in skilled administrative personnel, training facilities, and player development.

Participant 1 suggests that if women's sports received the same level of media coverage as men's sports, it would enable clubs to enhance their operations and achieve professionalisation. As per the statements of Participants 1 and 2 at Sunflower Women Football Club, women's football has exhibited the most significant progress in terms of commercial value in media, amongst various other women's sports. Nevertheless, if a

comparison were to be made, the amount is still lower to that of men's football. The primary factor contributing to the current lack of higher commercial value for women's football is the challenge of drawing audiences to stadiums (Sunflower Women Football Club Participant 2 June 2023).

In response to interview question 5 category 4, as per Annexure 4, Sunflower Women Football Club officials note that insufficient attendance at matches results in decreased appeal for television networks, newspapers and sponsors, thereby creating a cyclical effect that decreases the commercial value of women's football clubs in South Africa. The officials also noted that the sponsorship industry exhibits a certain level of apathy towards the factors that they prioritise in a business partnership. Instead, the emphasis is primarily placed on the principles of supply and demand. Despite reported efforts, the lack of progress in achieving gender equality in football by SAFA is a matter of serious concern. The association currently has no women's football officer, meaning that no one is dedicated to driving the agenda of women's football for clubs (Sunflower Women Football Club Participant 2 June 2023).

In addition, officials of the Sunflower Women Football Club emphasize the crucial impact of sponsorship on commercial value. The absence of sponsors would lead to insufficient funds for women's clubs, which would impede their ability to attract top-tier players and invest in other initiatives that could enhance the club's profile. According to Sunflower Women Football Club, their present funding structure relies on league prize money, National Lottery funding, and its owner's personal contribution. However, these sources are insufficient to cover the club's monthly operations. As a result, it is not feasible to sustain a women's football club in the SASOL or Hollywood Bets Super League without substantial sponsorship investment (Sunflower Women Football Club Participants 1 and 2 Annexure 4; Category 4; question 4 June 2023).

Table 4.2.1 below shows Sunflower's 2017 season SAFA SASOL Provincial League operational budget breakdown by month and matches played home and away throughout the season. The total cost of running a women's club in this division comes up to R115 000.00, an amount that is dwarfed in comparison to the R16 000.00 operational grant they received from the league sponsor in the same year.

Table 4.2.1 Sunflower Women Football Club 2017 League operational budget

2017 SASOL PROVINCIAL LEAGUE BUDGET				
MATCHES	TRANSPORT	REFRESHMENT	REFEREE FEES	ACCOMODATION
Newcastle	R4 500,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	R500,00
Ducks(Newcastle)	R4 500,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	R500,00
Mkhuze(Pongola)	R8 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	R5 500,00
Simunye(Ladysmith)	R3 500,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	R500,00
DUT-Pietermaritzburg	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
Tottenham-Pietermaritzburg	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
MUBS-Pietermaritzburg	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
Real Ladies(Port Shepstone)	R3 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	R500,00
Ntuzuma(New Centre)	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
UKZN-Durban	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
Lindelani(New Centre)	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
Shooting Stars(Wentworths)	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
Galaxy(Chesterville)	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
Tiger Girls (Umlazi)	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
Arsenal(Umlazi)	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
DL-Durban	R1 000,00	R1 500,00	R250,00	
	R34 500,00	R24 000,00	R4 000,00	R7 500,00
MONTH	AMOUNT			
January	R4 000,00			
Febraury	R3 500,00			
March	R3 500,00			
April	R3 500,00			
May	R3 500,00			
June	R3 500,00			
July	R3 500,00			
August	R3 500,00			
September	R3 500,00			
October	R3 500,00			
November	R3 500,00			
December	R3 500,00			
	R42 500,00			
COST SUMMARY:				
TRANSPORT	R34 500,00			
REFRESHMENT	R26 500,00			
REFEREE'S FEE	R4 000,00			
ACCOMODATION	R7 500,00			
TRAVELLING ALLOWANCE	R42 500,00			
	R115 000,00			

Source: Sunflower Women Football Club 2017

4.2.2 *The state of women's football in South Africa*

Regarding club football, the current state of women's football in South Africa is evidently experiencing a positive trend. Significant transformations have occurred since the inception of the SASOL league in 2009, leading up to the establishment of the Hollywood Bets Super League in 2021 (Sunflower Women Football Club Participant 1 June 2023).

The swift transformation has contributed to the enhancement of football's outstanding performance and standards, both at the club level and for the national team, Banyana-Banyana. Consequently, South African players have become more appealing to foreign clubs, with 28 players playing professional football across the globe as of the conclusion of the 2020/2021 season. Nevertheless, certain clubs participating in the premier league exhibit inconsistent performance at the highest-level owing to insufficient financial resources to enhance their operations (Sunflower Women's Football Club Participant 2 June 2023). The inability of clubs to negotiate their individual commercial value by selling front-of-shirt space to sponsors is hindered by factors such as the lack of access to information regarding the sponsorship deal between SAFA and the league's title sponsor (Sunflower Women Football Club Participants 1 and 2 annexure 4; question 2 and 3).

This is due to the fact that the front-of-shirt space is already occupied by the league's title sponsor, as communicated by Sunflower Women Football Club Participants 1 and 2 June 2023. Sunflower Women Football Club officials have identified three key issues that require attention, despite the significant progress made in a relatively brief period. One is financial stability, which is the most important for clubs to sustain operations and progress to a higher level. Secondly, in order to achieve commercial viability, it is imperative for clubs to engage in negotiations with sponsors that consider both cost and value.

Thirdly, the club's organizational structures present another issue. According to Sunflower representatives, the financial resources required to hire coaches, administrators and medical personnel on a full-time basis are still unavailable, resulting in the majority of personnel working for women's football clubs as volunteers. Consequently, a significant proportion of clubs exhibit an inadequate organizational structure, wherein administrators and officials are compelled to undertake multiple

responsibilities owing to the absence of adequate remuneration to recruit sufficient personnel to fulfil diverse roles.

Another welcome addition to the state of women's football is CAF's men's football club licencing amendments that now make it a mandatory for clubs participating in CAF competitions to have registered women's football teams attached to them to qualify for participation. This move is fast-tracking the development of the women's game in a significant way (Sunflower Women's Football Club Participant 1 June 2023).

4.2.3 Sponsorship as a commercial driver of women's football

As per the statements made by officials of Sunflower Women Football Club, modern sponsors exhibit limited interest in exclusively featuring their logo on the team's jersey or advertising boards within the stadiums.

According to Sunflower Women's Football Club Participant 2 (June 2023), the modern sponsorship model places greater emphasis on identifying additional values possessed by the sponsored club that can be integrated into the sponsoring company's brand. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is closely linked to the decision of a company to sponsor women's football as a means of demonstrating its concern for society. This association can have a positive impact on the company's brand. As a result of this factor, a significant number of women's football clubs in South Africa have chosen to register themselves as Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) in order to secure funding from corporate entities. However, this decision has impeded their ability to fully commercialize their operations due to the trade restrictions associated with NPO status (Sunflower Women's Football Club Participant 1 June 2023).

The officials of Sunflower Women Football Club have referred to the social projects that the club has undertaken, such as campaigns against teenage pregnancy; anti-drug and substance abuse campaigns; as well as partnerships with schools to create centres of excellence in various communities and schools in KwaZulu-Natal. These initiatives were believed to have a significant impact on the club's ability to secure sponsorships. However, the outcomes have been unsatisfactory as many women's football clubs employ comparable value propositions to attract sponsors (Sunflower Women's Football

Club Participant 2 June 2023). Despite the club's impressive track record of producing 15 players for various South African national teams, ranging from U17 to the senior women's national team Banyana-Banyana over a span of 26 years, it has not yet succeeded in securing a sponsor willing to invest in its commercial success (Sunflower Women's Football Club Participant 1 June 2023).

4.3 Women's football sponsors

4.3.1 The commercialisation of women's football

According to Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 June 2023, modern society relies heavily on mass communication channels. Consequently, sponsors aim to maximize their brand exposure to a wide audience in order to reap the benefits of its commercial value. The Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 (June 2023) suggests that expanding media coverage represents a viable strategy for enhancing the commercial value of women's football, as per the response to annexure 3; category 3 question 5.

The sponsor acknowledges that heightened media interest would likely lead to an increase in commercial value. However, the sponsor also recognizes that additional commercial partners must be secured to augment these efforts, as a limited number of sponsors cannot achieve this objective in isolation. Furthermore, the sponsor emphasizes the significance of maintaining a high level of performance by the players in order to appeal to potential sponsors. The clubs must possess a product that is commensurate with its nomenclature, implying that they must exhibit proficiency in the sport of football (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 June 2023).

The sponsor places significant emphasis on the necessity for the club and its members to maintain a visible presence within the community, thereby perpetually engaging in branding efforts. Sunflower Women Football Club has effectively fostered community engagement through various initiatives such as school visits to educate learners on women's football, and participation in public events within the broader KwaZulu-Natal

region. These efforts have significantly enhanced the club's local commercial value (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 June 2023).

The final aspect emphasized by the sponsor to enhance the commercial viability of women's football is the recognition by clubs and society that professional sports entail a cost. The club must aim to convey the message that in order to provide a high-quality football experience, adequate resources are necessary. Consequently, the club cannot sustain the current practice of distributing tickets for free indefinitely, as is the case in South African women's football.

According to the interviewed official of the sponsor, in order to enhance the commercial value of women's football, it is imperative to begin by addressing the deficiencies at the highest echelon of the industry, namely the South African Football Association (SAFA). It is imperative that all stakeholders, including CAF, SAFA, media outlets and commercial partners, assume accountability for ensuring gender equality in football (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 June 2023). Currently, there exists a notable disparity in financial and media coverage between men's and women's football, which must be addressed. The primary determinant of heightened commercial worth is contingent upon the level of public interest, thereby emphasizing the pivotal role of publicity (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 June 2023).

4.3.2 Sponsorship as a commercial driver of women's football

The official of the sponsor acknowledged that women's football has not been acknowledged as a commercial entity by several corporations in South Africa, unlike men's football. However, the representative asserted that women's football has been in existence for a significant amount of time and deserves equal attention to men's football (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9; annexure 4; category 3; question 3 June 2023). As per the representative's explanation, sponsorship serves as a means for the company to enhance its brand recognition amongst its current and prospective clientele.

Sponsors place great importance on the functionality of clubs and the leagues, which entails the presence of proficient personnel and volunteers who exhibit a high degree of

financial accountability (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9; annexure 4; category 3; question 4 June 2023). The Sunflower Women Football Club's community engagement, national team player production, and longevity of over 26 years make it an appealing club. However, Sunflower is not the only women's football club exhibiting these characteristics. The establishment of a distinctive value proposition is imperative for entities seeking to attract commercial investors and partnerships in a highly competitive and undervalued market with significant growth potential (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 June 2023).

The commercial potential of women's football in South Africa has been widely acknowledged, yet its exploitation has been limited. Nonetheless, there exists a substantial scope for expansion. The sponsor has demonstrated an increasing interest and emphasis on women's football throughout the years. However, the sponsor acknowledges that there appears to be a lack of commercial entities adopting this approach, which is regrettable as it is considered to be one of the factors impeding the commercial expansion of the clubs (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9 June 2023).

In light of the increasing level of professionalism and commercial viability of women's football clubs, it appears opportune to progress towards the establishment of a fully professional women's league, with the aim of enhancing the commercialization of women's football clubs, but this requires all the relevant stakeholders to rally behind this initiative (Sponsors of South African Football Participant 9; annexure 4; category 3; question 3 June 2023).

4.4 Women's football stakeholders

4.4.1 The commercialisation of women's football

The stakeholders of women's football express the undisputed commercial potential of South African women's football, as evidenced by recent viewership statistics of women's football on television, in both the SAFA SASOL Regional League and the Hollywood Bets Super League (Nelsen Sport 2019: 14). Despite the commercial significance of women's

football, the concerning issue of low attendance at club league matches persists, despite the absence of an entry fee (Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 7 and 8 June 2023). It is imperative for women's football clubs to focus on comprehending their product and the message they are conveying to their audience (Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 5 and 6 June 2023).

The consensus amongst stakeholders is that the assessment of the commercial worth of clubs and the industry at large primarily centres on spectator figures, encompassing both television viewership and stadium attendance (Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 5, 6, 7, 8; annexure 4; category 2; question 2 June 2023). The commercial value of women's football may be challenging to enhance if clubs fail to recognize the significance of acquiring viewership, both through televised broadcasts and in-person attendance at stadiums (Women's Football Stakeholder Participant 6 June 2023).

A primary issue concerning women's football clubs pertains to their self-presentation as non-profit entities, which ultimately diminishes their commercial worth. Rather than prioritizing their commercial values and marketing them effectively, these clubs tend to undermine their own commercial potential (Women's Football Stakeholder Participant 5 and 7 June 2023).

The stakeholders have identified that the activation and interaction between clubs and sponsors play a crucial role in contributing to the commercialization process. The participants emphasized the significance of sponsorship in augmenting commercial value (Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 5, 6, 7, 8 June 2023).

It is noteworthy that sponsorship is not limited to supporting normal club activities, but also encompasses the narrative surrounding the club. Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 6, 7, 8 June 2023 have asserted that clubs possess a plethora of activities and values that are not marketed effectively, and that these elements are crucial for clubs to establish distinctive value propositions that can enhance their appeal to potential sponsors. According to Women's Football Stakeholder Participant 7 June 2023, women's football clubs persist in emulating the marketing tactics of their male counterparts by displaying logos on the front of team jerseys. However, they have the potential to

establish their unique brand identity instead of competing in an already saturated commercial arena.

The stakeholders identified two primary issues pertaining to the diminished commercial viability of women's football clubs. One issue pertains to the disparity between men's and women's sports, while the other concerns the lack of an autonomous professional women's league (Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 5, 6, 7, 8 June 2023). The latter should ideally operate independently of the South African Football Association's structures, as the primary objective of the member association is to develop football talent and establish policy frameworks, rather than to commercialize football operations.

4.4.2 Sponsorship as a commercial driver of women's football

According to the Women's Football Stakeholder Participant 8 June 2023, sponsorship plays a significant role in enhancing the commercial value of women's football. The stakeholder asserts that for many clubs, including Sunflower women's football club, which have limited resources, sponsorship is crucial for their survival. In fact, the stakeholders consider sponsorship as the lifeblood of a club's overall operations.

South African women's football clubs receive a grant from the league that is deemed insufficient to meet their fundamental requirements. Furthermore, administrative setbacks from the South African Football Association (SAFA) lead to the delayed payments of these funds, exacerbating the clubs' distress (Women's Football Stakeholder Participant 7 June 2023).

The saturation of the sponsorship market and its limited accessibility to a select few companies pose challenges in securing funding, thereby impeding the smooth functioning of clubs due to limited resources (Women's Football Stakeholder Participant 6 June 2023).

This phenomenon can be attributed to several sponsoring companies directing their financial resources towards nationally renowned products and organizations, as opposed to individual clubs that are perceived as lacking a distinct value proposition and being indistinguishable from one another. One issue is that most South African commercial entities

sponsoring women's football sponsor cost and not value because currently, an evaluation model of a women's football club does not exist (Women's Football Stakeholder Participant 5 June 2023).

Consequently, the conventional sponsors' collaboration with women's football clubs has become increasingly challenging, leading the clubs to seek alternative strategies.

The stakeholders reached a consensus that it would be beneficial for clubs to examine the strategies employed by their counterparts in Europe and the Americas in transitioning from non-profit to more professional or hybrid operations. This may involve aligning mainstream operations with conventional private entity registration, while other operations are geared toward Corporate Social Investment (CSI) (Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 5 and 6 June 2023).

It is recommended that women's clubs identify individuals, volunteers or organizations with a specific focus on sponsorship and related tasks to enhance the likelihood of engaging in constructive discussions with prospective sponsors. At the core of this discussion lies the question of why clubs feel compelled to seek sponsorship based on their worth rather than their expenses incurred in running their operations (Women's Football Stakeholder Participants 5, 6, 7, 8 June 2023).

4.5 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter presented the findings of the study for data collected from interviews conducted with officials and individuals from Sunflower Women's Football Club, a corporate sponsorship decision-maker as well as South African football stakeholders. The key themes in the data were the commercialisation of women's football, the state of women's football, sponsorship, and its drivers. The following chapter will present the major conclusions and recommendations of the study based on the presentation and discussion of the results above.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study. This chapter presents and discusses the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

The aim of this study was to explore the commercial viability of women's football clubs in South Africa, using the case study of Sunflower Women Football Club in KwaZulu-Natal to achieve this aim.

The objectives of the study were:

- To develop a commercial strategy that can be modelled by all South African women's football clubs;
- To identify the key reasons for the lack of sponsorship drivers;
- To assist club management in addressing revenue and funding concerns by establishing multiple revenue streams; and
- To address the need for the establishment of a professional women's football league in South Africa.

5.2 Summary of the theoretical study

Chapters Two: Overall, the literature recognizes the potential for the commercialization of women's football clubs, but also highlights the need for concerted efforts to overcome the challenges and create a sustainable commercial model. By addressing the issues related to sponsorship, media coverage, revenue generation and social impact, women's football clubs can establish themselves as commercially viable entities and drive the growth and development of the sport.

The situation for African women's football clubs in terms of commercialization can differ from other regions due to specific factors and contextual considerations. While there is a growing interest and support for women's football in Africa, the literature highlights certain unique challenges and opportunities faced by African women's football clubs in their

commercialization efforts. African women's football clubs have fewer financial resources than those in affluent nations.

Commercialisation requires infrastructure, player development, and marketing. For this to happen, sponsorships and investments need to happen. However, African women's football sponsors are scarce. This can make it more difficult for clubs to get attractive sponsorship arrangements and sustained growth funding.

CAF President Patrice Motsepe's 2021-2025 strategic plan has made significant progress in efforts to commercialise African women's football clubs in the past 24 months. By barring men's clubs without women's teams from CAF inter-club championships starting in 2023-24 (Baloyi 2021: 3).

Various topics such the importance of sponsorship and its drivers, as well as the modern football business model, were discussed to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of the commercialisation of a women's football club. The theory of Cumulative Causation provided theoretical evidence that places emphasis on the perpetuation of poverty by poverty and the promotion of affluence by affluence, which means that commercial viability for clubs can only exist if significant financial investment is made in these clubs to improve operations.

5.3 Summary of the empirical study

The major findings of the study are presented in alignment with the research objectives that the study sought to answer. Below is the presentation of the major findings.

5.3.1 *Summary of the findings*

The study found that clubs can only begin to be commercially viable if they exist in a professional environment, which guarantees financial stability and organisational structure. The commercialisation of a women's football club model figure 5.3.1 illustrates that the establishment of a fully professional women's league can have a positive ripple effect on the entire value-chain.

The professionalisation of the league will bring with it club licencing regulations, which in turn will force clubs to conform to compliance standards like technical staff compliment, their level of qualification, administrative staff, i.e.: what constitutes a competent women's club Chief Executive Officer (CEO), marketing officer or sporting director.

This level of professionalism will attract sponsors, help clubs increase turnover, pay players' salaries, improve facilities, attract better playing talent, develop better players, earn profits from the sale (trade) of players, which will improve the overall women's product. Achieving this based on the Cumulative Causation theory as adapted for football (Dejonghe and Van Opstal 2010) will boost attendance at women's football matches, which will allow all women's football clubs to charge gate takings, thus contributing to revenue generation. Furthermore, once fans fill the stands, broadcasters and sponsors can brand and activate advertising around TV broadcasts of these matches, leading to more media and social media attention. Finally, this will lead to commercial success and long-term sustainability.

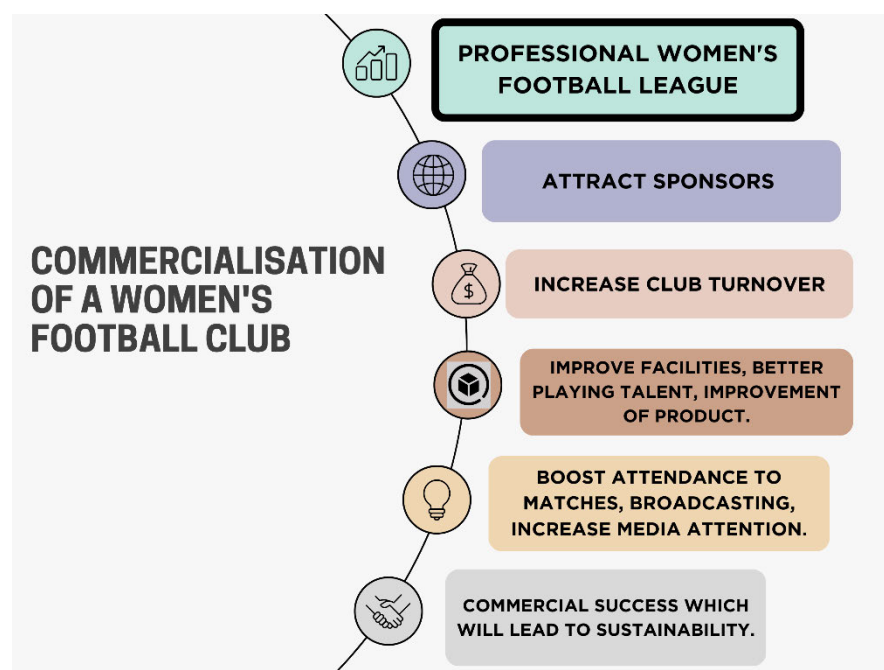


Figure 5.3 1 Commercialisation of a women's football club model by Author

5.4 Realisation of the study objectives

Objective 1: To develop a commercial strategy that can be modelled by all South African women's football clubs.

According to the literature, the modern landscape no longer has a heavy emphasis on match-day revenue. Deloitte (2010) and Forbes (2011) mention that a significant amount of revenue currently comes from broadcasting, commercial sources such as sponsorship and merchandising, player transfer fees, and non-football activities.

In his book, *Sports in African History, Politics and Identity Formation*, Gennaro (2019: 36) dives into the current and historical events surrounding the commercialization of African football. The author's goal is to highlight how Africa is failing to capitalise on the widespread appeal and commercial potential of football due to a variety of factors, including but not limited to corruption, a lack of professional frameworks, insufficient corporate sponsorships, and insufficient government support.

Commercialization has affected all levels of sports, from grassroots community involvement to the highest echelons of professional elite sports. Corporate sponsorship is a common feature in the world of professional sports, where sportsmen and sports clubs are expected to promote and/or endorse a wide range of products. Therefore, sponsorship is seen as a major driver in the commercialization efforts of a women's football club.

Objective 2: To identify the key reasons for the lack of sponsorship drivers.

The literature review highlighted that the sponsorship industry has evolved significantly over time. Although commercial interests continue to drive sponsorship investment, other factors such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) have become increasingly important, prompting the vast majority of South African women's football clubs to register as non-profit organizations in order to attract corporate support (McCullough and Trail 2022: 15). Furthermore, it has been discovered that sponsor investment is motivated not

only by financial or philanthropic motivations, but also by social identification and tribe affiliation (McGowan, Shiu, and Hassan 2017: 17).

Sponsorship is now a strategic business engagement (Demir and Söderman 2015: 23), also known as a co-marketing partnership or strategic collaboration.

In Africa, women's football sponsorship plays an important role in fostering empowerment and gender equality. Sponsors that believe in these ideas may be especially interested in financing African women's football activities since it allows them to contribute to cultural change and combat gender stereotypes (Pelak 2010: 26).

Objective 3: To assist club management in addressing revenue and funding concerns by establishing multiple revenue streams.

The literature review highlighted that a club's financial stability is critical to its success in football. An empirical investigation found a link between budget and team performance (Dejonghe and Van Opstal 2010: 15). The theory of cumulative causation devised by Karl Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish academic specializing in economics and sociology, can be used to investigate the elements that contribute to increased budgets and, consequently, growing success. Myrdal (1978) developed the concept of Cumulative Causality to describe the numerous growth paths that developing economic markets and nations can take.

Trudo Dejonghe, a sports economist, utilized this concept within the context of modern football's commercialization. Dejonghe and Van Opstal (2010) suggested the model depicted in Figure 2.11 in 2010 to demonstrate how Cumulative Causation might function in modern football.

Football clubs' revenue structure has evolved due to the commercialization of sports. Traditionally, match-day revenue was primarily derived from gate receipts, including season tickets. However, today, a significant portion of revenue comes from broadcasting, commercial sources like sponsorship, merchandising, player transfer fees, and non-football activities.

Objective 4: To address the need for the establishment of a professional women's football league in South Africa

The commercialisation of a women's football club model can positively impact the entire value-chain by introducing professional licensing regulations and requiring clubs to adhere to compliance standards. This professionalism attracts sponsors, increases turnover, pays players, improves facilities, attracts better talent, develops players, and generates profits from player sales. This, based on the Cumulative Causation theory, boosts attendance at matches, enables clubs to charge gate takings, generates revenue, and attracts broadcasters and sponsors. This leads to commercial success and long-term sustainability.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This mini dissertation investigated the commercial viability of a women's football club in relation to the professionalisation of women's football, but does not go into greater detail about the effects of club ownership, university teams dominating women's football, and how pairing with a PSL team under the new CAF club licensing amendments would affect both the current PSL business model and the future sustainability of women's football clubs that do not get absorbed into this new way.

In addition, the mini dissertation makes no attempt to investigate the actual impact of sponsorship on football fans' perception of a club. It also does not include studies on football fan preferences and the specific reasons why individuals attend football games or why they decide to watch football on TV.

Another constraint could be the complexities of SAFA's relationship with the PSL, as well as the lack of a women's football officer who could answer some crucial stakeholder issues. The study cannot be generalised to other sporting codes; participants may not have been honest due to the sensitivity of the topic; some CEOs or heads of marketing chose not to respond; and most participants were uncomfortable with their responses being attached to them, thus the decision to keep all of them anonymous.

5.6 Recommendations

Based on the results, the following recommendations have been suggested. In this mini dissertation, the researcher proposes that women's football clubs and key stakeholders apply the commercialisation of women's football model to boost the commercial value of clubs. The suggestion is around the idea of establishing a fully professional women's football league outside of the confines of the member association SAFA, whose primary mandate is development and policy framework.

To test the viability of this researcher's commercialisation plan, SAFA must license a commercial organization to organize a pilot professional women's league of roughly eight teams. The association must also create a thorough licensing system for women's football clubs and co-operate with the commercial entity to create a club professional handbook that governs all activities.

5.7 Recommendations for further research

More information can be gained by undertaking research on the impact of the CAF club licensing amendments for male clubs to attach to women's clubs to be allowed to participate in CAF competitions. In addition, more research can be done on the feasibility of a professional women's football league and how that would differ from the current Hollywood Bets Super League.

The impact of the commercialisation of women's football on SAFA, the South African Premier Soccer League (PSL) and the evaluation of broadcasting rights is also another key area that needs further research. Finally, the issue of who owns and runs women's football clubs in light of PSL clubs buying out their statuses to fulfil compliance requirements, will this mean the history of women's football clubs will be eroded? As well as the impact of university clubs dominating women's football.

5.8 Concluding remarks

All the research objectives were attained at the completion of the study. Overall, the results of the study concurred with other studies in the area of the commercial viability of a women's football club. The objective of this dissertation was achieved by constructing a commercialisation of women's football model that presents the examination of the discoveries in a more graphical format. The potential for commercial viability begins with the club and its prerequisites, as mentioned in Chapter 4. The study identified financial stability, organizational structure, and the establishment of a professional women's football league as the primary prerequisites for commercial success of a women's football club.

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ANNEXURE 1: CONSENT LETTER



CONSENT

Full Title of the Study: The commercial viability of women football clubs: a case study of the Sunflower Women Football Club in KwaZulu-Natal

Name of Researcher: Menzi Ngcobo

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- ☐ I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher **Menzi Ngcobo**, about the nature, conduct, benefits, and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 061/23
- ☐ I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- ☐ I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- ☐ In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- ☐ I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- ☐ I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- ☐ I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant Thumbprint	Date	Time	Signature	/	Right
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_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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I **Menzi Ngcobo** herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Witness (If applicable)	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)	Date	Signature

ANNEXURE 2: LETTER OF INFORMATION



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Dear **Mr/Mrs/Ms** _____

I would like to invite you to participate in this research study. I would appreciate your permission to conduct an interview as part of this research study. This should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes at an agreed upon time and date. I will only need to schedule a convenient time for the interview. You can ask as many questions as you wish because it is important that you fully understand the study. You are entitled to discuss the study with your family and friends and are under no obligation to commit at this stage. For this purpose, a copy of the Letter of Information document is given to you to take home.

Title of the Research Study: The commercially viability of women football clubs: a case study of the Sunflower Women Football Club in KwaZulu-Natal

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Menzi Ngcobo, B-Ed, Adv Dip Physical Education & School Sport, PG Dip Business Administration

Supervisor: Prof TE du Plessis

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: Inadequate funding and restricted access to financial capital continue to plague the growth and sustainability of women's sports in South Africa and throughout Africa. (Chinaza, 2021) However, it is now abundantly clear that sport can be empowering for young women. (Huggins and Randell, 2014). In an effort to examine and understand what the best way for women's football to grow as a commercial entity and a fully-fledged career for women, the focus area for this research is a commercial strategy for a South African women's football club.

The nature of the investigation and the desired insights led to the selection of a qualitative case study methodology. The development of a commercial strategy for women's football clubs in South Africa has received little academic attention, especially in the context of a traditionally male-dominated sport like football. Data will be gathered through in-depth interviews with key commercial sponsorship decision-makers, football stakeholders, players, and coaches with an emphasis on contextual comprehension.

Outline of the Procedures: You will be required to participate in an interview that asks for information such as your name, your position in your company/organisation/club, your background in football and/or the sponsoring business. In addition, the interview will ask you to respond to questions such as your involvement in women's football, knowledge of sponsorship and the state of women's football in South Africa.

The interview will take 30-45 minutes to complete, and your identity will remain anonymous. You will be required to agree to a convenient interview time, venue and method (face-to-face or via video call) to participate in the interview you need to be a club official of the selected club (Sunflower Women Football Club, an official of the South African Football Association (SAFA), A South African football stakeholder or a sports/football sponsorship decision-maker.

ANNEXURE 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions

Category 1 Biographical and Formal questions

1. What position do you currently occupy in your company/organization/club?
2. Inform us about your football and/or sponsorship experience.
3. What is the organizational structure of your league/competition/organisation/club?

Category 2 Women's football stakeholders

1. How would you characterize the growth of women's football in South Africa?
2. A football club's commercial value is simply determined by its capacity to earn revenue through multiple revenue streams. There are currently no records of any South African women's football clubs that are capable of doing so. What do you believe is the major issue in terms of the commercial value of women's football in South Africa?
3. What are FIFA, CAF, and SAFA doing to encourage the growth of women's football?
4. What issues do you believe must be addressed in order to build an economically viable strategy for a women's football club?
5. How important do you believe sponsorship is in delivering commercial value for a women's football club?
6. Do you think women's football clubs should be registered as Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) in order to attract sponsors and support, or as private commercial entities? Considering this which form of ownership would boost their commercial value?
7. Does the existing league system of South African women's football allow clubs to recruit sponsors?






Category 3 South African Women's football sponsors

1. Which football team or organization do you currently sponsor?
2. How is your current sponsorship deal structured and what do you believe your company is gaining from sponsoring sport, specifically women's football in South Africa?
3. What do you believe is required to boost the commercial value of women's football?
4. What factors are currently lacking that could contribute to an increasing interest in sponsoring women's football?
5. What elements do you consider when deciding to sponsor a club or league/competition/organisation?
6. Do you see any additional benefits to supporting women's football aside from the commercial value?
7. Describe a successful relationship with the sponsored club or league/competition/organisation? What are your expectations regarding their work as a club or

Category 4 Sunflower Women Football Club

1. What attempts have you made to attract sponsors and what has been the outcome of those attempts?
2. Are you as a club aware of the terms of the sponsorship deal between SAFA and SASOL for the SASOL Regional League, and SAFA and Hollywood Bets for the Hollywood Bets Super League, and SAFA and the SABC for the Broadcasting of Hollywood Bets Super League matches?
3. Do these deals hinder or aid your attempts to attract sponsors?
4. What importance do you think sponsorship has regarding the commercial value?
5. What do you think is the main problem regarding the commercial value of women's football not being higher than it is?
6. Do you believe that there are other values to be considered when trying to attract sponsors other than merely commercial values?
7. What would you improve in the cooperation between the club's, SAFA and the sponsors?

ANNEXURE 4: GATEKEEPER PERMISSION

CONTACT DETAILS		Address	 SUNFLOWER WOMEN FOOTBALL CLUB
 082 551 8100	 info@sunflowerwfc.co.za	11111 Sunflower Road Sunflower, 11111 082 551 8100	
 082 551 8100	 082 551 8100	REG No: 082 551 8100	

Gatekeeper Permission

Dear Menzi Obed Ngcobo

Thank you so much for considering Sunflower Women Football Club for your MBA research. It is with great pleasure to inform you that as a club we are willing to grant you access to our players, technical staff and club committee

Should you have any other queries feel free to communicate with us

Regards
Siyabonga Malinga
Founder: Sunflower WFC

ANNEXURE 5: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Berwyn Court
Gate 1, Sonhe Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2375

Email: lvishad@dut.ac.za

http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics

www.dut.ac.za

12 June 2023

Mr M O Ngcobo
19 Smakahle Myeza Avenue
KwaMakhutha
P.O. Amanzimtoti
4126

Dear Mr Ngcobo

The commercial viability of women football clubs: a case study of the Sunflower Women Football Club in KwaZulu-Natal
Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 061/23

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the DUT-IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

It is compulsory for a student or researcher to apply for recertification on an annual basis. The failure to do so will result in withdrawal of ethics clearance. It is the responsibility of the researcher and the supervisor to apply for recertification.

Please note that you are required to submit a Notification of Completion of Study form together with an abstract to the DUT-IREC office on completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely

Prof J K Adam
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

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ANNEXURE 6: LANGUAGE EDITOR'S CLEARANCE LETTER

EDITOR'S LETTER

Researchers Beyond-Borders (PTY) LTD
Umhlanga, Durban
South Africa
30 June 2023

To whom it may concern

Editing of Masters (MBA) Dissertation: Menzi Ngcobo (Student number - 21238853)

Title: The commercial viability of women football clubs: a case study of the Sunflower Women's Football Club in KwaZulu-Natal.

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned dissertation has been language edited.
Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.



Regards

Maleni Pillay
Researchers Beyond-Borders
consult@researchersbeyondborders.com
www.researchersbeyondborders.com

ANNEXURE 7: TURNITIN REPORT

THE COMMERCIAL VIABILITY OF WOMEN FOOTBALL CLUBS: A CASE STUDY OF THE SUNFLOWER WOMEN FOOTBALL CLUB IN KWAZULU-NATAL

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