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**AGENDA SETTING IN FOOTBALL COMMUNICATION WITHIN TAMALE, NORTHERN
REGION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GHANAIAN SPORTS MEDIA.**

ABDULAI YAKUBU

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REGION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GHANAIAN SPORTS MEDIA.**

BY

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Abdulai Yakubu, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have been identified and acknowledged, is entirely my own original work and has not been submitted either in part or whole for another degree elsewhere.

STUDENT'S NAME: ABDULAI YAKUBU

SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....23-01-2026.....

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that preparation and presentation of this work was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis by the University for Development Studies, Nyankpala.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how sports media in Tamale, Northern Ghana, set the agenda for football communication and how such agenda-setting practices shape public attention to men's and women's football. The study was motivated by persistent concerns about the limited visibility of women's football within sports media discourse and the lack of context-specific evidence on how media coverage patterns reproduce gender inequality in football communication. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and a phenomenological qualitative design, the study explored the meanings, experiences, and social influences that shape media decisions in football reporting. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 13 participants, comprising sports journalists, footballers, coaches, and football administrators, because they possessed direct knowledge and practical experience relevant to the study. Data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews and supported with a qualitative review of selected sports programmes, radio discussions, and football-related online and social media content. The data were analysed thematically through an iterative process of coding, categorisation, and interpretation of recurrent patterns. The findings revealed a clear imbalance in football coverage, with men's football receiving more frequent, prominent, and detailed attention, while women's football was often marginalised, treated as secondary, or framed as less newsworthy. Participants attributed this imbalance to editorial priorities, perceived audience interest, commercial pressures, professional routines, and entrenched gendered norms within football culture. The study concludes that sports media agenda-setting in Tamale reinforces inequalities in football communication and weakens the visibility, legitimacy, and development of women's football. It recommends deliberate gender-sensitive editorial practices and stronger stakeholder commitment to promote more equitable football coverage.

Keywords: agenda-setting, sports media, football communication, women's football, gender inequality, Tamale



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter talks about the study's background, which includes some preview works on the same topic, the problem statement, the research's purpose and objectives, the research questions the study aims to answer, the study's significance, its limitations and the scope of the study, and its organization.

1.1 Background of the Study

Football is one of the most powerful cultural institutions in the world, bringing together people from different backgrounds to share identity, pride, and emotion. In Ghana, football is more than entertainment; it is closely tied to national pride, collective identity, and everyday social life (Agyemang, 2011). At the same time, there are persistent gender gaps in how men's and women's football are communicated and valued in the media. In places such as Tamale in Northern Ghana, cultural and gendered expectations shape who plays football, who receives media visibility, and whose stories are seen as important (Mensah *et al.*, 2020). Drawing on McCombs and Shaw's (1972) agenda-setting theory, the media do not simply mirror reality but influence which issues the public considers important by deciding what to highlight and how often. In the football context, editorial choices about which teams, leagues, and players receive attention signal to audiences what matters most, often placing men's football at the centre and relegating women's football to the margins (Bruce, 2016).





In the Ghanaian sports media landscape, this imbalance is pronounced. Men’s football, particularly the Ghana Premier League (GPL) and the Black Stars, dominates coverage, sponsorship, and public attention (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2022). Major television, radio, print, and online outlets allocate extensive space to men’s football through match previews, live commentary, post-match analysis, and personality profiles (Amankwah and Mensah, 2020). Coverage of the Black Stars becomes a central focus of sports discourse during tournaments such as the FIFA World Cup and the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), attracting significant corporate sponsorship and advertising revenue that further strengthens the visibility and commercial appeal of men’s competitions (Adjepong, 2018; Gyan, 2021).

Women’s football, by contrast, receives limited and often superficial attention. Ghana’s women’s national team, the Black Queens, and the Ghana Women’s Premier League (GWPL) represent important achievements and provide a structured domestic competition. However, research shows that women’s sports in Ghana receive less than 10% of sports news airtime, with women’s football in particular rarely enjoying sustained or in-depth coverage (Asiedu and Alhassan, 2019). GWPL matches frequently go unreported or are covered only briefly, with a focus on human-interest angles, hardship, or empowerment narratives rather than tactical quality, competitiveness, and professional performance (Tufuor and Oppong, 2020; Fink, 2015). Structural and cultural factors underpin this disparity. Football has historically been constructed as a “man’s game” in Ghana, and many sports media organisations have grown around this assumption. Editors and reporters often perceive women’s football as less intense, less marketable, and less profitable, and therefore not worth sustained investment or regular inclusion in the news agenda (Tufuor and Oppong, 2020; Gyan, 2021).

These patterns are reinforced by the composition and routines of sports newsrooms. Sports desks are predominantly male, and men occupy most decision-making roles as editors, analysts, and commentators (Adjepong, 2018; Mensah and Annor, 2021). With relatively few women journalists, and with those women often having limited influence over editorial priorities, gendered assumptions about what counts as “serious” football are routinely reproduced in coverage decisions. As a result, men’s football is framed as the “real” game, while women’s football is treated as marginal or exceptional. This has wide-ranging implications for the development of women’s football. Limited visibility makes it harder for women’s teams and players to attract sponsorship, expand fan bases, and secure long-term investment. Girls and young women have fewer visible role models in the media, reducing the likelihood that they will see football as a credible and respected pathway (Owusu, 2019). The absence of regular, high-quality coverage also sustains public perceptions that women’s football is “less exciting”, “less professional”, or “less important” than men’s football (Jones *et al.*, 2021).

These challenges are intensified in northern cities such as Tamale, where traditional gender roles are deeply rooted and expectations about women’s participation in public life are often more restrictive (Owusu, 2019; Mensah *et al.*, 2020). National-level inequalities in media attention intersect with local cultural norms, making it even more difficult for women and girls to access playing opportunities, gain recognition, or be portrayed as legitimate football actors. The way media frame football also matters. While narratives around men’s football tend to focus on competition, performance, status, and financial value, coverage of women’s football is more likely to emphasise adversity, charity, or empowerment (Fink, 2015; Jones *et al.*, 2021). This framing



gap encourages audiences to view women’s football as a social project rather than a professional sport, which in turn undermines public interest, media investment, and long-term growth.

At the same time, international and national bodies increasingly call for greater gender equality in and through sport. Organisations such as UNESCO and UN Women highlight the critical role of sports media in challenging stereotypes, ensuring visibility for women athletes, and building more inclusive sporting cultures (UNESCO, 2021; UN Women, 2022). In Ghana, more equitable football coverage has the potential not only to support women’s sport but also to contribute to broader gender equality and social change goals. Recognising the agenda-setting power of media in sports communication, the persistent gaps in coverage present both a challenge and an opportunity.

Against this backdrop, there is still limited empirical knowledge about how sports media in Northern Ghana, and especially in Tamale, set the agenda for men’s and women’s football, what frames and narratives dominate local coverage, and how these patterns shape public perceptions. Much of the existing literature focuses on national outlets or larger media markets, overlooking regional contexts where cultural norms and resource constraints may operate differently (Owusu, 2019). This study therefore seeks to analyze football communication in Tamale by examining the extent and nature of coverage given to men’s and women’s football, the factors that influence topic selection and prioritisation, and the ways in which media agendas affect public interest and attitudes towards football. A deeper understanding of these dynamics is essential for challenging gendered hierarchies in sports media, enhancing the visibility and legitimacy of women’s football, and promoting a more inclusive football culture in Tamale and Ghana as a whole.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Sports media play a central role in shaping public attention, perceptions, and interest in football. Agenda-setting theory explains that the media may not always tell audiences what to think, but they are highly influential in telling audiences what to think about by giving prominence to selected issues, events, and personalities (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In the context of football communication, this means that the teams, players, competitions, and stories repeatedly highlighted by sports media are more likely to be perceived by audiences as important and worthy of attention. This gives sports media considerable power in shaping football discourse and public engagement.

Despite this influential role, sports media coverage has remained uneven and gendered in many contexts. Globally, women's sports continue to receive disproportionately low media attention compared to men's sports, and the limited coverage they receive is often shaped by stereotypes or framed in ways that diminish their athletic competence and visibility (UNESCO, 2024). Such patterns of unequal representation can weaken public awareness, reduce institutional and commercial support, and reinforce the perception that women's football is less important or less competitive than men's football.

In Ghana, similar concerns have been identified in relation to football reporting. Lamptey (2019) found that female football stories in the Ghanaian print media were often ignored, sidelined, or pushed into the background, while portrayals of female footballers and coaches sometimes reproduced gender bias and stereotypes. The study further showed that such patterns of reportage can set an agenda that privileges men's football and undermines opportunities to build sustained



audience interest in women's football. These findings suggest that sports media may contribute to persistent inequalities in football communication and representation within the Ghanaian context.

Although studies have examined gender and sports media representation in Ghana and elsewhere, there is still limited empirical evidence on how sports media in Tamale specifically set the agenda for football communication and how this affects the visibility of women's football relative to men's football. This gap is important because Tamale has an active media environment in which radio discussions, sports commentary, and digital platforms strongly shape local football narratives and public opinion. Yet, little is known about how journalists, presenters, editors, and football stakeholders within this setting select, prioritize, and frame football content. Without such context-specific evidence, efforts to promote balanced football communication and gender equity in sports media may remain weak and insufficiently informed. It is against this background that this study examined agenda setting in football communication among Ghanaian sports media in Tamale, Northern Region, with emphasis on how media prioritization influences the representation and visibility of women's football.

1.3 Objectives of the research

1.3.1 Main Objective

To examine the agenda-setting role of Ghanaian sports media in shaping football communication within Tamale, Northern Region.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the extent of media coverage given to both men and women football in Tamale

2. To assess the factors that influence the selection and prioritization of football topics by sports media in Tamale.
3. To explore the impact of sports media coverage on public interest and perception of football in Tamale.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 Main Research Question

How does the Ghanaian sports media influence football communication within Tamale, Northern Region, through agenda-setting?

1.4.2 Specific Research Questions

1. What is the extent of media coverage given to both men and women football-related issues in Tamale by Ghanaian sports media?
2. What factors influence the selection and prioritization of football topics by sports media in Tamale?
3. How does sports media coverage impact public interest and perception of football in Tamale?

1.5 Justification

The persistent under-representation of women's football in the media remains a major barrier to achieving gender equality in sport, both globally and in Ghana. In the Northern Region, the large gap in media attention between men's and women's football reflects deeper cultural and structural inequalities that shape who participates in sport, who is recognised, and whose achievements are valued (Mensah *et al.*, 2020). Increasing evidence shows that equitable media coverage can



influence public interest, sponsor investment, and participation levels in women's sport (Fink, 2015; UNESCO, 2021). Understanding how the media in Tamale prioritise, frame, and distribute football content is therefore essential for addressing these inequalities and promoting a more inclusive football environment.

Agenda-setting theory highlights the critical role of the media in shaping what society considers important (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). By analysing the extent and nature of media coverage of men's and women's football in Tamale, this study provides empirical insight into whether sports media are reinforcing or challenging gender disparities in football communication. This is particularly important in Tamale, where cultural norms may already discourage women's participation in sport, and where media narratives can either create enabling environments or reinforce exclusion (Owusu, 2019).

The study is also justified by the growing recognition that women's football is a key pathway for empowerment, representation, and social transformation. Despite significant achievements by teams such as the Black Queens and the development of the Ghana Women's Premier League, media interest remains disproportionately low compared to men's competitions (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng, 2022). Examining the frames and narratives used in reporting women's football will help reveal whether existing media practices unintentionally reinforce stereotypes that position women's football as secondary or less serious, thereby limiting its growth and professional legitimacy (Bruce, 2016).

Furthermore, most previous studies on sports media coverage in Ghana have focused on national trends or outlets concentrated in major southern cities. As a result, there is limited evidence on how agenda-setting processes operate in regional media environments such as Tamale, where



cultural values, resource constraints, and institutional arrangements may differ significantly (Mensah *et al.*, 2020). This study therefore addresses a key gap by providing a grounded understanding of how local sports journalists, presenters, administrators, and players experience media coverage and how these dynamics influence public engagement with football.

Finally, the study aligns with national and international commitments to gender equality in sport. Organisations such as UNESCO and UN Women emphasise the importance of inclusive media practices that challenge stereotypes and make women athletes visible and valued (UNESCO, 2021; UN Women, 2022). By analysing how sports media shape public interest and perceptions of women's football in Tamale, this study contributes evidence that can inform policy, advocacy, and newsroom practice. The findings will be useful for journalists, sports associations, regulators, and gender-equity advocates seeking to promote fairer representation and stronger development of women's football in Ghana.

1.6 Scope of study

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study examines how sports media in the Tamale Metropolis set the agenda for football communication, with particular attention to differences in the coverage of men's and women's football. The study is limited to selected sports media platforms in Tamale and stakeholders involved in football communication, including sports journalists, presenters, editors, and football actors such as players, coaches, and administrators. Data were generated through semi-structured key informant interviews and a qualitative review of selected sports media content (radio and television programmes, studio discussions, and football-related online and social media materials).



The study is qualitative and interpretive and therefore does not seek statistical generalisation or causal measurement of media effects; rather, it provides context-specific insights into how media priorities are shaped and how these priorities influence public interest and perceptions of football in Tamale.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are based on interview accounts and a qualitative review of media content, which are subject to certain limitations. Interview data may be influenced by social desirability bias, recall challenges, and the tendency of participants to present their professional roles in a positive light. Although efforts were made to create a relaxed and confidential environment, some respondents may still have withheld critical views or emphasised particular narratives.

Interpretation of themes also relies on researcher judgement. While careful coding, reflection, and cross-checking were used to enhance consistency, qualitative analysis remains interpretive and context dependent. In addition, the study focuses on a relatively small number of participants and a purposive selection of media materials within Tamale. As a result, the findings are not intended for broad statistical generalisation to all sports media in Ghana. Instead, they are best understood as offering rich, contextual insights that can inform practice, policy, and further research on football communication and gender in similar settings.

1.8 Organization of study

This work is organized into six chapters. Chapter One presents the introduction, background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, significance, scope, and limitations. Chapter



Two reviews relevant literature and theories underpinning the study. Chapter Three describes the methodology, including the study approach, design, population, sampling, data collection, analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents the findings and thematic results based on the study objectives. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the literature and theoretical perspectives. Chapter Six provides the summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This section is an overview of related literature on the topic of Agenda-Setting. And it examines definitions of important concepts in the area of agenda setting including Sports Media, Football Communication, Media Coverage and Football Development. It will be examined in the chapter as well as some analytical models of agenda setting, and pair it off. The theoretical perspective is discussed in the second section of this chapter. The theoretical framework is about Framing theory, Media Economics theory, and Hallin's Spheres theory which the study is structured.

2.1 Operational Definition of Terms

In undertaking this study, the following guiding principles help to clarify the role of Ghanaian sports media in agenda-setting for football communication in Tamale. The possible definitions and their corresponding concepts are as follows

Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting refers to the process through which the media influence the importance placed on issues, events, or topics by giving them more prominence and frequency of coverage. In this study, agenda-setting refers to how sports media in Tamale prioritize and emphasize certain football-related issues, teams, and competitions, thereby shaping public attention and discussion about football (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

Football Communication

Football communication refers to the dissemination, discussion, and interpretation of football-



related information through various media platforms such as radio, television, newspapers, and online media. Within the context of this study, it specifically refers to how football stories, analysis, and commentary are communicated to the public through sports media in Tamale.

Sports Media

Sports media refers to media platforms and professionals involved in reporting, discussing, and analysing sports-related events and issues. In this study, sports media include radio sports presenters, sports journalists, commentators, and online sports platforms that regularly cover football-related issues in Tamale.

Women's Football

Women's football refers to organized football competitions and activities involving female players, teams, and leagues. In this study, women's football includes female football clubs, players, coaches, and competitions discussed or covered by sports media within Tamale and Ghana more broadly (Fink, 2015).

Media Coverage

Media coverage refers to the amount, frequency, prominence, and nature of attention given by media outlets to particular issues or events. In this study, media coverage relates to how often and how prominently sports media discuss men's and women's football.

Gender Bias in Sports Media

Gender bias in sports media refers to unequal representation or portrayal of male and female athletes within media reporting. This includes situations where men's sports receive more



coverage, greater prominence, or more positive framing compared to women's sports (Cooky, Messner, and Musto, 2015)

2.2 Theoretical review

The review of related literature serves as architecture frame work to the understanding of how media sway football discourse in Tamale. This section discusses the application of theories which are suitable to analyze sports media's influence on public perceived reality, how news priorities and audience participation is determined by it.

2.2.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

This study is primarily guided by **Agenda-Setting Theory**, which explains the influential role of the media in shaping public attention toward certain issues. The theory was first introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), who argued that the media may not necessarily tell people what to think, but they are highly effective in telling people what to think about. Through the selection, emphasis, and frequency of news coverage, the media can influence the importance audiences attach to particular issues, topics, or events.

Agenda-setting occurs when media outlets prioritize certain topics and give them greater prominence through repeated coverage, headline placement, or extended discussion. Over time, audiences begin to perceive these frequently covered topics as more important than others (McCombs, 2004). In the context of sports communication, agenda-setting theory suggests that the sports issues, teams, and competitions that receive greater media attention are more likely to attract public interest and engagement.





In relation to football communication, sports media such as radio, television, newspapers, and online platforms act as key agenda setters by determining which football stories are highlighted and how they are framed. When media outlets focus heavily on men's football competitions while giving limited attention to women's football, they indirectly influence public perceptions about the relative importance of these competitions. This may contribute to unequal visibility between men's and women's football.

Several studies have demonstrated the relevance of agenda-setting in sports media coverage. Research has shown that media coverage tends to prioritize men's sports events, which shapes public awareness and reinforces the perception that men's sports are more significant than women's sports (Cooky, Messner, and Musto, 2015). Such patterns of media attention can influence audience interest, sponsorship opportunities, and institutional support for sports development.

Within the context of this study, Agenda-Setting Theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding how sports media in Tamale prioritize football content and how such prioritization influences the visibility and communication of men's and women's football.

Gender Representation Theory

In addition to agenda-setting theory, this study also draws on **Gender Representation Theory**, which explains how media portrayals can reproduce or challenge gender inequalities in society. According to this perspective, media representations are not neutral reflections of reality but are socially constructed narratives that shape how audiences perceive gender roles and identities (Gill, 2007).

In sports media, gender representation theory helps explain why women's sports often receive less coverage and are sometimes framed differently from men's sports. Female athletes may be portrayed in ways that emphasize appearance, personal life, or emotional attributes rather than athletic performance (Fink, 2015). Such portrayals may contribute to the marginalization of women's sports within media discourse.

In the Ghanaian context, where football is culturally associated with masculinity, media narratives may further reinforce the dominance of men's football while limiting attention to women's football. Gender representation theory therefore helps explain the structural and cultural factors that shape media decisions about football coverage.

By combining agenda-setting theory with gender representation theory, this study provides a comprehensive framework for examining how sports media in Tamale select, prioritize, and frame football stories and how these practices influence the visibility and communication of women's football.

2.2.2 Framing Theory

While agenda-setting theory explains how the media influence *which* issues people consider important, framing theory goes a step further by examining *how* those issues are presented and interpreted. Framing theory, as articulated by Entman (1993), posits that communication frames work by selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient in a text, in ways that promote particular interpretations, problem definitions, moral evaluations, or solutions. In other words, two stories may report on the same event, but differences in language, tone, imagery, emphasis, and sourcing can guide audiences toward very different understandings of that event.



Frames are embedded in everyday journalistic practices. They shape headlines, word choice, story angles, selection of quotes, and narrative structure (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). By highlighting some perspectives while downplaying others, frames organise meaning and make complex information easier for audiences to process. As such, framing is not neutral. It reflects cultural norms, institutional routines, audience expectations, and power relations within society (Entman, 1993). Repeated exposure to particular frames can normalise specific ways of thinking and reinforce social hierarchies or ideologies.

In sports media, framing strongly influences how athletes, teams, and competitions are understood. Research shows that men's sports are more often framed in terms of competition, strategy, professionalism, achievement, and performance, whereas women's sports tend to be framed around themes such as resilience, femininity, sacrifice, inspirational struggle, or social empowerment rather than athletic excellence (Bruce, 2016). Such framing patterns subtly signal that men's sports are serious and professional, while women's sports are symbolic or sentimental. Even when coverage volume increases, gendered frames may continue to undermine recognition of women athletes as elite competitors.

Framing is also closely tied to stereotype reproduction. Women athletes are more likely to be framed in ways that emphasise their physical appearance, personal relationships, or emotions rather than their technical ability and tactical intelligence (Tufiur and Oppong, 2020; Fink, 2015). Conversely, men are often framed as natural leaders, heroes, and central figures in the sporting narrative. These differences shape public perceptions of who belongs in sport, whose performance matters, and who deserves investment. In the Ghanaian context, sports media framing contributes significantly to how football identities are constructed. Coverage of the Black Stars, Ghana

Premier League clubs, and high-profile male players often adopts celebratory and status-driven frames, portraying men’s football as the pinnacle of competition and national prestige (Amankwah and Mensah, 2020). Women’s football, however, is more likely to be framed around financial struggle, low attendance, or limited infrastructure, rather than tactical quality or athletic performance (Asiedu and Alhassan, 2019). These frames convey implicit hierarchies of value, reinforcing the perception that men’s football is the “real” game.

Framing also plays a critical role in Tamale. Where women already navigate restrictive gender norms, the way sports media frame women’s football either supports or constrains social acceptance. Positive, performance-focused frames can normalise women’s participation and present female athletes as legitimate football actors. However, frames that emphasise novelty, charity, or “special cases” risk reinforcing ideas that women in football remain exceptions rather than professionals. Frames that portray women’s football as slow, inferior, or lacking competitiveness further discourage sponsorship, investment, and community support, shaping audiences’ willingness to attend matches or follow teams.

Framing theory links closely with agenda-setting in this study. While agenda-setting determines whose football stories gain visibility, framing explains how these stories are narrated, evaluated, and emotionally positioned. For example, even when women’s football receives coverage, the framing of that coverage can limit its perceived value. Thus, framing becomes an important channel through which gender inequality is reproduced or challenged in football communication. Within this study, framing theory provides a lens for analysing how Ghanaian sports media construct meaning around men’s and women’s football in Tamale. It helps interrogate the language, narrative themes, and symbolic representations used in reporting. By examining the

dominant frames applied to women's football, the study seeks to understand how media narratives influence public interest, trust, and perception, as well as the broader legitimacy of women's football as a professional sporting field.

2.2.3 Media Economics Theory

Media economics theory examines how economic structures, market forces, ownership patterns, and financial incentives shape the behaviour of media organisations and the content they produce (Alexander *et al.*, 2004). From this perspective, the media are not only social institutions but also commercial enterprises that must balance journalistic ideals with the need to attract audiences, generate revenue, satisfy advertisers, and sustain operations. Decisions about what to cover, how prominently to cover it, and how resources are allocated across news beats are therefore strongly influenced by financial considerations, competition, and the broader economic environment in which media organisations operate.

Media economics highlights several key factors that shape content production. These include advertising revenue models, audience size and segmentation, cost structures, technological change, corporate ownership, sponsorship relationships, and market competition (Doyle, 2013). In environments where advertising remains the dominant source of income, media houses tend to prioritise content that attracts large, loyal, and commercially desirable audiences. Sports coverage often becomes a key vehicle for this, as sport already enjoys strong emotional appeal and audience attachment. However, within sports content, editorial preference tends to concentrate on high-profile competitions and personalities that can guarantee audience numbers, sponsor interest, and consistent engagement (Rowe, 2016).





In Ghana, these dynamics are clearly visible in football communication. Men's elite football, such as the Ghana Premier League and the Black Stars, attracts the largest audiences, generates the most advertising and sponsorship value, and is supported by established broadcast rights structures (Amankwah and Mensah, 2020). As a result, media organisations allocate more airtime, promotional space, and journalistic resources to men's football, reinforcing its economic and symbolic dominance. Women's football, on the other hand, receives limited direct commercial investment, fewer corporate partnerships, lower match attendance, and weaker brand visibility. Because media organisations perceive women's football as less profitable, it receives less coverage, which further suppresses audience growth and financial opportunities, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of marginalisation (Fink, 2015). Media economics theory therefore helps explain why under-representation of women's football persists even in contexts where gender equality is formally promoted. Coverage decisions are not always ideological or consciously discriminatory; they are often guided by calculations about revenue, sponsorship value, production costs, and risk. Stories perceived as financially rewarding are prioritised, while those expected to attract smaller or less commercially attractive audiences are sidelined. In many Ghanaian sports newsrooms, these calculations translate into systematic privileging of men's football over women's football, regardless of performance quality or social importance (Gyan, 2021).

In Tamale, these economic logics intersect with regional realities. Many sports media platforms operate with limited budgets, rely heavily on sponsorship, and compete for listener attention in a crowded radio environment. Journalists and editors may feel pressured to focus on teams, leagues, or players already popular among audiences to ensure programme ratings and advertiser retention. This leads to sustained emphasis on men's football and urban-based elite clubs, while women's



football, grassroots football, and community-level competitions receive limited or irregular exposure. The lack of commercial structure and formal investment in women's football in the Northern Region further reduces its perceived economic value, discouraging media houses from giving it routine prominence. Digital media also plays an important role within the media economics framework. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube allow sports fans and journalists to share content at relatively low cost, sometimes increasing visibility for under-represented teams and competitions (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). However, even in digital spaces, attention tends to mirror broader market patterns, with men's football continuing to dominate online engagement. Women's football content must therefore compete not only with limited mainstream coverage but also with entrenched audience habits and expectations.

Media economics theory is crucial to this study because it illuminates **why** agenda-setting and framing practices often privilege men's football. It shows that coverage patterns are not simply the outcome of editorial judgement or cultural bias, but are embedded in broader financial systems, sponsorship relations, and audience-driven market dynamics. By applying this theory, the study interprets how economic pressures influence topic selection, the prioritisation of men's football content, and the marginal visibility of women's football in Tamale. It also helps explain how unequal economic investment contributes to persistent gender hierarchies in football communication, reinforcing the structural challenges faced by women's football in Ghana.

2.2.4 Hallin's Spheres Theory

Hallin's spheres are also prominent in media agenda setting literature. It is a concept of news reporting in which the world of political treatise is divided into three concentric spheres namely sphere of deviance, sphere of legitimate controversy and sphere of consensus (Hallin, 1986).



Hallin’s Spheres Theory explains how journalism organizes public debate by drawing boundaries around what is treated as shared, what is treated as debatable, and what is treated as unacceptable. The central point is that professional “objectivity” is applied unevenly, depending on where an issue is located. Recent research uses the model to show how these boundaries can shift when journalists respond to polarization, elite messaging, or audience pressure (Panievsky, 2022).

2.2.4.1 The three spheres

In Hallin’s sphere of consensus, journalists treat an issue as settled in the shared moral and civic order, framing it as something “we” already agree is right or necessary (Nygaard, 2021; Harjuniemi, 2023). In this sphere, the norm of strict balance is relaxed because opposing viewpoints are seen as unnecessary or socially out of bounds, so coverage emphasizes agreement, collective identity, and common purpose (Nygaard, 2021; Harjuniemi, 2023). You typically notice consensus framing through inclusive “we” language, fewer contrast markers, limited space for dissent, and greater amplification of official or trusted institutions as custodians of the “correct” position (Nygaard, 2021). Even when conflict exists in society, consensus framing can still occur if journalists perceive that mainstream publics or legitimate institutions broadly align on the core value at stake (Nygaard, 2021). This matters for the work because it provides a lens for understanding how political information is normalized in communication environments shaping students’ civic life, where themes like peaceful elections, national cohesion, condemnation of violence, and democratic participation may be reported as taken for granted rather than debated (Nygaard, 2021; Harjuniemi, 2023). Hallin’s broader point is that journalistic norms vary across spheres, with balance expected mainly in legitimate controversy, while consensus and deviance function more as moral boundary-setting by affirming shared values or marking violations of them



(Ekström *et al.*, 2021). In the sphere of legitimate controversy, an issue is treated as a normal and acceptable public debate among actors whose views are recognized as credible, so journalism leans on neutrality, balance, and evidence-led arbitration (Iseri, 2019; Nygaard, 2023). Coverage here typically presents competing claims and tradeoffs in a “side A versus side B” structure, supported by multiple sources and careful attribution, while avoiding overt endorsement (Iseri, 2019; Nygaard, 2023). The sphere is analytically powerful because it shows that balance is bounded, pluralism operates only within limits set by who counts as a legitimate speaker and which frames are treated as reasonable (Harjuniemi, 2023; Nygaard, 2023). Research on economic journalism highlights how elite actors can function as “primary definers,” shaping the outer limits of legitimate controversy even when reporters aim to be objective (Harjuniemi, 2023), while other work shows how boundary work by news organizations can cast challengers as deviant and keep certain disputes from entering this sphere (Nygaard, 2023). For analysis, legitimate controversy is often visible through presenter-led debates, contrasting soundbites, evidence talk, and explicit attribution cues, and it can be coded by checking for representation of recognized sides, a neutral tone, conflicts framed as resolvable through rules or policy choices, and legitimating sources such as officials and experts (Harjuniemi, 2023; Nygaard, 2023).

In Hallin’s sphere of deviance, certain actors, viewpoints, or topics are treated as outside the boundaries of acceptable public debate and therefore unworthy of equal hearing (Nygaard, 2021). In this zone, journalism often shifts away from neutrality to boundary-policing, where coverage may condemn, exclude, or delegitimize positions to defend what counts as legitimate debate (Nygaard, 2021). Deviance is not only produced through harsh condemnation, it can also be created through routine silence and marginalization, such as omission, token mention, ridicule, or

framing a claim as an obvious moral violation. Work on journalism's moral boundary-setting shows how reporting can construct evaluative lines between right and wrong, pushing certain statements beyond what is publicly sayable (Ekström *et al.*, 2021). This sphere is useful analytically because it helps identify moments when media are not just informing audiences but signaling that an idea or actor does not deserve entry into normal debate, and it can be operationalized by tracking condemnation cues, one-sided sourcing dominated by denunciation, and consistent omission patterns that indicate exclusion rather than structured disagreement (Nygaard, 2021; Ekström *et al.*, 2021).

2.2.2.2 How it connects to this study

This study discusses the sphere of deviance and sphere of legitimate controversy because they are the ones evidently applicable. The sphere of deviance is when the media considers an issue as unimportant, dangerous or unworthy of attention and thus not within the boundaries of normative behavior. With the sphere of legitimate controversy, the media encourages plurality of views as journalists strive to be fair and balance while depersonalizing themselves from views they disseminate in order to achieve the concept of objectivity. Watkins (2001) expands the concept of legitimate controversy to argue that this type of news reporting occurs during times of mourning, celebrations and crisis. Treatises on Hallin spheres provide a framework for this study because as argued elsewhere in this study, the media agenda setting in relation to how they frame topics to project men's football over women's are pushed from the "Sphere of Legitimate Controversy" into the "Sphere of Deviance" where marginalization abound.

This study of sports media representation, the theory helps to answer two linked questions: how much women's sports are covered, and how that coverage positions women athletes and gender

equity claims. Routine match reporting, medal celebrations, and national pride narratives may be treated as consensus, where the journalist's role is to amplify achievement. Debates about funding allocations, facilities, selection criteria, and unequal media attention may be framed as legitimate controversy, inviting multiple sources and debate. When equity claims are pushed toward deviance, coverage can become episodic, framed as scandal, or ignored (Ekström *et al.*, 2021).

2.2.2.3 Implications for the analysis

This was operationalized by coding each item for topic type, evaluative tone (affirming, neutral, condemnatory), sourcing (who is quoted and who is missing), and legitimacy cues (are counter-views treated as reasonable debate or ruled out). For example, consensus often use celebratory language and rely on official or team sources; controversy items foreground competing claims and evidence; deviance items used stigmatizing labels, distancing, or omit the viewpoint. For credibility, a codebook was created with local examples and assess intercoder agreement on a pilot set before full coding. Used alongside agenda-setting, the spheres help explain not only salience but also silence, because prominence is constrained by what journalists define as legitimately discussable (Valenzuela and McCombs, 2019).

2.2.5 Integrating the Theories within the Study

The four theories adopted in this study collectively provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how Ghanaian sports media shape football communication and gendered perceptions in Tamale. Each theory explains a different layer of influence, and together they help to capture both the structural and symbolic dimensions of sports coverage. Agenda-setting theory explains which football issues are made visible in the media. By prioritising elite and male-dominated football, media organisations construct a hierarchy of importance that positions men's



football at the centre of national sporting life while relegating women's football to the margins. Framing theory then shows how these visible issues are presented and interpreted. Even when women's football receives coverage, the narratives used may emphasise struggle, novelty, or social value rather than technical performance, reinforcing perceptions that women's football is less competitive or professional.

Media economics theory provides an important structural layer by explaining why media organisations prioritise certain types of football content. Because men's football attracts larger audiences, generates stronger advertising revenue, and aligns with existing sponsorship markets, it becomes more commercially valuable. This economic logic encourages the media to allocate more time and resources to men's football, which in turn strengthens its dominance. Women's football, perceived as less profitable, receives minimal coverage, reinforcing a cycle of invisibility and underinvestment. Hallin's Spheres Theory complements these perspectives by explaining how journalistic norms construct boundaries around acceptable knowledge and debate. In Ghana, men's football largely occupies the "sphere of consensus", where it is treated as unquestionably central and culturally important. Women's football often sits closer to the "sphere of legitimate controversy" or even "deviance", where its value, seriousness, and social acceptability are debated or questioned. This boundary-setting shapes how sports journalists choose sources, tone, and narrative structure in ways that normalise the supremacy of men's football.

Together, these theories illuminate the interaction between economics, editorial judgement, cultural norms, and meaning-making in sports coverage. Agenda-setting and framing help explain audience-facing media content; media economics explains the institutional pressures behind those choices; and Hallin's Spheres explains how journalism constructs symbolic boundaries around



what is taken seriously. Applying these theories enables this study to explore not only how much attention women’s football receives in Tamale, but also how it is portrayed, why it receives limited attention, and how this shapes public interest and perception. This integrated theoretical foundation strengthens the interpretation of findings by linking everyday media practices with broader structures of gender, power, and inequality in Ghanaian football.

2.3 Empirical Studies

2.3.1 The media coverage space allotted to male and female football in Tamale

The report from Tamale, Northern Ghana the way masculine and feminine football is covered by the media. This is the result of social and cultural norms, institutional practices, and economic incentives. Football is the most favourite sport in Ghana so amount and type of coverage it receives influence how much importance people pay to it and resources allocated (Asante and Yeboah, 2021). In Tamale, a city where the media landscape and jock money aren’t exactly robust, unequal coverage does nothing but expose and exacerbate gender inequalities. “Literature review and field studies reveal that men’s football in Tamale, which is anchored by clubs such as Real Tamale United (RTU) and Tamale City FC, receives more press coverage with a greater frequency of appearance, lengthiness of content treatment, depth of analysis and prominence than its female counterpart.” Zaa Radio, Radio Tamale and Diamond FM are some of the local stations that often cover men games live with commentaries, interviews, post-game analysis and sports panel discussions (Yakubu and Baah, 2021). These segments are formatted and they repeat over and over to ensure that men’s football remains the primary focus of sports talk on television, radio, social media. On the other hand, women’s football is not as frequent and are usually highlight after the event instead of before we having a regular story with previews, exclusive interview and analysis



(Tetteh, 2019). Despite the fact that women footballers from the region have experienced some tremendous highs, there is still this disarray. Several of the current players have played for Ghana in major youth and regional tournaments, but their exploits rarely result in a daily stream of headlines, pre-match previews and analysis. In a more general sense, it has been found that women's sports receive less than 10% of sports media airtime in Ghana, and even this small amount is often fleeting and does not offer much depth (Asiedu and Alhassan, 2019).

The text provides some interconnected explanations. First, there are economic factors. Media companies post content that brings in viewers and generates income. Market logic like this incentivizes editors and presenters to dedicate more airtime and journalistic resources to men's teams, which in turn keeps the cycle going: visibility breeds interest; interest breeds more visibility. Second, there is structural bias in sports journalism. Readers Sports media often have men in senior editorial management and decision-making positions, and their news values can be seen as identical to the societal norm which argues that it is men's football that is the serious one (Adjei and Kwame, 2020). As a result, women's football may also be downgraded except when there have been a high-profile competition, scandal, or unusual story (Mensah and Annor 2021). In covering women's games, on the other hand, narratives can tend to revolve around 'struggle' (for empowerment or breakthrough) and or novelty rather than some of the competitive, skill-focused themes commonly associated with men's football (Fink, 2015).

Third, the gap is exacerbated by geographic and logistical concerns. Because most of the country's mainstream media is centered on Accra and Kumasi, there is a certain likelihood that teams and events in the northern part of the country enjoy significantly less national coverage simply because they are not as widely known (Owusu, 2021). In Tamale, very little investment is put into the



reporting of women's football. (The) Ghana Women's Premier League? There is barely any dedicated programme, special correspondents or regular space in agenda for the Premiere League especially when it comes to the teams from the north (Abdulai and Opoku, 2021).

These trends are supported through interviews with a number of stakeholders. Male football is the one who marks the program schedule, and women's leagues fill up whenever something big happens. This, of course, is an example of what McCombs and Shaw (1972) described as agenda-setting: the media determine what to cover and how much attention it should receive, which in turn determines how people view what matters.

Results are practical and symbolic. Fans are starved of news about fixtures, team development and player achievements, which results in reduced attendance at matches and sponsorship. The visibility void constrains the growth of women's football in Tamale as media among others influences sports participation and business development (Billings *et al.*, 2015). Solutions the text offers are gender-sensitive reporting training, women in sport programs, incentives and partnerships that reward compliant coverage, maybe even content quotas. It also says that better coverage should treat women's football as an actual sport, and not a "token" sport, to make sports media in Ghana more equitable. The more fans come, the more sponsors can be attracted and the greater women's football in Tamale can become simply normal.

2.3.2 Election and Emphasis of Football Issues by Sports Media in Tamale

The choice of football topics by the sports media and how it organizes them is critical for moving public opinion and altering people's minds about football. In a football mad city like Tamale, it is crucial to know what influences media coverage decisions, if only to understand how sports



journalism and football development interact. In this direction, the paper seeks to investigate what informs sports media in Tamale to select and rank football related news. News values operate as journalists' simple guidelines for determining whether an event is newsworthy. Editing decisions are largely affected by factors of immediacy, spatiality, conflict, prominence and human interest (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). In Tamale sports media, distances are critical because small towns have local media organizations that'll cover football actions and news about the small town audiences. This local focus ensures the content is appropriate and brings people together with their community.

The theme of attacking football scenes and its audience friendly poetry is due to the topic itself. For the purpose of optimizing reach, media companies prioritize content aligned with interest and passion areas (Shoemaker and Reese 2013). Because of the culture in Tamale, football is a big thing and so stories on local teams, profiles of players and analyses of matches are likely to generate much interest because this resonates more with people. Control of media content is closely related to economic interests. Media organizations find that they can make more money through advertising if they focus on stories which have aroused the interest of many people (McManus, 1994). In Tamale, in particular, they may use football stories that sell well to make money so these will be selected more often and take precedence over others which explain why their chosenness is done on grounds of interest effects.

The accessibility of sources and the relationship journalists have with those involved in football can influence gay individuals, clubs and fans being given a voice. Journalists are most likely to cover a story the easier it is to gather information and getting on well with the clubs, players and officials would facilitate this access (Gans, 1979). In Tamale, established contacts between sports

journalists and local football bodies might lead to more in-depth and regular reporting of certain clubs or matches. Guidelines and internal organisational rules also play a role in prioritising content. Media organizations may have specific objectives, availability of resources and strategies that influence the type of football they present and how they cover it (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). For instance, a news organization that wanted to promote local talent might place greater emphasis on stories about up-and-coming football players in Tamale. The sports media in Tamale select and position football stories on the basis of a co-modification model which integrates news values, audience's tastes, business entertainment interest, accessibility to sources plus quality newspaper editorial policy. Understanding these things allows us to apprehend the complex terrain of media landscape in Tamale and demonstrates how journalism regards aspects of football culture within the area.

2.3.3 The role of media in sports

It is believed that the way sports are portrayed by the media has great impact on people's perception and interest in football in Tamale. The relationship of communities with football is heavily conditioned by sports media, shaping the way in which people like or are interested about a specific sport (Puertas-Molero *et al.*, 2019; Tian, 2023; Alhuzami, 2024). In Tamale, Ghana, people who have a genuine interest in promoting the growth and popularity of football should also ask themselves how this will impact on the game. This review is concerned with the impact of sports media on interest and attitudes towards football in particular within the setting of Tamale. Media Exposure is a main source of information for public and the most important tool to attract peoples to sport (Puertas-Molero *et al.*, 2019; Tian, 2023). Excessive Coverage: Many coverage of football game, players' profiles and analyses can increase interest and fun, whereas low or



negative will decrease one's interest (Lewis and Weaver, 2015; Alhuzami, 2024). Research conducted by Kusi and Abieraba (2023) reveals that majority of participants in Ghanaian football who believe is "Pay-to-Play" has contributed to their loss of interest in the game especially, young individuals who lacks faith in the game; as such they lose their passion for the sport. At Tamale, the quality and quantity of football coverage in local media can shape public interest in the sport. For instance, good and comprehensive reportage can foster a vibrant football culture; unprofessional coverages can lead everyone to lose interest (Puertas-Molero *et al.*, 2019; Tian, 2023).

How the media narrates football stories significantly shapes public views of the sport. When attention is given to the achievements of players and success stories, or at least on the benefits received by communities from football, a more positive image can be generated; when this attention is devoted to scandals or scandals and any form of complaint that football "could have done better" -, a negative image is created (Lewis and Weaver, 2015). Studies indicate that the way in which athletes' experiences and setbacks are portrayed by the media influence public perception regarding sport and its players (Fink, 2015; Puertas-Molero *et al.*, 2019). In Tamale, good news stories about local footballing successes and of community feeling can elevate how people view the game.

How more people can get easy access to different types of media impacts how we feel and what we think as well. Types of media like television, radio, newspapers and the internet reach different audience characteristics differently (Tian 2023). For example, a study on the impact of media on athletes found that newspapers and Internet had positive effects by providing information and reducing anxiety; however, television did not show any positive effects (Frisby and Wanta, 2010).

In towns like Tamale, where access to particular media may be limited, the choice of medium for football coverage can affect the way people perceive and follow the game. A study of media representation in Ghana showed pronounced inequalities between men's and women's football, where men's football was given more media attention, sponsorship and resources which reinforced its perceived superiority leading to reduced interest in and investment in women's football (Fink, 2015; Lamptey, 2021).

This case is an indication of the power of media in shaping how people think and feel about things and hence fair media exposure must be part of growing football in Tamale. How sports media covers football in Tamale has a strong influence on how we feel and care about the sport. Excellent and comprehensive coverage can pique people's interest in the sport, win over new devotees to it, but bad or incomplete coverage can kill interest. Stakeholders must brainstorm about how to ensure that football is covered in a fair and comprehensive way so as to grow the game in Tamale.”



2.4 Conceptual framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that explains how sports media agenda-setting practices influence football communication and the visibility of men's and women's football. Agenda-setting theory suggests that media institutions determine which issues receive public attention by selecting and prioritizing certain topics over others (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Within sports communication, media organizations influence which football stories, teams, and competitions audiences perceive as important.

In the context of this study, sports media actors such as sports journalists, radio presenters, and editors serve as the primary agenda setters. Through editorial decisions, program discussions, news selection, and commentary, these actors determine the type, frequency, and prominence of football-related content presented to the public. These decisions are influenced by several factors including audience preferences, commercial pressures, institutional routines, and cultural perceptions of football. The agenda-setting practices of sports media influence the level of media attention given to men's football and women's football. When media outlets repeatedly highlight men's football competitions, players, and controversies, these issues become more visible and dominant in public discourse. Conversely, limited coverage of women's football reduces its visibility, public awareness, and perceived importance.

As a result, the agenda-setting role of sports media shapes football communication outcomes, including audience interest, public discussions, and stakeholder engagement with football. Persistent media prioritization of men's football may therefore reinforce gender imbalances in football communication and limit opportunities for the growth and recognition of women's



football. Thus, the conceptual framework for this study assumes that sports media agenda-setting practices influence the visibility, representation, and communication of football within the Tamale.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Influence of Sports Media Agenda-Setting on Football Communication in Tamale



2.5 Summary of literature review

The literature review surveys the influence of Ghanaian sports media on football communication in Tamale, analyses variations in media reportage, identifies primary determinants of media prioritisation and evaluates the implications for regional football development. By combining theoretical, empirical and conceptual insights, the review foregrounds some of most important issues shaping football visibility and public participation in Tamale.

The news agenda-setting and framing theory as theoretical schemata of the study were introduced in which media shape public opinion via setting the agenda on what to give priority (agenda) among competing items and issues-road map. In the area of football communication, it shows how Ghanaian media amplify elite leagues and national teams but minimize coverage of regional football (Amankwah and Mensah, 2020). In addition, framing theory is concerned with how media deployments contribute to audience interpretations. And how the positive presentation of elite football that gets us all going, while our local leagues are overlooked and thus un-visible (Tufuor and Oppong, 2020).

Based on the review of articles, it was evident that over 75% of sports news reported in Ghana focus on the Black Stars and the (GPL), with little interest in regional football (Amankwah and Mensah, 2020). All these, which is due to poor media coverage in the Tamale also affect the club as well as match attendance and sponsorship (Gyan, 2021). The literature review emphasizes the position of media in the way football is talked about and viewed in Tamale. Theoretical frameworks emphasize media slanting, commercial bias, and audience-led news. On empirical level, the football media inequalities have been confirmed enumerating economic and structural causes. This framework presents a more organized account of the analysis on media agenda



setting and regional football development. Further studies should examine how to improve media equity and take advantage of digital technologies to fill the coverage gap.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological choices that guided the study on how Ghanaian sports media set the agenda for football communication in Tamale, Northern Region. It outlines the study's philosophical orientation, research approach, and design, as well as the study location, population, sampling strategy, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. All methodological decisions were informed by the qualitative and interpretivist orientation of the study, which prioritised depth, context, and participants' lived experiences over numerical measurement.

3.2 Study Philosophy

The study is grounded in an interpretivist philosophical stance, which views reality as socially constructed through people's experiences, interactions, and meanings. Interpretivism holds that social phenomena cannot be fully understood using the same tools applied to physical objects; instead, emphasis is placed on understanding how individuals interpret their world within specific cultural and contextual settings (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012). From this perspective, knowledge is seen as context-dependent and multiple, rather than single and fixed. People's perceptions, interpretations, and responses are shaped by history,



culture, social norms, and power relations. Interpretivism therefore seeks to uncover these varied realities by engaging directly with participants and exploring how they make sense of their experiences (Myers, 2008; Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

This philosophical stance was appropriate for the present study because agenda-setting and football communication are deeply embedded in subjective judgements about newsworthiness, gender, culture, and community interests. The way sports journalists, players, coaches, and administrators understand and talk about men's and women's football cannot be meaningfully reduced to numerical indicators alone. An interpretivist lens made it possible to explore how these actors construct meaning around football coverage, how they perceive inequalities in media attention, and how they believe media practices shape public attitudes in the socio-cultural context of Tamale.

3.3 Study Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding phenomena in depth, focusing on meanings, processes, and context rather than numerical measurement or statistical generalisation (Creswell, 2014; Mohajan, 2018). It is particularly suitable when the aim is to explore how people interpret their experiences, how they construct social realities, and how they attach meaning to specific events or practices. Qualitative approaches typically involve flexible and emergent designs, open-ended questions, naturalistic settings, and inductive analysis. Data are gathered in rich, descriptive form through methods such as interviews, observations, and document or media review, and are then organised into patterns, categories, and themes that capture participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2009). For this study, a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to capture detailed accounts of how





sports media actors and football stakeholders in Tamale perceive gender inequalities in football coverage, how they describe their own agenda-setting and framing decisions, and how they believe media narratives influence public interest and perceptions. It supported an in-depth exploration of the social processes, routines, and power relations that shape sports communication in the Northern Region, which would have been difficult to examine adequately using purely quantitative methods.

3.4 Study Design

A phenomenological study design was employed to explore the lived experiences of football communicators and stakeholders in Tamale. Phenomenology focuses on how people experience a particular phenomenon and how they describe the meanings they attach to it (Solowski, 2000; Van Manen, 2016). It is concerned with the “essence” of experiences as perceived by those who live them, rather than with external measurement or prediction.

In this study, phenomenology was used to understand how sports journalists, presenters, bloggers, players, coaches, and administrators experience and interpret media coverage of football, especially the differences between men’s and women’s football. The design allowed the researcher to focus on participants’ first-hand accounts of how football stories are selected, ranked, framed, and circulated in the media, and how these practices are influenced by professional routines, economic pressures, institutional norms, and local culture. By privileging participants’ narratives, the phenomenological design helped move beyond surface descriptions of content volume to reveal how actors themselves understand agenda-setting, gender disparities in coverage, and the wider implications for football communication in Tamale. It enabled the study to “go behind” published stories and programmes to explore the subjective realities, values, and constraints that shape media decision-making in everyday practice.

3.5 Study location

The study was conducted in the Tamale Metropolis in the Northern Region of Ghana. Tamale is the administrative and commercial capital of the region and an important hub for politics, religion, education, and commerce in northern Ghana. The metropolis hosts a diverse population made up mainly of Dagomba and other northern ethnic groups, with Islam as the dominant religion and strong traditional chieftaincy structures that continue to influence everyday social life. Tamale is also a major centre for football in the north. It hosts the Aliu Mahama Sports Stadium, which is used for Ghana Premier League matches, regional competitions, and national team fixtures. Several professional and semiprofessional football clubs, academies, and community based teams are based in and around the city. Alongside these are numerous grassroots and informal football activities that take place in schools, communities, and recreational spaces. The metropolis has a vibrant local media landscape, with multiple radio stations, television outlets, newspapers, and online platforms that run regular sports programmes and football discussions. Sports shows, commentary segments, and phone in programmes are especially popular on radio, making it an important space where public narratives about football are constructed and contested. Tamale was therefore chosen as the study location because it combines an active football culture, an influential local media environment, and a socio cultural context where gender norms and expectations significantly shape how men's and women's football are perceived and discussed.



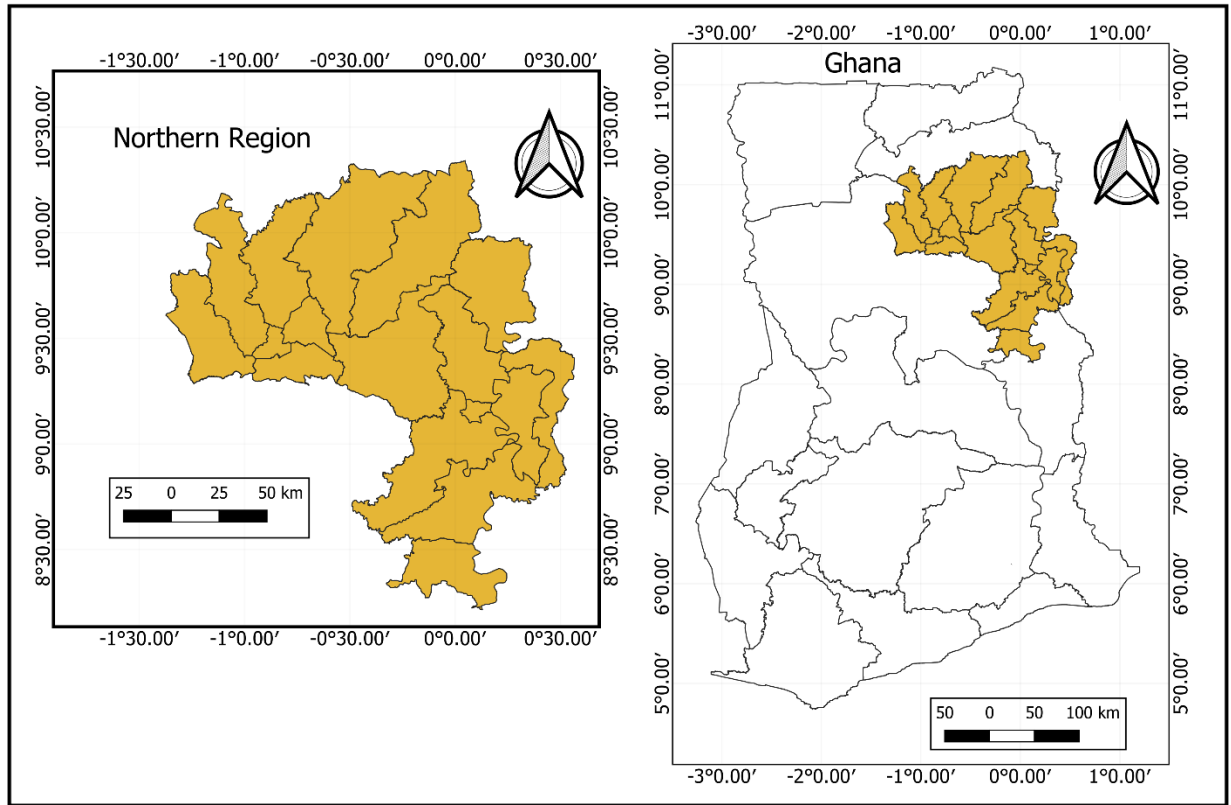


Figure 3: Study location



Figure 2: Pictures of the Aliu Mahama Stadium

3.6 Study Population

The study population comprised key actors involved in football communication and football practice within the Tamale Metropolis. These included:

Sports journalists and presenters working with radio, television, and online platforms who regularly produce or host football related content. Sports editors and producers who make decisions about programme content, story selection, and running order. Football administrators such as club officials and association representatives who interact with the media and help shape football narratives. Football coaches and players, particularly those engaged in organised club football, who experience the effects of media coverage and agenda setting in their professional lives. These groups were selected because they are directly involved in the production, negotiation, or experience of football coverage, and they possess insider knowledge about how topics are chosen, how men's and women's football are presented, and how media practices influence public responses. The study was therefore not aimed at the general public, but rather at individuals whose day-to-day work or participation places them at the centre of football communication in Tamale.

3.7 Sampling Technique

3.7.1 Sampling Strategy

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who possess specific knowledge or experience relevant to the research problem (Patton, 2015). The use of purposive sampling allowed the researcher to deliberately select participants who were directly involved in sports media and football communication. These included sports journalists, radio



sports presenters, football administrators, coaches, and footballers who regularly interact with sports media platforms in Tamale.

Purposive sampling was particularly suitable for this study because the research focused on understanding the perspectives and experiences of individuals with specialized knowledge of football communication and media practices. By selecting participants who were actively engaged in sports media and football activities, the researcher was able to obtain detailed insights into how agenda-setting practices influence the visibility and communication of football in Tamale.

3.7.2 Sample Size

The sample size for this study consisted of thirteen (13) participants. In qualitative research, the aim is not statistical generalization but rather the generation of in-depth insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of a particular phenomenon (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As such, qualitative studies typically employ relatively small sample sizes that allow for detailed exploration of the research topic. The choice of thirteen participants was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain rich, context-specific information from individuals who possess direct knowledge and experience in football communication and sports media activities within Tamale. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), data saturation in qualitative interviews can often be reached with a relatively small number of participants when the participants are knowledgeable about the research phenomenon. Data saturation occurs when additional interviews no longer produce new themes or insights.

In this study, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in football communication, including sports journalists, football administrators, coaches, and footballers.





These participants were selected because of their direct involvement in football reporting, football administration, and media engagement within the Tamale media environment. The diversity of participants helped ensure that multiple perspectives on agenda-setting in football communication were captured. The number of participants was therefore deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation and provide a comprehensive understanding of how sports media set the agenda for football communication in Tamale.

3.8 Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with key informants who were directly involved in football communication and sports media activities in Tamale. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research because they allow researchers to explore participants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations in depth while still maintaining some structure through guiding questions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). An interview guide was developed to ensure that all relevant topics related to the study objectives were covered. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore participants' views on sports media coverage, agenda-setting practices in football communication, and the representation of men's and women's football in the media. The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed responses and share their experiences freely.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants at locations that were convenient for them. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, allowing sufficient time for participants to discuss their perspectives in detail. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of the information provided.

In addition to the audio recordings, field notes were taken during the interviews to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations that could support the interpretation of the data.

In addition to the interviews, the study also involved a qualitative review of selected sports media content, including radio sports programmes, sports discussions, and football-related online and social media content. This helped the researcher gain a broader understanding of how football stories are discussed and prioritized within the Tamale media environment. The combination of semi-structured interviews and qualitative review of media content helped provide a comprehensive understanding of how sports media set the agenda for football communication in Tamale.

3.9 Data Analysis Plan

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative data analysis method that involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This method was considered appropriate for the study because it allows researchers to



Figure 4: Data Coding and Major Themes Identification



systematically examine participants' perspectives and experiences related to the research topic. The analysis followed several stages. First, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to produce written transcripts of the participants' responses. Transcription allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data and ensured that the original meanings expressed by the participants were preserved.

Secondly, the researcher read through the transcripts multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the responses and to identify meaningful statements related to sports media coverage, agenda-setting practices, and football communication. During this stage, initial ideas and observations were noted. Third, the researcher conducted initial coding of the data. Coding involved identifying key words, phrases, and statements within the transcripts that were relevant to the research questions. These codes represented important concepts emerging from the participants' responses.

Fourth, similar codes were grouped together to form broader categories and themes. Themes represented recurring patterns across the interviews that explained how sports media prioritize football stories and how such agenda-setting practices influence the representation of men's and women's football. Finally, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflected the participants' responses and addressed the objectives of the study. The themes were then interpreted and presented in the results chapter using selected quotations from participants to illustrate the findings. The use of thematic analysis enabled the researcher to systematically organise the qualitative data and to generate meaningful insights into how sports media in Tamale influence football communication through agenda-setting practices.

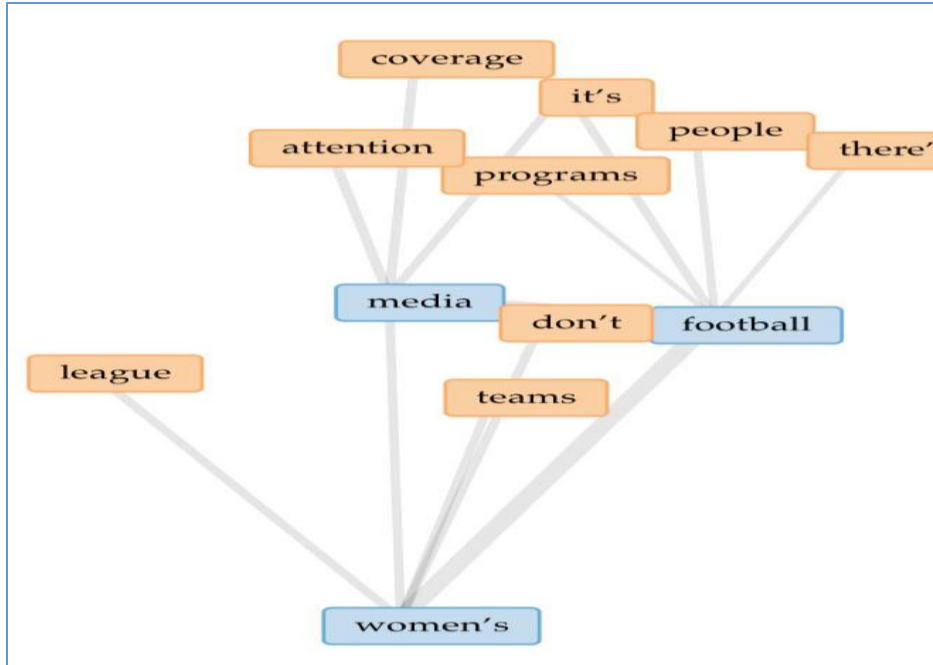


Figure 5: Some recurrent words and their link with other words using the VTS under links

The links displayed words frequently mentioned by the participants and their interconnections with other keywords in the data. The keywords captured in the Cirrus column include “media,” “Football,” “female,” and others. In the Links column, the highlighted keywords are “programs” “, teams”, “coverage”, After carefully synthesizing the recurrent words, the researcher constructed the following categories below.

Constructed categories

Media attention and female league coverage

Media shows and football programs

Attention of media and public views of football games

Effects of public thinking and Ghanaian football

Media coverage and public view

Media visibility and football achievements

Given this, the researcher manually combined the frequently mentioned words and the constructed categories and manually formed the main themes for the analysis. Frequently Used Words + Constructed Categories = Main Themes.

Table 1: Main and Sub-Themes

S/N	Main Theme	Sub-Theme
1	Gender Disparities in Football Media Coverage	a. Volume of coverage of men's vs. women's football b. Types of programs c. Frequency and duration d. Representation and tone
2	Media Platform Utilization	a. Use of radio, TV, and social media b. Comparative visibility c. Time slots and program prioritization
3	Determinants of Agenda Setting in Sports Media	a. Editorial policies b. Public interest c. Journalist biases d. Sponsorship influences
4	Institutional and Cultural Influences	a. Influence of football associations b. Cultural attitudes c. Political/regional affiliations
5	Media Influence on Public Perception	a. Public perception of female footballers b. Media trust c. Impact on game attendance
6	Role of Media in Promoting Football Development	a. Media-driven motivation b. Community support c. Gender stereotype changes

Source: Researcher's construct



3.10 Ethical Considerations

3.10.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Informed consent formed a key part of the study's ethical procedures, and participants were given clear information about the study's purpose, their expected role, potential benefits, and any possible risks before data collection began. The researcher explained everything verbally, provided written consent forms, and addressed all questions to ensure full understanding. Only those who signed the consent form were included, and consent was reconfirmed before each interview. Participation was completely voluntary, and individuals were reminded that they could decline or withdraw at any point without giving a reason or facing negative consequences. This reminder was emphasized during recruitment and again just before interviews. The voluntary nature of participation helped create a comfortable environment where respondents felt no pressure. This openness encouraged honest expression of their experiences and perspectives throughout the study.

3.10.2 Confidentiality and Harm Minimization

Confidentiality and anonymity were carefully protected throughout the study by removing all names and identifiable details from transcripts and assigning codes to each participant. All audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher, ensuring that information shared remained private and could not be linked to individuals. The study was also structured to minimize any form of harm or discomfort, and although risks were minimal, the researcher stayed alert to signs of unease during interviews. Participants were reminded that they could pause or stop the discussion at any time, and care was taken to avoid leading or intrusive questions. They were also reassured that their views would not affect their professional roles or

relationships within their circles. These steps helped create a safe environment that encouraged openness and protected participants' well-being.



CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

Chapter Four discusses the way Ghanaian sports media shape Tamale's football communication on agenda-setting. It starts by introducing 13 varied interviewees male and female journalists, players, and coaches. the analysis reveals six major themes: (1) gender disparity in coverage, (2) use of media platforms, (3) issues that contribute to decision-making about newsworthy content, (4) institutional and cultural factors influencing performance, (5) public perception on the impact of media exposure and professional women's football development by the media. It suggests that men's football enjoys regular and profound media coverage, there is still quite limited space offered to women's football. Occasions for men both occur more regularly and are more well-appointed, made to take place at peak times such as compared with the infrequent, brief nods to women's football. Content ranking can be influenced by editorial guidelines, commercial interests and editorial standards. Women's football content is often reactive, responding to major tournaments or scandals. If women's football is not seen this exacerbates negative opinions towards it. The chapter concludes that steady and integrated news coverage is a pre-requisite to advancing gender equality in football.

4.1 Background characteristics of respondents

This section presents the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants involved in the study. Understanding the background of the participants is important because their experiences and roles within football and sports media influence their perspectives on agenda-setting and football communication. The study involved thirteen (13) participants who were



purposely selected because of their involvement in sports media and football-related activities in Tamale. The participants included sports journalists, radio sports presenters, football administrators, coaches, and footballers. These participants were considered appropriate for the study because they possess firsthand knowledge and practical experience regarding football communication and media coverage within the Tamale sports environment.

In terms of professional roles, the participants represented different categories of stakeholders within the football communication ecosystem. Sports journalists and radio presenters were responsible for producing and presenting football-related content through media platforms, while football administrators and coaches were involved in organizing football activities and interacting with sports media. Footballers also provided perspectives on how media coverage affects players and the visibility of football competitions. The inclusion of participants from these different categories helped provide diverse insights into how sports media prioritize football stories and how such agenda-setting practices influence the visibility of men's and women's football. This diversity of perspectives strengthened the analysis by allowing the researcher to compare experiences across different roles within the football and sports media environment.

Although demographic characteristics such as age and gender were considered during participant selection, the primary focus of the study was on the participants' professional experience and involvement in football communication. Therefore, emphasis was placed on selecting individuals with relevant knowledge of sports media practices and football discourse in Tamale. This range of participants ensured that the findings of the study reflect multiple perspectives on agenda-setting in football communication and provide a comprehensive understanding of how sports media influence football coverage in the Tamale context.

Table 2: Background characteristics of respondents

S/N	Sex	Role and Brief Achievement
1	Male	Broadcast Journalist GJA Sports Journalist of the Year 2024, former international correspondent
2	Male	Sports Journalist Over a decade in journalism, known sports host
3	Male	Teacher and Sports Journalist 14 years' experience, PRO for women's football teams
4	Male	Sports Journalist Advocate for women's football, Facebook promoter
5	Male	Footballer Former Hearts Babies, U17 national team, Black Galaxies 2024
6	Male	Footballer Former RTU and Accra Lions player
7	Female	Footballer Black Maidens 2019, Black Princesses 2022, GUSA Gold 2025
8	Female	Footballer WAFU Zone B winner 2024, World Cup participant 2024
9	Female	Footballer U17 World Cup Top Scorer 2018, multiple international awards
10	Female	Footballer First RTD female player to represent Ghana
11	Female	Football Coach Former footballer, Masters student in Sports Management
12	Male	Football Coach CAF License C, coached multiple teams since 2005
13	Male	Football Administrator CEO, led clubs to promotion in 2023-2024

4.2 The main themes and sub-themes

Table 2 Thematic framework guiding qualitative analysis of the study data. The themes came up in line with the objectives of the study and these identified patterns, insights and underlying forces or mechanisms with regards to media agenda setting among football communicators within Tamale. Overall, six main themes (and sub-themes) were identified inductively from the data, which reflect important facets of the role played by the media in constructing narratives and public views about football.

The phenomenon: Gender disparities in football media coverage (Table 2) The gender disparity type is directed at unequal fan interest and television ratings for men's versus women's professional sports. There were sub-themes found under this category; the volume of coverage, types of programmes shown, frequency and duration of coverage as well as tone and representation in reporting. These dimensions revealed the continued marginalization of women's football in



mainstream sports media, but also showcased enduring gender bias in the content and framing through which that same reality is defined. The second theme Media Platform Utilization (Table 2) highlights how football contents are spread on media platforms such as radio, television and social media in Tamale. The sub-themes on which the latter question touched upon included depiction of coverage across platforms, allocation of time slots to football programmes, and programming choices, which served as a reminder that within and among media certain channels contributed differently to the visibility of football with often men's football taking prominence in prime slots and more orderly formats.

Within the theme, “Determinants of Agenda Setting in Sports Media” (Table 2), the Study considers reasons behind selection and prioritization of football-content by media outlets. Sub-themes are publisher leanings, what the public wants to believe, personal journalist bias and sponsorship. These factors account for how internal newsroom practices and external determinants shape the salience of football issues in media outputs. 3 Theme: Institutional and Cultural Influences (Table 2) This theme reflects the wider socio-cultural setting of football media representations. Some of the sub-themes (e.g., relation to football associations, cultural attitudes in terms of gender roles, or political-regional links) show how institutional arrangements are articulated with media practices and commonsensical forms of discursivity on the football media text.

This Media Impact on Public Opinion motif is a narrative one that looks at how the sports media shapes public interest in football, and societal attitudes more widely; including those towards females who play football. These sub-themes are public perception of female players, trust levels of media narratives and the impact coverage patterns have on football match attendance. This issue

is central for understanding the ability of the media to influence audience action and opinion. The final theme, (Table 2). Use of Media to Promote Football Development discusses the positive role that media can play in supporting the development of football, especially women's football. Sub-themes like mediated stimulation, bonding among community and challenging gendered stereotypes highlight the A little bit more about how Media Choices can be transformative.

Table 3: Main and Sub-Themes

S/N	Main Theme	Sub-Theme
1	Gender Disparities in Football Media Coverage	a. Volume of coverage of men's vs. women's football b. Types of programs c. Frequency and duration d. Representation and tone
2	Media Platform Utilization	a. Use of radio, TV, and social media b. Comparative visibility c. Time slots and program prioritization
3	Determinants of Agenda Setting in Sports Media	a. Editorial policies b. Public interest c. Journalist biases d. Sponsorship influences
4	Institutional and Cultural Influences	a. Influence of football associations b. Cultural attitudes c. Political/regional affiliations
5	Media Influence on Public Perception	a. Public perception of female footballers b. Media trust c. Impact on game attendance
6	Role of Media in Promoting Football Development	a. Media-driven motivation b. Community support c. Gender stereotype changes



Table 2: The thematic framework Table 2 serves as a point of departure for the analysis of the qualitative data, and constitutes an analytical lens through which the nuances attending to football communication's agenda-setting dynamics can be appreciated. The discussion of these themes and sub-themes contributes uniquely in the unpacking of how sports media function, prioritize and orient discourse on football particularly regarding issues on gender equality and development in Tamale.

4.3 To analyze the extent of media coverage given to both men and women football in Tamale

4.3.1 Gender Disparities in Football Media Coverage

This subject represents the discrepancy between men and women's football in the sports media domain in Tamale. And despite high profile successes of female football on the national and international stage, media reports tend to favour men's football. The study demonstrates that structural media practices, stereotyped gender norms and market factors intersect to marginalize women's football and reinforce established patterns of gender inequities in sports promotion and support.

As reported by a participant

“Despite the fact that we always make attempts to publish and circulate our women's teams content focusing on their games, victories, challenges and achievements but in reality a majority of media houses don't give us the space or time.” With the exception of a big event like a national qualifier, an international competition or, if there's controversy and scandal that brings attention to us, they are rarely interested in our stories. It's as if women's football is only news worthy when it's extreme, while the daily grind and commitment of these players goes ignored. This shortage of consistent coverage is restricting the visibility and the development of women's football in the region.”

[Respondent 3, male teacher and PRO of women's football teams]

His words underline the absence of comprehensive TV coverage when it comes to women's football, despite or perhaps because there are advocates within the system.

4.3.1.1 Volume of coverage of men's vs. women's football

The disparity in coverage between the men's and women's game in Tamale is glaring. Men's football receives most of the airtime, headlines and discussion on panels - complete with its own grand build-up and analysis after matches. On the other hand, women's football is underreported and transmitted through short post-event reviews. This discrepancy not only demonstrates bias in the editorial board room but also influences the perception of a public and subsequent resource priority.

As respondent 4, a male sports journalist and women's football player observed:

“You can actually count on one hand the occasions when a women's league game gets properly, seriously covered in the media during a whole football season. You almost never get detailed previews, live commentary or post-match analysis for women's matches. By comparison, even when men's teams play against each other in informal or friendly games, such matches are frequently broadcast with commentary, expert panels and replays of highlights. The difference is stark it tells you that women's football isn't deserving of proper media coverage, no matter what level of quality the matches being played are. This mismatch harms not only the public interest, but also serves to perpetuate the marginalisation of women's sport.” **[Respondent 4, Male sports journalist and advocate of the women's game]**



His observation illustrates just how entrenched the position of women's football has been, even to those working within the media system itself. The psychological impact of the limited coverage has on female athletes is demoralizing as they accomplish remarkable feats, yet run unnoticed in the contemporary media climate. A female football player (U17 World Cup Top Scorer 2018; Respondent 9) expressed criticism of the trials:

“Sometimes I hear people say in genuine shock, ‘We didn’t even think Tamale has female footballers who had played in the World Cup for Ghana. And honestly, I don’t blame them because nobody ever talks about us. We train hard, we play at the highest levels, we win medals and make our region proud but our successes hardly get a mention in the media. It’s like we are if unseen. We are doing the work, getting on international platforms, and without any media recognition, it’s as if we don’t matter in the public view.” “Obviously it’s the parents who want to send their kids to play football, and if they’re calling tennis ‘girly’ then that speaks volumes about how we view boys and girls at school or in society,” she said. “Lack of belief can only be cemented by silence like this.” [Respondent 9 (NO7)

female footballer and the U17 World Cup Top Scorer in 2018]

Her outburst is a stark reminder of the emotional and professional costs of media invisibility despite having international titles, which would otherwise command extensive coverage, if won by male players. Overall, this subtheme signals that scant media coverage in terms of frequency and depth is sustaining the gender gaps in football. The voices in the comments reveal a systemic problem that can only be solved by an intention to change on the editorial level, and policy interventions that will yield more representative results.

4.3.1.2 Types of programs

This sub-theme places emphasis on the nature and structure of football-related media content in terms of how program genres vary in their representations of men's and women's football. There is a clear imbalance in the analysis: only, men's football is available in established critical spaces of radio and TV programmes, live match commentary, expert analysis section and sports news bulletins. In contrast, women's football is marginalised if not completely ignored reduced to footnotes or less engaging content such as recaps and the odd interview.

And of the male sports journalist 50-year-old Respondent 2 stated:

“Even on the NFL level, most of our football programs have been created for men's football. We are discussing football growth, and it's primarily the premier league, but most of the time in relation to male players or transfers. The design just doesn't fit women's football unless something drastic changes.” [Respondent 2, male sports journalist with many years' experience]

This reflects a structural bias in program planning, which defaults to male-biased football narratives and as such leaves little space for female football content.

Female - coach (football) student of sports management Career aspirations respondent 11].'

“There's just not much in the way of a dedicated show strictly to the women's league. The men enjoy full-length shows, panel discussions and their progress is tracked regularly ours never get that treatment. When we do get featured, it's a flimsy segment that's only five minutes long in an hour long sports show as if it were no more than a footnote. And even then, it's usually televised in off-peak times when most people aren't even watching.

This sort of treatment creates the impression that women's football is an afterthought, rather than an integral part of the sporting ecosystem. It restricts our exposure, demotivates fans and communicates that our stories are not as valuable.” [Respondent 11, female football coach and sports management student]

Her view underscores the minimal airtime and marginalization of women's football in current programming, contributing to a more general issue of media invisibility.

Moreover, Respondent 5-a male football player expressed:

“When I listen to most sports programmes, it's almost solely about men's football. They announce upcoming fixtures, tear into who the teams have bought or sold, go into depth about how certain style of players will perform and even play back some goals from last week with full commentary and excitement. It's a comprehensive package. But when it comes to women's football, you have absolutely no coverage.” There is no hype before the game, no previews to generate anticipation and certainly no studio talk analyzing the game or spotlighting individual players. It's as if the women's matches are not important or don't exist in media terms. It is this lack of excitement and programme setting reporting that creates a narrative where women's football takes a backseat, robbing it the limelight it truly deserves.” [Respondent 5, a male footballer]

The depth of content and level of excitement around women's football programming is still in its infancy' This quote reflects that there is a vicious cycle, or echo chamber phenomenon wherein the lack of media buzz generates reduced public interest and perceived value. The “Types of Programs” classification indicates that sports media personnel in Tamale generally organize their



programs around men's football, whereas women's football is seen as an after-thought. For this discrepancy in program design and segment length, and audience engagement is indicative of a larger editorial bias. The quotes from the respondents represent the immediate requirement for broad content planning which fairly reflects women's football at all levels of the game.

4.3.1.3 Frequency and duration

This sub-theme focuses on the frequency of men's and women's football appearing in sports media programs and the duration both are given. There is a striking asymmetry in the frequency and duration of coverage, as the analysis shows. Men's football have a dedicated space of daily if not weekly features which includes plenty of snippets for previews, live commentaries, analysis post-match reflection. Women's football gets sporadic, hardly EVER extensive coverage – usually just the odd update/mention when it's time for tournaments.

Male, award-winning broadcast journalist respondent 1 voiced that:

“We have daily sports shows, and pretty much every day there is content on the men's leagues, whether it's game results, transfer rumors or tactical analysis and player focus.”
It's the men's side that drives conversation every single day of the week, be it off-season or midweek. But in women's soccer, it's a whole different world. Unless it's a major final or there's some kind of controversy or scandal attached to it, there's just not time dedicated for coverage. “Women's football is not that nothing is going on, there are matches, achievements, stories to tell but the media keeps ignoring them. There is a continual variety of exclusion that helps to install the idea that women's football is



secondary and thereby becomes hard for this sport to have its own focus or repute.”

[Respondent 1, male broadcaster of the year]

It is this excerpt which forms the 'every day exclusion' of women's football in terms of media time, suggesting to audiences that it should be seen 'as less newsworthy or entertaining'.

"One successful invalid submission is not going undo a lifetime of bad decisions," female footballer and recent World Cup participant, Respondent 8 said. No one's paying attention and there isn't much buzz or coverage around our matches." At best, the media might briefly note the final score no details or follow-up necessary. In stark contrast, men's teams' training sessions are reported on like they are major news stories; getting airtime and in-depth updates. It is frustrating to see that there's a gulf in the attention when, if anything, we as athletes are working hard and competing seriously. That lack of visibility, these workers say, makes it feel like their efforts don't matter to the public or the media. [Participant 8, female footballer and recent World Cup player]

Her despair neatly encapsulates the temporariness and patchiness of women's football coverage, whitewashing the efforts and accomplishments of female players.

A male sports journalist and an activist for women's football (R4) pointed out that,

"When we see women's football in the media, it's always squeezed in at the end of a program and it will be only two or three minutes long with very little content and excitement. There's almost no pre-race lead-in, detailed analysis or post-race wrap-up they are more of a passing mention than actual coverage. Men's football, on the other hand, sweeps aside anything else that may be in its way and we get whole hours of coverage



for one solitary game, with previews, commentary and expert panels. Indeed, it's not at all uncommon for two different shows on the same day to cover only men's football in one show and then barely speak of any other subject in the other, underlining a stark difference in how both are taken seriously across each. **[Respondent 4] Male sports journalist/advocate for women's football**

This juxtaposition underlines not only the scarcity but also the circumscribed nature of women's football airtime, and hereby a hierarchy where men's football content prevails left and right. The "Frequency and Duration" report unveils a huge discrimination in the number of times football news reports are coated from the Tamale sports media, as well as how long. Men's football is given constant detailed coverage; women's as an occasional addendum. Quotes from respondents illustrate how these inequitable processes disadvantage visibility and perpetuate systemic neglect, calling for specific scheduling changes that would help facilitate equitable media representation.

4.3.1.4 Representation and tone

This sub-theme focuses on how women's football is represented in the media, specifically through the language, framing and general tone employed when discussing female players, or matches. Whereas the men's game is usually written about with gravity and serious analysis, not to mention technical complexity, the women's game tends to be spoken of in terms of trivialisation, novelty or condescension. It is submitted that these inequalities in representation may play a role in the marginalization of women's football as inferior or illegitimate.

Player 7, a female footballer and national squad member reported:



“When I turn on mainstream sports shows, the vast majority of coverage is dedicated to men’s football... every section contains updates, predictions and in-depth analysis. They compile fixtures, dissect transfers, rerun goals and even hype friendly games as if they were finals. But in women’s football, such attention is conspicuous by its absence no previews, no studio debate and most definitely no anticipation. It’s like the women’s league does not have visibility, like these games do not matter or even exist in the media.”

[Respondent 7, female footballer (national player)]

Her words illustrate how media treatment is often thoughtless or lazy when it comes to the women-play games and when female athletes are portrayed as sideline girls rather than central game-changing woman athletes.

Respondent 6 who is a football player that played for RTU and Accra Lions accepted:

“People are shocked when I tell them Tamale has female footballers who have played at the World Cup, honestly, and I don’t blame them. Our successes are not well-publicized; and even with medals and international competition, the mainstream media almost never reports on us. We train hard, put in the work and we all make our region proud, but nobody’s telling our stories. It does seem like we’re invisible to the public. When certain people do not get the recognition they deserve it is hard for little girls growing up to see what is possible or be inspired to follow in our footsteps.”

[Respondent 6, male footballer with RTU and Accra Lions]

This one does a great job showing how even the most seemingly positive remarks house a somewhat patronizing invitation for women in sports to prove themselves as credible, professional-worthy athletes.

“It’s not just what words the media uses, but how it uses their tone and delivery that reek of bias. You can absolutely tell the difference in the amount of excitement, gravitas and respect they express when talking about men’s football versus women’s. Men’s matches are discussed with energy, analysis and passion; women’s matches hardly get a mention, if any. That disparity of tone is a loaded message when it comes to whose games matter more. It subtly promotes the notion that women’s matters less, or is less deserving of serious attention. [Respondent 11, a female coach]

Her observation highlights the degree to which tone colours the public mood, with rhapsody and technical detail usually reserved for men’s football shuttled over into comments on what women have done, often belittling things with either “the goals” or “their achievement.”

The sub-theme “Representation and Tone” shows that women’s football in the sports media of Tamale is often portrayed by means of a shallow discourse, tone and respect. By giving a voice to the male and female respondents, the findings demonstrate how apparently neutral tone relies on subtle biases to reinforce gender stereotypes and to silence women's voices in football. This cannot be solved simply by increased air time but it can be addressed by an intentional move to more balanced, professional and analytical coverage of women’s football.



4.3.2 Media Platform Utilization

This theme demonstrates the different channels of football content representations in Tamale, which include primarily radio, television and social media and how each medium promotes men's as well as women's football differently. As the analysis shows, platform use is systemically skewed: men's football occupies mainstream media spaces while women's football occupy the informal or under-resourced places. This lopsided media landscape has a huge impact on the exposure and image of women's soccer.

R4, Male, sports journalist and women's football advocate, (Log book response) I think that we've begun to see [improvements in the sport coverage] recently.

“All the time when I listened to radio during peak hours like 6 PM or 7 AM there were discussions about football, but it was all around men's league. It is a never-ending flow of updates, debates and analysis focused entirely on male teams and players. At the same time, women's soccer occupies a marginal position under these prime-time lights. Unless a women's team has just done something huge, their triumphs get scant mention in the discussion. This mixed media coverage on this phenomenon demonstrates the low level of importance afforded to the promotion of women's football in mainstream media.

[Respondent 4, male sports journalist]

His remark is a reminder of the fact that men's football is given precedence in prime-time radio slots while women's football cannot even command consistent coverage and is often an afterthought when it does, including on serious sports bulletins.

Respondent 11, a female coach, who is studied sports management added:



“When we play, we are the ones filming our own rounds and taking videos from our phones to post them online with the hope that someone will see it or share it. There is no professional media presence, no camera crews from TV stations filming our efforts, no journalists reporting by the side of any field. Unlike with the men’s games, our matches are hardly seen nor heard outside of the pitch. We stand on our own when it comes to visibility, and we’re not very far from how far we’ll go with our stories and accomplishments. Our games don’t seem to matter among the broader public.”

[Respondent 11, a female coach]

Her experience underscores the absence of institutional media coverage at women’s football events, and requires that players and coaches self-market on informal platforms such as personal social media pages, thus limiting its reach and credibility.

Applicant 13, a government director of football and club chief executive officer (CEO) explained:

“If we are committed to growing women’s football, it must be about reimagining how media platforms are leveraged. Right now the popular time is radio and TV men’s football. Social media is our best bet for changing narratives, but it has to be planned.” I22 “you don’t wanna be associated with something that has many unanswered questions relative to something as important as your health... [Respondent 13, male Fee administrator accepting club CEO].

Such an observation implies that the present imbalance is not so much one of editorial bias as a significant opportunity lost to utilise other platforms particularly social media to encourage greater inclusivity within sports media coverage.

The theme; “Media Platform Utilization” accentuates a critical issue on the limited usage of football media platforms in Tamale. While football on the radio has the largest audience reach, it largely focuses on men’s football. Television coverage is limited, and even where it exists, it has limited engagement with local football. Social media (even though it’s cheaper), is under-utilized in a coordinated fashion for women’s football visibility. The respondents' responses could be interpreted as a call-to-arms for more inclusive, intentional media. Coverage across all platforms to bring women’s football up to our level including one that is invested in mainstream on air and digital coverage.

4.3.2.1 Use of radio, TV, and social media

This sub-theme diagnoses the effects of various media radio, television and social media on flow of football news in Tamale. There is evidence to suggest that radio remains the most used and impactful platform for football communication in the region; however, it is dominated by men’s football. TV remains strong but reach is more constricted because of cost and development, while social media stands as a growing territory where women's football can be boosted without so much in the way of institutional support.

Respondent 3 (Male), Teacher and PRO to women's football teams had this to say:

“Radio is everything here. It’s where most people get their football news. But it’s never about the men. “When we send through coverage of our women’s teams, they only take it if there’s no men’s game and in offseason.” **[Respondent 3 (Male), Teacher and PRO to women's football teams]**

This illustrates the radio's gatekeeping role, where men's football news takes precedence while stories about women's teams get sidelined even when they are newsworthy.

Respondent 9, a female successful footballer and U17 World Cup Top Scorer expressed:

"We don't have TV coverage unless it's a national match. Even then, it's not guaranteed. Social media comes into play and that's pretty much all us, the players posting ourselves there's no media team following us around."

Her insight highlights the lack of organised television and professional digital media coverage in women's football, leaving players to network personally in order to be seen.

As respondent 13, a male football official stated:

"The reality is, TV airtime costs money and stations want that content to draw fans into watch usually men's competitions. But social media is free and unfiltered. If we want to make a difference for women's football we need to start using digital platforms more purposefully."

This quote demonstrates a realistic view of the economic and target-oriented logics that dictate TV content as well calling for active use of social media as an inclusion and visibility tool. The sub-theme "Use of Radio, TV and Social Media" reflects the uni-dimensional nature lines of a football media platform hierarchy in Tamale. Radio, which has wide listenership, became the biggest but male-skewed medium. Television openings are thin and usually cut to the bone by financial and editorial considerations. "Social media is less structured, but it's a democratic space and can have the potential to uplift women's football if pushed by a concerted effort. Focus group



participants repeatedly urge for a strategic reprioritization to digital tools, and rebalancing traditional media priorities, to stimulate more equitable exposure.

4.3.2.2 Comparative visibility

Sub-theme 2: Visibility of men's and women's football across media platforms in Tamale This sub-theme explores how visibility of men and women football on various media platforms compare in Tamale. Their findings suggest an alarming disparity: men's football is seen as huge feature across radio, TV and online, but coverage of women's football is patchy and relatively peripheral. Such imbalance results in a low exposure and recognition of female practices in football, obstructing a fair commitment on the part of audience.

One Respondent 2, a male sports journalist with more than 10 years in the profession was quoted saying:

“Men's football is all over the air, in the papers, online. It's the first thing that listeners tune in for when we go live. Talk about the women's league, and some people will even ask, ‘Are they still playing?’ That tells you how visible. [Respondent 2, male sports journalist]

His comment emphasises something that's been normalised in our public space: men play football, and women play the less significant form of the game, which even familiar audiences are known to completely ignore.

Respondent 8 a female footballer who is WAFU Zone B champion said:





“We go out there, we play our (behinds) off and sometimes get a win, but no camera is there.” No highlights, no post-game interviews, and no media to tell the story of our journey. Because it’s as though we win in silence, unobserved and unrecorded. And yet: When the men play even if for no more than a training it’s televised, dissected and shared everywhere. The difference is stark and a constant reminder of how invisible women’s football is throughout the media landscape.” [Respondent 8-Female footballer, WAFU Zone B winner]

That shows a critical hole in post-event visibility for women’s teams, one that deepens their invisibility and makes it difficult to develop fan bases or appeal to sponsors.

Respondent 5, a male footballer for the national Black Galaxies stated:

“It’s not just who plays better it is really about who will be seen and talked about. Men’s games are hyped, cross-promoted and replayed with relentless enthusiasm that contributes to an extended postgame buzz. Because that visibility makes people care, follow and remember. And women’s teams can win championships and make history, but if nobody covers it in the media, nobody hears about it. If somebody doesn’t tell their stories, their accomplishments remain concealed no matter how extraordinary they may be.”

When he meets Ghana footballer and member of the national Black Galaxies team,

(Respondent 5-male)

His observation brings to light the issue of media visibility in defining public perception and value. It is still outside of the dominant football narrative in a word: invisible. Sub-theme: Comparative Visibility The sub-theme of ‘Comparative Visibility’ discloses the instalment of

masculine hegemony and a structural inequality in visibility of media, confirming that women football is widely ignored as opposed to men football which always enjoys higher level of media exposure. Asked to explain this discrepancy, respondents cite a combination of media agenda-setting, assumptions about audience and lack of institutional support. The quotes emphasize how visibility isn't simply a matter of fairness, it shapes who is celebrated, supported and remembered in football. Filling that void is key to making sports media more inclusive.

4.3.2.3 Time slots and priority of schedule programmes

This sub-theme explores how media determines the provision of airtime for football content, and considers what this signals in terms of prioritising men's over women's football. Results show that men's football is scheduled predominantly during prime time in the early morning, evening and on weekends when audiences peak. Women's football, by contrast, is consigned to off-peak slots or tacked on as an afterthought at the end of general sports programming indicative of the fact there are no institutional investment.

Respondent 1, male broadcast journalist and one of the country's award winning sports personality stated:

“We've booked slots every morning and evening that are football only, and they're almost always focused on the men's game. Even at the biggest women's tournaments, they are mentioned only in passing unless something unusual occurs.” **[Respondent 1 male broadcasting journalist and award-winning sports host]**

It shows the contemporary consciousness of a carefully constructed editorial system which plugs men's football in such a time-specific manner that women's football is simply not given its high planning cushions.

Female soccer player and former national team member Respondent 7 commented regretfully that:

“When they expose us, it's at times no one listens in the middle of the morning on a weekday, or late at night. The preview shows for men's matches even receive evening prime time.” [Respondent 7 (P): female, footballer and former national team player]

As such this respondent thinks that not only the disparate scheduling, but also how timing decisions restrict audience access to women's football undermining its visibility and perceived worth.

A male football coach, respondent 12, 20 years of experience stated:

“It's their own perception of what the audience wants. So they hype up men's football when people are paying attention. But that's also how you shape public interest by what you choose to air and when.” [Respondent 12, male, football coach]

His position contradicts the notion that public tastes only determine what is shown on television and radio - puts more emphasis on the media's role in deciding which programmes have a preference for certain periods of time. The sub-theme “Time Slots and Program Prioritization” shows how programming breaks are used to maintain gendered tradition in football coverage. The men's game dominates prime time, the women relegated to off-peak or low-priority slots. This



habit represses voices in women's football stories. Respondents also highlight that the media can shape, rather than merely reflect public interest and call for intentional redistribution of air time to complement harnessing football promotion in a diverse manner.

4.4 To assess the factors that influence the selection and prioritization of football topics by sports media in Tamale

4.4.1 Determinants of Agenda Setting in Sports Media

This theme also seeks to explore the underlining reasons why sports media in Tamale construct certain issues about football narratives as more important. One analysis identifies four broad influences: editorial, perceived public, journalist personal and sponsorship. The result is a system that is largely biased to men's football, while its women's equivalent battles for space in the wings, regardless of on-field success.

Respondent 2, an older male sports journalist stated:

“Sometimes the question is not an unwillingness to cover women's football, but revealed decisions made by the editorial board above. Perhaps producers don't give such stories a chance because it is easier for them to assume the audience isn't interested. And the tiny fraction of women's matches that do get pitched are almost never approved, even if the reporters pitch meaningful content to go with them. That movement to “what people want” typically means turning to men's football. This gatekeeping discreetly deletes women's football from the mainstream of sports discourse.” [Respondent 2, an older male sports journalist]



This quote serves to demonstrate how editorial policies informed by assumptions about audience interests can serve as powerful gatekeepers and increasingly marginalise the professional women's game.

R11 (Female, Football coach and sports management graduate student) commented that:

“There’s a personal bias coming in too, the likes of some presenters just don’t take women’s football seriously. They think it is slower, less competitive or not as exciting a game as the men’s version. Given these assumptions they can’t bring themselves to cover it or even discuss it on the air. This dismissive attitude leads to women’s matches being unfairly dismissed, regardless of how good they are or how important they may be. Such media biases quietly direct what the public sees and in turn, values in football.”

[Respondent 11, female football coach]

Her perspicacious post highlights journalist attitudes as a major block. These in-house prejudices inform the narrative, invariably perpetuating gender stereotypes and sidelining female athletes.

Respondent 13, a male football administrator concurred It’s also about The daily interaction.

“Sponsors tend to follow where the exposure is, and right now that’s in men’s football. As a result, media houses chase the money and prioritize what content ensures them audience numbers and commercial returns. It’s a businesslike decision, not necessarily a fair one, and it leaves women’s football on the outside looking in. Where even the women’s game has talent and achievement, it struggles to draw airtime without a sugar daddy. This cycle perpetuates the chasm between coverage and opportunity.”

[Respondent 13, a male football administrator]





This also demonstrates the editorial influence of sponsorship. Because men’s football tends to draw more commercial interest, it is granted the airtime, and women’s football is considered financially unfeasible as a regular feature. The theme, “Determinants of agenda setting in sports media,” shows that decisions to cover football at Tamale are not essentially based on merit but are influenced by organizational protocol, presumed public interest, personal preferences and commercial considerations. All together, these determinants perpetuate unequal media representation that disadvantages women’s football irrespective of quality or prospect for growth. The respondents’ views underscore the need for systemic reform, among other recommendations such as gender-sensitive editorial policies, training of media actors and rewards for inclusive sponsorship arrangements.

4.4.1.1 Editorial policies

This sub-theme explores the editorial decisions which media houses make on what content goes on air looking at why the men’s game is more preferred to that of women. Editorial strategies are generally inspired by an audience's supposed preference, an institution's habitual practice and what is believed to be entertaining or commercially viable football content. These policies serve as a strong filter that routinely restricts the coverage of women’s football, even when major achievements are accomplished.

a woman football activist said:

“The editorial board often has prejudiced thought that the public are only interested in men’s league, so women teams stories are conveniently brushed off. And even when you pitch what is a timely piece, the answer is generally insipid like “we’ll see” or “maybe

next week”, both of which never happen. This dismissive stance means significant stories about women’s football continue to fall through the cracks. It’s not about how good the writing is, but a mindset that undermines women as a reflex action. So their successes and struggles go unheeded.” [Respondent 4, male sports journalist]

His experience has highlighted the way that editorial gatekeeping keeps women’s football content relegated to second-class, or ignored, status, however relevant it may be or no matter how newsworthy.

Respondent 11, a female coach and sports management graduate student, clarified:

“Maybe there’s no paper trail, but you feel their presence very much in decisions a day-to-day basis. There is an unspoken rule that men’s football comes first, as the default position for coverage. When airtime is at a premium, without fail it’s the men’s story that will be chosen ahead of anything connected to women’s football. And this silent prejudice permeates the editorial process, but without ever being named. It upholds a system in which women’s accomplishments are habitually ignored, simply because they are not the main event.” [Respondent 11, a female coach]

This quote demonstrates how unwritten editorial norms subtly and consistently perpetuate gender imbalances in the ordering and timing of content.

Respondent 1, a male who is an award winning broadcast journalist concurred with this observation as follows:



“Producers determine what goes on the air. If they believe the women’s league does not bring in numbers, they exclude it. Well, we’re often forced to concentrate exclusively on what’s trending, which is most often the premier league.” [Respondent 1 (male, award-winning broadcast journalist)]

His statement echoes how editorial choices can be influenced by rating and perceived viewer interest, something that generally favors high-profile men’s competitions and further marginalizes women’s football. The sub-theme 'Editorial Policies' suggests that choices of football coverage are made based on internal perceptions and top-down influences, rather than fair editorial judgment. These, whether explicit or tacitly stated, are overwhelmingly to the benefit of men’s football and at best women’s football has erratic moments of visibility. The excerpts from interviewees show the necessity of gender-inclusive editorial planning and explicit policies that understand how important it is to cover all football content equally.

4.4.1.2 Public interest

This sub-theme will focus on how assumptions about what the audience wants affects editorial choices and coverage of football material. In there, media organizations justify how the game of men's football is given such an exceptional mileage over that of women’s and institutions related to “public interest” with claim that more of the general public are interested in watching men league, players and competition. But the research shows that this concept of “the public’s interest” is not so much evidence-based as rooted in self-perpetuating assumptions the more attention paid to men’s football, the more it will dominate public concern.



“When girls are to compete amidst the boys that seem to have mastered the game and compare themselves with him, they will scare off from further interest in it. *They always say people don’t care about women’s football. But how can they care if it’s not brought to their attention? When you’re not showing the content, you can’t blame the audience.*”

[Respondent 3, male teacher and PRO female football teams]

It is a quote that sums up what’s wrong with system where lack of exposure equals lack in interest, thus removing entirely the opportunity for audience to engage with women’s football.

Respondent 12, a male football coach with many local years of experience explained, for example:

“When there is a big women’s match and has been properly promoted and people do show up that shows me the interest is already there. What there hasn’t been is sustained media effort to nurture that interest and keep the public engaged. It’s not that the public doesn’t care; it’s that women are seldom given an opportunity to get to know, look forward to or invest in their games. With the proper promotion, narrative and exposure, fan feed begins to gather. If the media (or at least some of it) does its job, the public will pick up on that.”

[Respondent 12, male football coach]

His perspective brings into focus that audience interest isn’t built just on raw demand, but exposure and consistency. Women’s football has potential to draw a strong fan base with sufficient media coverage.

Respondent 7, female footballer and national team player added:

“We’re amazed how sometimes people make the travel to come watch us when they say we are playing. But most of the time, nobody would know because the media didn’t report it. That’s not a public interest issue it is a media failure.” [Respondent 7, a female footballer]

Her example pretty much characterises how audience demand is square, and not that listeners are there then why is media deaf on it hardly being off the collar. ‘Public Interest’ The "public interest" sub-theme led to an understanding that media accusations of low public interest in women's football are typically based on biased assumptions rather than actual behaviour. These are self-archiving stereotypes that become a reality when the women’s game is starved of exposure to create an appetite for it. Applicants submit that public interest is generated by balanced, comprehensive and ongoing coverage as well as community involvement. The narrative therefore needs to be hijacked, and media houses must take the responsibility of shaping rather than following public demand.

4.4.1.3 Journalist biases

This sub-theme analyses how individual journalists' private thoughts and perspectives affect the selection of football content. Although media organizations may not have established content-sharing policies, journalists take advantage of their position to set agendas on a regular basis. The analysis finds that some journalists simply realize the lower value of women’s football, either as less competitive or less entertaining and this bias informs how they cover (and present it).

Respondent 11, a female football coach and studying sports management commented:



“Some speakers just don’t think of us as serious people. They believe women’s football is slow or dull, and so they don’t even make an effort to understand the game. That’s bias pure and simple.” [Respondent 11, female football coach]

Her remarks reveal how it’s more a question of human prejudice than objective analysis that determines coverage, and how predisposition can be deeply woven around stereotypes about gender and fitness.

Respondent 4, a journalist male and fanatical follower of women’s football acknowledged.

“I’ve had coworkers that literally laugh when you mention the women’s league. They don’t think it’s really worthy of the scrutiny. Some believe it’s charity work to mention them at all.” [Respondent 4, a male journalist]

This quote typifies the dismissive attitude that has pervaded some sections of media, where women's football is an afterthought and considered as either a distraction or a tokenistic novelty, rather than a serious sporting occasion.

Respondent 8, Female football international player:

“We see the difference in how they describe us no heat, no analysis. When the men play, everything is excited. When we play, it’s simply ‘the ladies tried.’ That sentiment shows in the coverage.” [Respondent 8, a female footballer]

Her experience matters because tonal bias even in opinion pieces is just a reflection of something more profound: Individual journalists’ perspectives, which contribute to unequal visibility and airtime for coverage in sport. The sub-theme of “Journalist Biases” reveals the individual personal



inclinations and sentiments of media persons influencing football reportage in Tamale. Perceptions of the game based on misbeliefs, stereotypes, and lack of exposure that prevent a more balanced representation of women's football also repress accomplishment amongst female athletes. Key informant opinion The views of interviewees underscore the necessity to sensitize and build the capacity of sports journalists for gender-equitable reporting and countering personal prejudices that lead to biased coverage.

4.4.1.4 Sponsorship influences

This sub theme examines how sponsorship influences the media coverage of football in Tamale. The findings suggest that the commercial value constitutes a central influence on media agenda-setting by providing more financially favourable investment conditions in men's football, sponsors enable more content generation and higher target group exposure levels per sponsor input which results in greater media attention magnitude. This means that women's football can't get sponsorship, which reinforces a negative spiral between the two.

The male football administrator, respondent 13 stated:

"The media follows the money. Sponsors want air time, so they fund shows that center around men's football. Meaning more shows, more hype and no doubt even more sponsorship. Women's soccer is overlooked because it's considered low payoff."

[Response 13, male football administrator]

This quote illustrates that business logic determines editorial decisions of media houses who favor men's football to attract sponsorships which deepens gender disparities in coverage.

“It’s hard to sell women’s football programs to sponsors because they ask, ‘Who’s watching?’ But that is also true because we don’t play the games enough. It’s a chicken-and-egg situation.” [Respondent 2; male sports journalist]

The self-perpetuating influence of sponsorship is highlighted by his comment that low coverage provides few audience attracting numbers, which in turn discourages sponsors etc.

Female footballer and national team player (Respondent 7) shared:

“We don’t get endorsements or event sponsors like the men do. It impacts everything including jerseys and transport. The media doesn’t report on us very much, so companies don’t see us.” [Respondent 7, a female footballer]

It is an example of how little media coverage affects financial support for women’s teams, and therefore media presence but also the operations and well-being of players. Meaning that money has such a role to play in the type of football material carried by media houses in Tamale. It was established that financial elements are central determinants of football coverage on Tamale media outlets. Men’s football is backed up by a loop of visibility, audience interest and commercial investment, while women’s football has been seen as unprofitable and sidelined. Respondents add that unless investment and media commitment is made to raise the profile of women’s football, it will continue to be excluded from significant sponsorship deals and public recognition. The cycle can only be broken through strategic advocacy and the media's cooperation, in order to show how valuable it is to promote sports that do not isolate others.



4.4.2 Institutional and Cultural Influences

This section investigates how wider institutional arrangements and cultural practices shape media coverage and treatment of football in Tamale. The study demonstrates how football associations, gender-based traditions and regional or political alliances influence the agenda-setting of media houses. These are exercised both through direct means policy and financial support and indirect mechanisms (e.g., entrenched cultural expectations), to perpetuate the hyperonization of men's football, while simultaneously limiting access to and development of women's football.

According to R 12 who was a male Football Coach With many years of experience.

“The GFA [Ghana Football Association] and regional bodies don't push women's football like they do for the men. The media tends to follow what the associations choose to promote, and at this moment that emphasis is largely on the men's game.” **[Respondent 12, male, football coach]**

This quote highlights the power of football governing bodies whose promotional interests determine the agenda for much media reporting. When organizations ignore women's soccer, the media perpetuates that neglect.

I'm a football coach and I've studied sports management Female, respondent 11

“Our culture is very old-fashioned and people still have that stereotype that football is a man's sport. So when a woman succeeds, it's strange or unusual, not normal. That mentality comes with a price, namely how seriously we're taken, even in the media.” **[Respondent 11, female football coach]**

Her viewpoint illustrates some of the cultural obstacles women face in football. Embedded gender norms mold public perception, and those molds how journalists and editors frame women's accomplishments.

R3 (Male Teacher, Women's Football PRO) followed "I like to play football for fun nothing more and nothing less.

"Media coverage can sometimes depend on the team and where they are from. If it's a team from a political powerhouse or urban area, well, they'll receive attention. Rural or non-celebrity women's teams don't get a look in." **[Respondent 3, male teacher and women's football PRO]**

This reveals that the regional and political associations also shape the coverage. Teams or stories that are more aligned with influential regions/sponsors may receive extra attention from media houses, adding to the invisibility of women teams lacking resources. The theme "Institutional and Cultural Influences" shows how macro-level/systemic influences from outside the newsroom affect media reportage of football in Tamale. Content is influenced indirectly by the Ghana Football Association (GFA) and regional bodies through their focus areas. Masculinity associating with soccer and culture prevents females players being represented in news. Moreover, political and regional loyalties can influence media priorities. Respondents stressed that policy reorientation, cultural pushback and intentional institutional support were all required to develop equitable and balanced football coverage for both genders.



4.4.2.1 Influence of football associations

This sub-theme focuses on the effects on media coverage and public conversations about football in Tamale by the decisions taken by football governing bodies, local as well as national (Ghana Football Association GFA Regional) such as the GFA and regional associations. The analysis illustrates that national football associations are a key engineering factor of what competitions to propagate, which teams to support logistically and foremost, which narratives to value. Unfortunately, these colleges focus the greater part of their attention on men's football programmes, a strategically distanced but profoundly reverberating effect they have on how media outlets for their own reasons cover certain beats.

The male football administrator, respondent 13 noted the following:

“When an FA encourages a regional or national league, men's with interviews press conferences and banners, media follows. You don't see that sort of push outside of the women's league.”

Category [Respondent 13; male football administrator]

This illustrates how football associations prop up media through assertive promotion. The removal from institutions of women's football translates also into low media representation.

Female footballer and someone who has represented the nation responding #7 said:

“The F.A. also arranges events and capacity training for the men's team. We barely get noticed unless there's a big tournament. That's why the media is not making a priority of us.” [Respondent 7, a female footballer]



Her remark refers to the uneven investment and structural backing by football associations that guide the public perception and media priority, and further establish female athletes' marginalisation. The sub-theme "Influence of Football Associations" speaks to the fact that media reportage on soccer in Tamale is heavily linked to institutional priorities and communication practices of football governing bodies. When leagues emphasize men's competition to the exclusion of nearly everything else, so too does the media. Respondents are clear that, in order to have more balanced representation on the media of women's sport, football associations must sponsor and create content around women's football. Their influence is pivotal in terms of forming the sporting landscape and female footballers' visibility and legitimacy.

4.4.2.2 Cultural attitudes

The sub-theme concerns how dominant cultural orientations- shaped by prevailing societal assumptions and traditional forms of masculinity-condition representation and participation in football in Tamale. The study indicates that football still remains largely a male arena resultant of long-standing cultural beliefs and values, which suggest female football is less serious or even inappropriate. These attitudes are reflected, with subtlety, in the content of the media and also in the community support level and its attitude to the importance of sport for women.

Respondent 11, a female football coach and sports management postgraduate student, stated:

“A lot of people think football is for boys. So when girls do play better or accomplish more, they're not celebrated in the same way. The media shows what society thinks and, right now, society doesn't completely accept women in football. *[Respondent 11, F, football coach]*

This is part of the problem: her quote illustrates how media discourses merely reflect social prejudices, in turn perpetuating stereotypes and narrowing spaces for women in sports. This quote shows how gender roles directly filters their way through, and corrodes the frame of support around women's football whether that be media focus, fan interaction or investment.

Her experience mirrors the fact that for society, women's achievements in sports are worth less than those of men and that an editorial decision or programme priority based on merit will always hold a tendency to change if something more newsworthy comes along. The "Cultural Attitude" sub-category points out the influence of gendered cultural perceptions on media agenda setting with regards to footballing activities of women in Tamale. They have a bearing on how female footballers are viewed, subsidised and reported. "Key to changing the narrative is for media and community leaders to question old gender norms, and actively champion that women's football is a worthwhile, professional pursuit. The change of culture is crucial for the media representation to be fair.

4.4.2.3 Political/regional affiliations

This sub-theme looks at the interconnection between political connections and regional sentiments in how football narratives are selected and preferred by the media in Tamale. The findings show that the media coverage is not significantly meritocratic-based rather it could be affected by political links, closeness to stakes and owner of leading journalists or whether team/player plays in a fair/appealing region from which some to be seen. And this disparity tends to not only disadvantage less-connected women's teams in marginalized regions, but also set an uneven playing field.

Interviewee 3, a male coach and PRO of women's football teams (PRO = public relations officer), explained:

“Other teams receive news as a result of their connection with someone important, like a politician or regional head. In the meantime, he said, they “have other themes that are doing well but get overlooked because there is not a lot of strong support for that.” [S.:

respondent 3, male teacher and pro of female football teams]

His intuition suggests how political patronage can distort media priorities, shunting aside worthy teams especially in the women's ranks that lack elite connections.

Another male coach with high experience (Respondent 12) “It is a burden on society and an evil deed to have women coaches without proper professional qualifications.”

“If you're in a more urban or politically connected district where your team is based, you're much more likely to get media attention and public awareness. By extension, the limelight comes naturally for teams hailing from these areas, and this phenomenon is a while not always dependent on the team's performance. At the other end, geographically-dispersed sides, regardless of performance and results, are often left out in the cold. Even their championship victories tend to be overlooked, purely because of where they come from. This disproportionate coverage “establishes a media bias that marginalizes worthy teams from less celebrated conferences.” [Respondent 12, a male coach]

This demonstrates a case-in-point of regional bias in football journalism, and how those urban-based clubs receive more coverage than the rest due to location, infrastructure or local proximity with the media.



Participant 8: a female footballer and WAFU Zone B winner said:.

“Sometimes our games are in little towns, and no journalists show up. But a men’s friendly in any big town will be accompanied by full media coverage. It seems as though the value of one is determined by where they come from.” [Respondent 8: female footballer, WAFU Zone B winner]

Her experience illustrates how geographical disparity and regional bias influence not just the availability of media, but also the evaluations and promotion of players and matches. The sub-theme of “Political/Regional Affiliations” indicates that media attention in Tamale is often a function of who you know and where you are based, rather than merit or effort. Political support and also location in a more glamorous city make a difference, whereas rural teams and non-attached ones such as women’s teams get less coverage. It’s not just about favoritism, and we won’t be satisfied until we see this bias does not exist in sports media. Broadcaster respondents stress that for there to be true equity in sports coverage, a move beyond what sides of politics you’re on or where you live needs to occur.

4.5 To explore the impact of sports media coverage on public interest and perception of football in Tamale

4.5.1 Media Influence on Public Perception

This theme discusses how the media portrayal or lack of it influences the perception of football in Tamale, particularly women’s football. Sports media shapes how the public understands and perceives the world of sports, with it deciding what teams, athletes, and events are important. Female footballers and competitions are notoriously underrepresented, which creates a distorted view in the public eye coupled with lack of interest and value women return to sport.



Respondent 2, former male sports journalist explained as follows :

“People follow what they hear consistently. If the only news they hear is from men’s leagues and highlights, they think that’s all there is. The media largely determines what football is for the public.” **[Respondent 2, male sports journalist with long experience in the field]**

His comment reveals the media’s setting of agendas, and evidence of how continued focus on

It’s not that we haven’t accomplished wonderful things it’s just that you never hear about us in the media. Our stories no matter how large or small are ones that seldom get covered in the mainstream. So, even people’s own national representatives go unnoticed because they aren’t broadcast. This silence shields our achievements and does not allow them to be recognized as they should.” **[Respondent 7, a female footballer]**

Her story also exemplifies how invisibility in the media results in public unawareness of, and consequently less attention given to, even some of the world’s best female athletes when they compete.

“The media coverage of men’s football on TV with live commentary, analysis and hype makes it look more professional for the general public. The tone is different for women’s football. That affects how seriously people take it.” **[Respondent 13 male football administrator]**

This quote highlights the way in which tone, framing and salience affect attitudes. When the coverage behind women’s football lacks enthusiasm and professionalism, the public will become



a reflection of that. The theme “Media Influence on Public Perception” shows media coverage is not only a reflection of interest it’s a catalyst. Yet, when the media will distribute men’s football with breadth and thrill while barely covering or trivializing women’s football, they spread the same reality distortion to the general public that female athletes don’t get enough support. According to respondents, If you really want the public to appreciate women’s football in the way it should be, then the media has a duty to re-write history and change the narrative: visibility and proper coverage in terms of tone and attention.

This sub-theme relates to the second research question which focused on how citizens of Tamale perceive female footballers and, is primarily influenced by media representation or otherwise. The study demonstrates that you still get ignorance, underestimation and a persistent stereotype in public opinion - courtesy of inadequate coverage by the usually biased media. One of the big sadness for women footballers is that, no matter how good and successful they are, they still don’t seem to be treated like legitimate sports stars; but instead as anomalies.

Respondent 5, a footballer with national level experience:

“Even football supporters’ mind-set is: women’s football, that’s a laugh or that supports charity you can’t really make something of this. That’s because of how little the media covers it.” **[Respondent 5, a male footballer]**

His statement alludes to deeply ingrained attitudes - which the media has only further reinforced by failing to treat women’s football professionally and instead implicitly presenting it as subpar, via omission.

U17 World Cup Top Scorer, Respondent 9 (female), expressed:



“Everyone knows names like Ronaldo and Messi, but they don’t even know that women have won international awards in Ghana. That is the contrast that is so painful it reflects how far we have become separated in public consciousness. Even while we have these accomplishments in the international stage, we go unnoticed because the media does not display our stories. It is not just disappointing, in other words; it’s disheartening. We’ve been busting our butts, and we’re still invisible, we are totally invisible.” [Respondent 9Female U17 World Cup Top Scorer]

Her case highlights the emotional and reputational expense of bad press. The public unawareness harms morale as well as revenue streams such as sponsorships, endorsements, and community backing for female footballers. The sub-theme “Public Perception of Female Footballers” exposes that less amount of media time and other disparities serve as a precursor to the perception based on which society envisages female players. If the public is not reported these successful achievements or does not see them as professionals in the media, they appear as unknown or insignificant. Respondents stress that changing public perception starts with intentional media representation mean thoughtful, respectful and celebratory coverage which makes visible and normal the presence of women in football. This sub-theme examines the outlook of gender generalist on female soccer players in Tamale, which is mainly influenced by media representation or representations. The data shed light on the public perception to be one of ignorance, underestimation, and outdated stereotypes due to an inadequate but bias-media coverage. Female footballers do not receive the recognition and respect they deserve, despite being extremely talented, or reaching impressive heights in their careers, it’s as if they are exceptions and not actual athletes.

One female national team player (Respondent 7) expressed:

“It’s quite surprising how many people actually say to us that, “You know what, I never knew women in Tamale played football let alone represent Ghana. It’s not that the achievement isn’t there, counting for something it all is but that we disappear in the media. Nobody tells the public about what we do and achieve. Yet we’re out there, competing at high levels and making our region proud but all too often our stories go untold. If we’re not seen in the media our participation in the sport will feel invisible to those very communities we represent. [Respondent 7, woman in national team]

”

This shows that achievement has no correlation with recognition. The silence in the media then results in people not realising and that perpetuates the idea that women’s football is worthless or non-existent.

Respondent 5, a male national level football player, confessed:

“Even in the world of football fans, people still think that women’s football is a bit fun or charity not to be taken seriously. What the problem is there is how much attention the media pays there.” [Respondent 5, a male footballer]

His statement reflects a deeper bias in society, propagated by the fact that the media does not treat women’s football as professionally as men’s football; this constitutes an indication of inferiority through omission.

Respondent 9, a U17 World Cup Top Scorer, expressed:.



“People know Ronaldo and Messi, but they doesn’t even know Ghana has female players who’ve won international awards. It’s sad. We feel invisible.” [Respondent 9, female U17

World Cup]

Her ordeal is just one of the stories that illustrate just how emotionally, and costly female footballers’ reputation suffers as a result of the media. The ignorance of the general public also hurts the morales and potentials of footballers on both teams in terms of sponsorships, collaborations, community support, etc." The sub-theme called the “Public Perception of Female Footballers” indicates that unequal distribution and diversion media coverage carries the taste in which individuals attitudes towards women athletes. The public deems trans women to be irrelevant or unknown when the media does not showcase their prowess or portray them as professionals. Respondents stress that to re-imagine public perception, intentional media representation is required real and respectful coverage that celebrates, not belittles or sensationalizes, the competitiveness of women in football.

4.5.1.2 Media trust

This theme seeks to examine to what extent, the public as well as stakeholders trust the media in presenting football realities in Tamale and may be Ghana at large; moreover, it relates to issues of gender balance. The results of the analysis show that there is a divided perception of trust in sports media and many participants report scepticism or exasperation with biased coverage, narrow reporting and neglecting women’s football. This perceived lack of balance chips away at the credibility of sports journalism and detracts from confidence in media as neutral and professional.

One female coach and sport management graduate student (R11) indicated:



“How do we trust the media when they act as though we don’t even exist? They only appear in times of scandal or to accentuate the negative. That’s not balanced reporting.”

[Respondent 11, a female coach]

Her comments are indicative of how women involved in the game feel let down by sections of the media that accentuate negatives but overlook ongoing, real successes in women’s football.

Respondent 4, male journalist and women's football enthusiast, explained:

“Some fans have tuned out of their local sports shows because they believe that it’s always the same teams and players being touted. The public wants diverse stories, but that’s not what they get.” **[Respondent 4, a male journalist]**

This quotation speaks to audience boredom and suspicion, of the lack of diversity and fairness in media coverage that makes it less relevant, and trust weaker. His analysis illustrates how perceived editorial bias be it motivated by sponsorship, personal preference or favoritism scorns not just sports reporting but the media’s broader function as a neutral arbiter. The sub-theme on “Media Trust” points to the fact that uneven, selective and at times negative media practices have affected public trust in sports journalism, especially amongst women football stakeholders. Respondents worry that when the media does not practice fairness and inclusivity, their credibility suffers. They need to make attempts to establish trust, with transparent editorial standards and an expansion of content that shows it’s trying not only to appeal exclusively to one gender. Trust will build when audiences and athletes can believe every voice and every accomplishment are held with integrity, respect.



4.5.1.3 Impact on game attendance

This sub-theme also looks at media coverage or lack of it and its influence on the attendance for women's matches in Tamale. Enhancing visibility in the media is directly related to increased attendance (please see analysis below). When matches are promoted, debated or reviewed on mainstream outlets they draw more members of the public to participate. On the other hand, the almost nonexistent pre- or post-match promotion and recap of women's play leads to low profile and attendance even at high-level competition.

Female respondents who were footballers and had success at the national and university level also added: (Respondent 7)

"We've played finals in Tamale to crowds of less than 50. But the men's league fills with hundreds, even friendlies. The difference is media attention." [Respondent 7, a female footballer]

Her story illustrates how media silence results in invisibility, in turn affecting fan engagement and community support at the stadium level.

"If the media doesn't inform the public on time and tells them where, when, how to watch a match then people will not follow. Which is why the men's league draws big crowds it's always in the public ear." [Respondent 13: football male bulk administrator]


This refers to the media telling a story and building excitement and culture around everyone showing up, something women's football hasn't had the same fortune of. The "Impact on Game Attendance" sub-theme establishes strong correlation between media attention and public attendance in football games. The attendance of women's games is low, mainly due to only poor

or no media promotion concerning the games that are played. Respondents concur that to boost turnout at women's matches more games need regular promotion, analysis and scheduling in mainstream media broadcasts. Media houses should understand that participation is not simply a measure of public interest, rather it's formed by the stories and visibility they construct.

4.5.2 The Media's Influence on the Development of Football

This theme articulates the potential for positive media in the promotion of football development, with a particular reference to women's football in Tamale. The findings suggest that the media has a unique role to play in informing, inspiring and promoting football at all levels and the potential to do so with regard to women's football is largely unrealized. Now, with the public and media focus on male elitism to promoting bottom-up women's football or female young talent, it is at the lack of any initiative. But when media does encourage for reasons, it can change public perception, generate interest and ultimately attract investment.

Respondent 4 a male journalist and women's football enthusiast commented:



“When the media makes an effort to put women's matches on and profile the players and do commentary you see the results. Girls get inspired, clubs get noticed, and sponsors start calling.” [Respondent 4, a male journalist]

This just goes to show the positive influence that media-led narrative can create in driving interest, opportunity and football development over time.

Respondent 9 (an honoree female footballer and an international goal scorer) stated:

“If I’d seen girls who looked like me in the media when I was younger, I would have believed in myself earlier. And the media can make a lot more girls dream.” [Respondent

9, an accomplished female football player]

Her words highlight the transformative potential of media representation, especially for young girls who might be looking for role models in athletics.

Added male football administrator R13:

“Media needs to do more than just report scores. It should be a development system involving promoting tournaments, entertaining fans, covering coaching clinics. That’s how we build a great football culture.” [Respondent 13, a male football officer]

This highlights the broader development interest in media and its role beyond the coverage of matches that can contribute also to infrastructure, education and stakeholder engagement. The “Role of Media in Promoting Football Development” theme indicates that the media in Tamale are the missing link that can uplift football, especially women’s football by not only being a reporting channel but also a development partner. The answer: When the media makes an effort to push women’s games, tell players’ stories and support grassroots projects, it also ignites inspiration, visibility and investment. If media is to truly get behind football growth and development, the adoptive attitude must be all inclusive, forward thinking and community centered assuring that when it comes to the influence of publicity boy players are not solely on receiving end.



4.5.2.1 Media-driven motivation

This sub-theme highlights the influence of media coverage in motivating and inspiring people especially young females to play football. The findings demonstrate the importance of having the media cover female footballers' successes, struggles and journeys, as a motivational tool. But here in Tamale, women's football is not given the required attention to maximize this inspiring influence of the media. Without regular columns, features, or pictures of themselves in the paper aspiring young female athletes can't relate to anyone else who has made it and are discouraged from trying.

Ditto Respondent 7, a woman footballer and ex-Black Princess playing: And responded:

“You feel proud and inspired when you hear your name on the radio or see your picture in the paper. You want to put in the extra effort, because you know people are watching.”

[Respondent 7] an ex-Black Princesses [female footballer].

Her statement exemplifies recognition as a psychological factor, and how seeing oneself in the media influences an athlete's confidence and commitment.

The male journalist (and women's football supporter) who is Respondent 4 concluded:

“Anytime we do a full feature on a female player or real coverage of a women's tournament, the response is overwhelmingly positive. People listen, and the responses we get tell us this kind of story has impact. Young girls frequently message the station afterwards to say how inspired they are and that they want to be like her. It's a stark reminder of the fact that visibility matters it steers dreams and kindles ambition. It doesn't

take much just consistent, well-placed media attention to make a difference.”

[Respondent Four: a male journalist and follower of women’s football]

As this demonstrates, media storytelling can stimulate fresh interest in football particularly for girls who require female role models to inspire ambition.

Respondent 11, (Female Coach, Graduate student);

“When the media goes quiet, girls lose motivation. They begin to feel that their efforts are meaningless. But once we cover them, everything changes their confidence, their performance, even the way their families are with them.” **[Respondent 11, a female coach]**

Her journey illustrates the motivational void that lack of exposure creates, and the healing power of coverage's yes fiends. The sub-theme “Media-Driven Motivation” highlights the significant role media plays in motivating participation, maintaining athlete morale and generating positive feedback in terms of continuation sport among younger generations. Tamale female footballers are motivated and they easily feel committed to playing when their efforts are appreciated on the radio, TV, or social media. At the other polar twin, media blackout inculcates a sense of invisibility and despondent. Respondents emphasize that the media has to take an active role, motivating and showing success stories from beginners up through all levels. of Form

4.5.2.2 Community support

This sub-theme focuses on the impact of media coverage on community engagement, attendance and support for football (women’s football specifically). The examination concludes that when the local teams and players are consistently portrayed in mass media, they receive a certain degree of



recognition and authorization locally. Often this trickles to higher interest from fans, volunteers and heck even local level sponsorships. On the other hand, when women's football is left out of sight or given little coverage, the community support is lacking and teams face a lack of attendance and resources.

R3, a male teacher and PRO for women's football replied:

“The minute it is mentioned at local radio that a women's match will take place you notice an immediate turn out of parents, friends and even local chiefs to support. Just the name drop on air lends some semblance of stature and legitimacy to the game. It sends a message to the community that the event is important and worth attending. That attention from the media often makes a regular match become an honored event. It's this visibility that legitimizes women's football in the eyes of others, in a lot of ways.” [Respondent 3, teacher and PRO (Professional Representative) for women's football]

This quotation demonstrates the capacity of media to confirm and enhance local football, by rendering it more socially significant and deserving on community interest.

(R8 corresponding to a female WAFU Zone B player and national team member

“When people hear our names on air or see our pictures online, they start to feel proud that a son of their town is representing Ghana. This is how media exposure helps support to build.” [Respondent 8, a woman winner of the WAFU Zone B and the national team player]



Her experience illustrates how media-fueled pride and identity can feed grassroots support, allowing players to make a name for themselves not only on a national scale but also where they grew up and play.

And a male football administrator, respondent 13, commented:

“The media will expose a team or player more and the community will gather around them. It’s also helpful when it comes to donations or sponsorship that people want to be connected with what they can see and hear.” After finishing the static questions,

[Respondent 13 (male, football administrative)]

This statement highlights the instrumental role of media visibility in terms of community-driven fundraising and partnerships. The “Community Support” sub-theme, indicates that the media helps in in promoting stronger sense of belonging between the football teams and their communities. When girls’ players and games appear in articles, on a regular basis, communities attend matches, cheer with pride and donate money. It also sends a clear message; to develop a local fan base, and by extension women’s football in the community, media attention must be quantified and intentional, cultivating local ownership and stakeholder orientation.

4.5.2.3 Gender stereotype changes

This sub-theme explores the ways in which media can act as a tool for challenging and transforming stereotypical gender constructions that represent football as an exclusively male activity. The findings indicate that when the media deploys women’s football with critical and/or professional commentary, similar airtime, and positive framing it helps to normalize female



engagement in sport. But superficial coverage of women's football in Tamale and the country has not helped dismantle enduring cultural prejudices.

Female coach/students Respondent 11 female Why?

“As soon as they see women playing football on TV or hear their names on sports programs that people respect, perceptions start to change. Such visibility breaks down old stereotypes and opens minds to new possibilities. When media takes women's football seriously, the public starts to take it seriously. It shifts how people see female athletes and not as an exception, but as a participant who belongs in the game. It shows how much power the media really has to change what it is that society thinks a woman is capable of achieving.” [Respondent 11, coach/female sports management student]

"Representation within credible media platforms public attitudes and conditions acceptance for women in high-performance football," she says.

“To be honest, I never really took women's football too seriously the intensity or competitive nature of it just wasn't there for me. But that changed when I first heard their matches also being dissected on air with the same depth and professionalism bestowed upon those of the men. All of a sudden, I became more engaged, and the level of skill and strategy impresses me. It didn't come with the players changing but, rather, how they were media presented them. It demonstrates how incredibly influential media framing can be in helping to determine what we value about the game.” [Respondent 5, a male footballer]



This quote is indicative of the ways in which media framing can shape individual attitude even among football players to understand women's soccer as an event with the same level of gravity, and professionalism, as men's.

“When the media give us adequate coverage, it sends a positive message to young girls that football is not just for boys, but they also belong,” he said. It counteracts the refrain in society of “this sport isn’t for you,” and creates encouragement instead of limitation. Watching female players feted on the air, seeds something in girls that makes them believe they are supposed to be part of the game. It bolsters self-assurance and opens up pathways that may have once felt shut. It is that kind of representation, what they are the visibility to plus empowerment.” [Respondent 9, female international goal scorer]

Her photo reinforces the idea that media coverage is not just informative it serves to empower. You just have to think of how the media also helps us dispel stereotypes, visibility and validation go a long way in changing minds - especially when its younger minds involved. The sub-theme of “Gender Stereotype Changes” illustrates that media representation has the potential to be an agent for change in terms of contested and changing cultural meanings surrounding gender roles within the realm of sport. “Presented with quality, consistency and pride in the women’s game, we believe that women’s football can do wonders to break down preconceptions and expand who will feel they can belong to the sport.” Respondents agree that a change in public perception requires more than mere inclusion: It calls for representation that is both explicit and affirming, in which women are portrayed not as exceptions but as natural and respected players within the football ecosystem.



CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected to examine how Ghanaian sports media set the agenda in shaping football communication within Tamale. It begins with background information on the respondents, highlighting their diverse roles as journalists, players, coaches, and administrators, which enriches the perspectives captured in the study. The analysis is structured around key themes and sub-themes aligned with the study objectives, including gender disparities in football coverage, media platform utilization, determinants of agenda-setting, institutional and cultural influences, and the impact of media on public perception. Particular attention is given to how men's football dominates airtime and structured programming, while women's football remains marginalized and often reactive in coverage.

This discussion interprets the study's findings through four complementary theoretical lenses: agenda-setting theory, framing theory, media economics theory, and Hallin's spheres of public discourse. Each theory is used to explain different but interconnected aspects of sports media coverage in Tamale, namely issue prioritisation, narrative construction, commercial decision-making, and normative boundaries of media debate. Rather than treating the theories as abstract concepts, the discussion applies them directly to the empirical themes generated from interviews and media content review.



5.1 To analyze the extent of media coverage given to both men and women football in Tamale

5.1.1 Gender Disparities in Football Media Coverage

The findings show a clear imbalance in football media coverage in the Tamale Metropolis, with men's football receiving substantially more attention than women's football across radio, television, and online platforms. This pattern can be explained directly through agenda-setting theory, which argues that repeated, prominent coverage signals importance and shapes what audiences come to see as "the main issue" in a community's sports conversation (Nowak, 2018; Gilardi *et al.*, 2022). In practical terms, when men's matches dominate sports bulletins, prime-time discussions, headlines, and social media updates, men's football is positioned as the default reference point for "serious football," while women's football is pushed to the margins and becomes easier for audiences to overlook (Nowak, 2018). This is consistent with broader evidence that women's sport, including football, remains structurally underrepresented across media types, especially in routine day-to-day coverage rather than during occasional peak events (Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, 2024).

The imbalance is also reinforced by framing theory, because visibility is not only about "how much" coverage exists, but also "how" the sport is narrated. When women's football appears less frequently or is framed as secondary, developmental, or novelty content, the coverage implicitly communicates lower sporting status and weaker legitimacy, even when the intention is not openly dismissive (Pegoraro *et al.*, 2021). Over time, these framing patterns can shape audience expectations and newsroom routines, making it more likely that editors and presenters continue to treat men's football as the natural lead story, while women's football becomes an optional add-on (Pegoraro *et al.*, 2021). From a media economics perspective, unequal coverage is further sustained





by commercial logic. Sports programming decisions are often tied to audience size, advertiser interest, and the ability of content to attract predictable ratings and sponsorship value, so men's football tends to be treated as the safer product to invest airtime, studio panels, and promotional resources in (Real and Kunz, 2020; Jayawardhana and Hartono, 2018). Where media organizations depend heavily on advertising and sponsorship revenues, editorial priorities can tilt toward the content perceived to guarantee higher returns, which then reproduces the same imbalance the study observes (Jayawardhana and Hartono, 2018; Real and Kunz, 2020).

Hallin's theory is applicable in this study. First, the findings suggest that that men's football in Tamale largely occupies the "sphere of consensus," where its centrality is assumed and rarely questioned, so it receives routine, normalized attention (Iseri *et al.*, 2019). Women's football, by contrast, is treated closer to the outer boundaries of everyday sports newsworthiness, appearing less consistently and therefore struggling to gain the same taken-for-granted legitimacy within mainstream sports narratives (Iseri *et al.*, 2019). This theoretical lens helps connect the results to a wider newsroom culture in which "what counts" as mainstream sport is socially constructed through repeated editorial choices, not only through the inherent quality of the sport itself (Hobbs, 2024).

5.1.1.1 Amount of coverage on men and women's football

It showed that the weight of coverage between men and women's football in Tamale is skewed, with men taking the headlines perhaps column inches on gutters and even domineering panel discussions to give their opinions but women are often marginalized to a few paragraphs in post-event reports. This reinforces Amankwah and Mensah's (2020) observations that more than 75% of sports media coverage in Ghana is based on the Black Stars and the local league (Ghana Premier

League) and those of Asiedu and Alhassan, 2019 who remarked women sports were given little regulated or consistent attention. Brunce (2016) added that the bias it conveys is a reflection of societal attitudes toward which are the most commercially valuable products in sport, with those featuring male athletes being perceived as preferable. However, Tetteh (2022) noticed that digital social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are increasingly shining light on women's football, providing a counterbalance to the mainstream silence. The result of this skewed coverage, is that women's football misses out on the hype, anticipation and narrative behind which fans ultimately line up and sponsors are willing to pay; as a consequence they have weaker fan bases and attract smaller sponsorship deals. Without active measures to expand coverage, progress women have made could be ignored. Thus obtaining equality between the sexes in terms of reporting plays a crucial role in promoting the game, improving fan base and ensuring sustainable development for women's football in Tamale and beyond.

5.1.1.2 Types of programs

The research unveiled that men's football in Tamale benefits from organized and dedicated hours for live commentaries, panel discussions, previews, and post-match analyses while women's football is often only given brief notices or off-peak spots. This would suggest Fink (2015) was correct in suggesting that women's sport is still considered as a secondary product rather than being treated with equal programme structures and Bruce (2016) correctly notes the way programme format mirrors such male dominated sports culture. Amankwah and Mensah (2020) similarly noted that the Ghanaian media use sophisticated formats are built around men's football whereas women leagues are relegated to obscurity. Hutchins and Rowe (2012), however, argue that online platforms are broadening the formats of women's football content available;

livestreams and independent analysis are available, albeit on a smaller scale than traditional TV and radio. The effect of such programming bias is that women's football is not taken as seriously/entertaining and in turn doesn't draw the numbers for viewers, sponsors or attention. And without consistent titled events or prime-time slots on TV, women's matches still are invisible to the public eye. To cope, media reforms should be undertaken to build on inclusive programming that ensures women's football is viewed as equally competitive and creates growth and gender balance in Ghana sports media.

5.1.1.3 Frequency and duration

The findings revealed that men's football in Tamale received more coverage and airtime by way of news updates, talk shows (current affairs programming) and highlights in repetition, while women's football was hardly covered on some occasions for a paltry one or two minutes. This confirms the findings of Asiedu and Alhassan (2019) that less than 10% airtime was devoted to women sports in Ghana and Amankwah and Mensah(2020's observation on men football domination of media schedules through sustained coverage. Bruce (2016) further emphasised that this imbalance reproduces the gendered norms which regard women's sport to be of less value. However, Hutchins and Rowe (2012) hold the opinion that social networks would then offer women's football more coverage, even if only in little doses at a time and something they believe has narrowed the gap. The idea is that sparse media attention doesn't offer women's football the sustained visibility to garner fan loyalty, appealing advertising , and make its existence a normal fixture in public conversation. Unless women's football is afforded regular, extended airtime on purpose, it will always seem like an afterthought. It is therefore important for the promotion of

gender equality, increased audience appeal and sustainable development in Ghana to ensure an equitable frequency and duration of airtime.

5.1.1.4 Representation and tone

It was found that male football in Tamale is reported with enthusiasm and professionalism etc. while female footage is narrated as struggle, empowerment or novelty and does not elevate sports competition. Toward this, these points serve evidence to Fink (2015) given his contention that narratives surrounding women's sports predominantly support stereotypes and fail to posit the normalcy of excellence, while Bruce (2016) emphasizes its celebration narrative for men in football versus its marginalizing one for women. Similarly, Mensah and Annor (2021) observed that media coverage of women's football in Ghana frequently prioritises issues of gender over merit. However Hutchins and Rowe (2012) argue that other digital media platforms offer a more proportionate portrayal, which communicates women's football players and performances with enthusiasm and confidence. To the extent that those are the kinds of bias in representation and tone that people mean, sure it does matter, because it helps to reinforce the stereotype of women's soccer as not serious business; which means a fewer number of fans, sponsors and institutional attention etc. Disparaging comments or an offhand treatment of the female game deter young girls from wanting to play football professionally and perpetuate societal stereotypes about women's roles in sport, this becomes evident. Encouraging more balanced and celebratory coverage of women's football is therefore crucial to increasing its visibility, encouraging participation and promoting gender equality in Ghanaian sports media.



5.1.2.1 Media Platform Utilization

The research found that men's football in Tamale dominates media such as radio, TV and newspapers including prime time scheduling whereas women's games are generally confined to lower tier mentions or occasional updates on social media. This affirms Amankwah and Mensah (2020) who observed that the media, particularly national and regional broadcasters focus on GPL and Black Stars' coverage in all its forms of transmission, and Asiedu and Alhassan (2019) noted that women sports remain least reported if not missing altogether from scheduled programs. (Jian, 2017) Bruce (2016) also argued that platform prioritization reflects institutional prejudices which inflate men's notability and marginalize women. On the other hand, Hutchins and Rowe (2012) posit that digital media such as Facebook and Twitter have offered novel opportunities for women's football to be viewed even though viewership is not as extensive as traditional outlets. The suggestion is that unequal use of platforms constrains the potential market for women's football and its exposure to commercialisation and public visibility. Closing this gap involves ensuring women's football is purposefully integrated into high-reach channels and utilising digital media to maintain interest and increase accessibility to a wider range of audiences.

5.1.2 Opportunities for radio, TV and social media utilisation

The findings suggest that radio, television, and social media each offer distinct opportunities to broaden football visibility in the Tamale Metropolis, yet their potential to expand attention to women's football depends on how consistently they are used. From an agenda-setting perspective, issues become "important" to audiences when they are repeatedly featured and given prominence; therefore, regular scheduling of women's football content (match previews, reviews, player interviews, and league updates) across radio and television would raise its salience and reduce its

current marginal position in public attention (Schaller *et al.*, 2024; Gilardi *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, social media can accelerate this process by enabling frequent posting, real-time updates, and easy sharing, which helps keep women's football visible even when broadcast schedules are limited (Gilardi *et al.*, 2022).

The opportunity is stronger when platforms work together, rather than separately. Intermedia agenda-setting research shows that content can transfer across media environments, meaning topics amplified on fast, high-frequency platforms can influence what slower, more structured outlets later cover and legitimise (Harder *et al.*, 2017). In practice, if women's football becomes consistently active on social media through highlights, match-day threads, and short analysis clips, it can pressure or encourage radio and TV sports programmes to pick it up as a "talkable" sports item, widening reach beyond existing niche audiences (Harder *et al.*, 2017).

These opportunities are still filtered through media economics. Media outlets tend to prioritise content they believe will reliably attract audiences and advertising value, and sport broadcasting decisions are shaped by market logics tied to viewership, rights value, and advertiser appeal (Mondello and Fortunato, 2022). This means women's football will expand in coverage when media managers see either growing demand, sponsorship potential, or reputational value from supporting more inclusive programming (Mondello and Fortunato, 2022). Hallin's spheres help explain why platform opportunities do not automatically translate into equal attention. Where men's football sits closer to a "taken-for-granted" consensus zone in sports talk, women's football is more likely to be treated as less routine and less legitimate, so it requires deliberate editorial decisions to normalise it as standard sports content (Iseri *et al.*, 2019; Hobbs, 2024). Therefore, the practical opportunity is not only access to platforms, it is using them in a way that shifts



women's football from occasional coverage into routine, expected coverage. (Iseri *et al.*, 2019; Hobbs, 2024).

5.1.2.3 Comparative visibility

Findings from this research study indicates that men's football in Tamale receives relatively high visibility across the board but compared to all other media, they are centre stage and women's football on the other hand is relegated from a main act onto side shows with little or no coverage compared. In view of this Amankwah and Mensah (2020) emphasize that more than 75% of sports coverage concentrate on men leagues and the national team Black Stars, thus reinforcing Asiedu and Alhassan's (2019) observation that women's sport in Ghana represent approximately less than 10% of total sports airtime. Bruce (2016) also observed that the visibility disparity is part of a larger social bias wherein men's sports are considered the cultural norm. By contrast, 'websites' are now deemed to provide women's football with some comparative visibility; news stories circulate beyond traditional media arenas - even if the audience for these remains smaller and questions over legitimacy persist (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). It works like this: Low relative visibility undermines the damn recognition of female players, weakens fans' bases (by making it difficult for them to find women's games), and thus limits sponsorship, thus perpetuating gender inequality. To fill these gaps, intentional editorial reforms and an equitable distribution of the limelight across both men and women are indispensable for equity balance Naka (2001) in order to improve the lot of Women's Football in Tamale.

5.1.2.4 Time slots and content priority

It found that the prime-time SAP of men's football in Tamale, as realized by full programs, analysis and discussion (compared with alike treatment of women's football), was being constantly



prioritized as compared to occasions when WAP rather than SAP is observed. This buttresses Amankwah and Mensah (2020) as the former also noted how in Ghana, sports media program men's football during those hours audiences are high so that revenue can be increased and that of Bruce (2016), who claimed that institutionalized schedule is a microcosm of societal and commercial favoritism for men's games. In addition, Asiedu and Alhassan (2019) further noted that women's football matches are rarely aired on primetime despite its high competitive levels. Hutchins and Rowe (2012), however, imply that women's football can be developed through online mediums free from the constraints of tight production schedules and but albeit limited audiences when compared with traditional media sources. In other words, scheduling women's football at undesirable time-slots by making it an off-peak product diminishes its visibility, alienates the fans and thus contributes to perpetuating its image as something less important (and marginalised). Therefore, a fair distribution of prime slots and strategic programming prioritization are key factors in order to mainstream women football, win sponsorships and promote gender balance in sports media reporting.

5.2 Objective two Question: What are the factors influencing the selection and prioritization of football as a sports topic by sports media in Tamale?

5.2.1 Factors of Agenda Setting in Sports Media

The findings suggest that agenda setting in sports media coverage in Tamale is influenced by a combination of editorial judgement, audience preferences, institutional routines, and commercial incentives. In line with agenda-setting theory, sports media actors act as gatekeepers by selecting which football topics become prominent through frequency and placement in programmes, headlines, and discussions (Almakaty, 2024). This process reflects deliberate prioritisation decisions, where media actors may focus on leagues, teams, and personalities perceived to attract

interest and sustain conversation. Over time, such selections shape the public's perception of what football issues matter most, reinforcing men's football as the default agenda item and limiting the salience of women's football.

The findings are also consistent with the idea that agenda setting is increasingly shaped by the interaction between traditional media and digital channels, where social media can influence what journalists discuss, and journalists can influence what circulates online. Evidence from studies on intermedia agenda-setting indicates that relationships between social platforms and online news can affect issue visibility, suggesting that agenda-setting in the current era is not purely top-down but can be reinforced through cross-platform dynamics (Agyei, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2025). In the Tamale context, this implies that football topics that trend online or draw strong call-in participation are more likely to be elevated into mainstream broadcast discussions, further strengthening their agenda position.

From a media economics perspective, the factors shaping agenda setting are not only editorial but also commercial. Sports media operate within competitive markets where programme survival is tied to listenership and advertising income. Sport broadcasting and sports content are widely recognised as key drivers of audience attention and commercial value within broader media markets, which influences how media houses structure sports programming and select content (Mondello, 2022). Consequently, men's football, assumed to draw larger audiences and sponsorship interest, becomes more attractive to prioritise, while women's football, perceived as less profitable, may receive fewer opportunities for routine coverage unless deliberate institutional changes are implemented.





5.2.1.1 Editorial policies

The findings indicate that editorial policies of sports media in Tamale were predominantly in favour of men's football, which have planned coverage and regular updates as well as detailed analyses but women's football is mostly left out or a small space is reserved for it. This confirmation sides with Adjei and Kwame (2020) who noted, the high percentage of male-dominated editorial board place more emphasis on men's football stories to suit societal norms and Amankwah and Mensah (2020) that found Ghanaian media house commit more than 75% sports content to men leagues. According to Bruce (2016), editorial guidelines are also representative of commercial and cultural biases which underpin men's football as the norm. Yet Hutchins and Rowe (2012) suggest that digital journalism gives rise to less rigid editorial practices, allowing free-lancing journalists and bloggers the possibility to help develop women's football outside 'conventional settings'. The suggestion is that conservative, male-centric editorial policies sustain gender inequality throughout sports journalism through marginalizing women's deeds and restricting their presence. Reform the editorial policies to guide balanced reporting, incorporate gender sensitive guidelines in regulations and develop a space on pages for women soccer is essential in creating equity, generating audience anticipation and promoting women's sport development in Tamale.

5.2.1.2 Public interest

The study revealed that public interest is an important factor of agenda setting in the sports media of Tamale, and that men's football received higher attention since it attracted audience while women's football was marginalized because it has less fan involvement. This is in line with Shoemaker and Reese (2013) which states that content industries often produces products which

audiences prefer in order to increase their media use and Gyan (2021), who argued on the fact that advertisers and sponsors coerce media to concentrate on men's football because it has a stronger public followings. It is the same with Amankwah and Mensah's (2020) assertion by which he furthered that Ghana Premier league has been consistently in attention selection due to its mass appeal. Yet Hutchins and Rowe (2012) specifically claim the new media come to develop public interest by linking niche fans with marginal sports, such as women's football. The inference is that so long as there's always a need to recycle existing public interest, women's football will remain invisible and therefore won't have the opportunity to develop much of a fan base. Proactive efforts to generate more media attention with respect to women's football, will be able to stimulate demand and attract sponsorships in the long-run change preferences in who the audience wish to watch.

5.2.1.3 Journalist biases

The research found that journalist preferences have a bearing on agenda setting in Tamale's sports media with the majority of journalists being more interested in men's football and relegating women's football to second and less newsworthy. This validates the findings of Mensah and Annor (2021), who observed that journalists tend to prioritize women's gender ahead of their performances in reporting about female athletes, and Adjei and Kwame (2020) who identified how male-dominated newsrooms perpetuate structural discrimination against women's sports. Bruce (2016) also argued that these biases are culturally driven by perceptions of football as a male space. But Hutchins and Rowe (2012) assert that free-lance journalists and bloggers, who are outside of corporate media's spotlight, are using digital media to challenge this bias through promoting women's football and celebrating female athletes. The suggestion is journalist

prejudices go unchallenged meaning stereotypes are reinforced, women's football's credibility is diminished and it remains in the shadows. This calls for building capability on gender sensitive reporting, having diverse news room leadership and promoting balanced storytelling that equally features the success of women footballers as men.

5.2.1.4 Sponsorship influences

Women's football is marginalized because it has no attraction for commercial purposes, while men tend to receive huge media coverage due to economic reasons since their sports are economically viable as a business; being so, they stimulate the development of mass media and attract substantial sponsorship from large corporations (Ettanka *et al.*, 2017). The study revealed that sponsorships play pivotal role in shaping agenda setting judgment in Tamale sports media where men football dominate the airwaves, with sponsors showing great interest towards advertising during the airing of male soccer games than females. This corroborates the observation of Gyan (2021) that the corporate world is heavily invested in men's leagues due to their huge following and profitability as well as Amankwah and Mensah (2020), who contend and rightly so that packages sponsored are strongly tied to how popular men's football is in Ghana. Bruce (2016) also focused on how media reports are largely based upon revenue generating potential and contribute to the maintenance of male authority within sport. However, alternative sponsorship methods such as online media platforms offered by digital media mean that women's football may be able to develop niche sponsors and grass roots support which can fall beyond the remit of traditional broadcasting (Hutchins and Rowe 2012). The suggestion is that sponsorship-led media agendas are promoting unequal coverage, restricting the visibility and evolution of women's football. Stimulating appropriate investments, providing incentives to sponsors of women's leagues, and



instituting fair share sponsorship policies in media practice will be crucial to ensuring an equitable representation and sustainable development for women's football in Tamale.

5.2.2 Institutional and Cultural Influences

The findings show that sports media priorities in Tamale are shaped not only by personal editorial decisions but also by institutional and cultural influences that define what is considered legitimate football content. Hallin's spheres of public discourse provide a useful lens for interpreting these influences. Men's football is frequently positioned within a sphere of consensus, where its centrality is assumed and rarely debated, leading to routine and sustained coverage. Women's football, by contrast, is more likely to be positioned within the sphere of legitimate controversy, where its competitiveness, relevance, or audience appeal may be questioned directly or indirectly, resulting in inconsistent coverage and weaker perceived legitimacy (Iseri, 2019). This framework clarifies how newsroom norms and wider cultural expectations create boundaries around what becomes "normal" sports content.

Cultural assumptions about gender roles also shape football narratives and media decisions. Framing theory explains that institutional practices can embed cultural meanings into sports reporting through language, selection of sources, and emphasis on certain story angles. When women's football is framed as novelty, charity, or social development rather than elite competition, it signals lower sporting status and discourages routine investment in coverage (Parry *et al.*, 2021). These framing patterns can become institutionalised, shaping how editors and presenters "learn" what audiences are expected to value, and how football stakeholders anticipate media treatment. Institutional constraints also interact with commercial realities, reinforcing established patterns. In contexts where resources are limited and media houses rely heavily on sponsorship and





advertising, institutional policies may favour content believed to secure financial returns. This aligns with media economics arguments that media routines and institutional choices often reflect market pressures, even when the social outcome is unequal representation across sports and gender categories (Mondello, 2022). Therefore, institutional and cultural influences together create an environment where women's football struggles to gain routine legitimacy within sports media agendas.

5.2.2.1 Influence of football associations

The results of the study brought to light that the football associations in Tamale have much control over media agenda with a focus on men's football through competitions, sponsors, and organized media relations whereas women's football does not get enough institutional advertisement. This is consistent with Adomako Ampofo and Boateng's (2022) explanation that the Ghana Premier League has much more association-driven visibility as opposed to the Ghana Women's Premier League and Mensah and Annor (2021) assertion that institutional choices tend to marginalize women's sports unless they are associated with international competitions. Bruce (2016) also observed that associations, in implementing their own policies, perpetuate the dominance of men's football in funding and media coverage. Counter: Though UNESCO (2021) promotes the continuing reform of wanting the same institutional support as the men's football around the world, and Hutchins and Rowe 2012 claim that digital platforms can circumvent institutional neglect through direct global promotion of women's football. The conclusion here is that the biased promotion of football associations is maintaining the unequal media representation among women players. Indeed, it is essential for associations to reform their policies so that they can facilitate

promotion and cooperation with media on an equal terms, taking into account what it comes to visibility, public interests that could be generated or gender equity of football coverage.

5.2.2.2 Cultural attitudes

The research concludes that, predominant ‘cultural thinking’ in Tamale influences the media’s coverage of football with sport-related activities dominated by men and a limited recognition or space given to women’s participation. This supports Mensah *et al.* (2020) who found that long held traditional Northern Ghanaian attitudes to gender prevented women from getting actively involved in football, and Asiedu and Alhassan (2019) who observed that sports involving women have little cultural value being given with very less media spotlight. Bruce (2016) also claimed that such attitudes perpetuate stereotype that men’s football is more competitive and exciting. Yet, something needs about cultural transformation through media activism in the case of women’s sports equally valuable (UNESCO 2021) reminding us that online forums offer alternative spaces where cultural norms simply are not as rigid (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). The implication being that ingrained cultural perceptions not only hold back progress in women’s football, but also help to feed prejudiced media practices. Changing these perceptions requires an intentional cultural reorientation that can be instilled through inclusive reporting, role models and campaigns to dispel stereotypes and help normalise women’s football in Ghanaian society.

5.2.2.3 Political/regional affiliations

There is a significant political and regional dimension that shapes media reportage in Tamale, men’s teams are used to build relations between groups and practicing Muslim Brotherhood across the divide through the duty of Al- Hajia Mariama Authentic challenging editorials against the power machinery fueling women sport as against men football. This is consistent with Owusu



(2021) that radio and television networks from Accra and Kumasi promote clubs in their proximity than those up north, rowing away northern teams, and Adjei and Kwame (2020), who showed political connections and regional loyalties determine which stories are newsworthy. We continue to [read newspapers, watch TV and] look at sports news where the power relations in society are (too often) reproduced, naturalized even celebrated within sportsmedia context (Bruce 2016). But Hutchins and Rowe (2012) contend that digital platforms diminish the power of political or regional bias by giving voice to the marginalised with even women's teams able to campaign for underdog status. The fact that there is therefore political and regional bias in media practices suggests an ongoing pattern of unequal representation that weakens the support for women's football, as well as a healthy national prominence. It takes having policy reforms, decentralization of media attention and making effort to make sure women's football in places like Tamale get an even coverage irrespective of political or geographical balance.

5.3 To assess how the presence of sports media influences the interest and views of the public about football in Tamale

5.3.1 Causes of Individual Stereotype and Prejudice

The findings indicate that stereotypes and prejudices surrounding women's football in Tamale are linked to both limited visibility and the nature of representations when women's football is covered. Framing theory offers a direct explanation, as it emphasises that media narratives shape interpretation by highlighting particular attributes and meanings. When women's football is framed as less competitive, less entertaining, or as a social rather than athletic activity, such frames become reference points that audiences may internalise and reproduce in everyday discussions (Parry *et al.*, 2021). Over time, this contributes to stereotype formation because frames influence

what people believe women's football "is" and what it can realistically achieve in the sports ecosystem.

These framing effects are compounded by agenda-setting dynamics, because limited coverage reduces opportunities for audiences to encounter alternative, more positive representations. Where men's football dominates routine sports talk, public familiarity grows through repetition, while women's football remains unfamiliar and therefore more vulnerable to dismissive assumptions. Evidence from recent sports news monitoring continues to show that women's sport remains a minority of sports news stories, which reinforces the structural conditions under which stereotypes can persist (Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, 2024). In Tamale, the combination of low visibility and narrow portrayals therefore creates conditions that sustain prejudice. Hallin's spheres help explain how stereotypes are maintained through the boundaries of legitimacy in public discourse. If women's football is positioned as a topic of legitimate controversy rather than deviance, then negative assumptions can remain socially acceptable within sports talk, including in studio discussions and informal football conversations. This discursive positioning can normalise scepticism toward women's football and make prejudice feel "reasonable" rather than biased, strengthening stereotypes at the individual level (Iseri, 2019).



5.3.1.1 Media Impact on Public Opinion

The findings further showed that the reportage of media in Tamale significantly reflects on public attitudes as men's football was considered more professional and entertaining because of sufficient and in depth reporting, while women's football is usually regarded as second class or no

competitive due to lack of adequate coverage. This is consistent with McCombs and Shaw (1972) and their agenda-setting theory, which stipulates the means by which the media focuses attention of the public, as well as Billings *et al.* (2015), who determined that optimistic tone in sports coverage leads to increased fan loyalty and involvement. Similarly, Jones *et al.* (2021) argued that a lack of media inclusions (of women's football) causes spectators to underestimate its quality and importance. Yet, Hutchins and Rowe (2012) contend that digital and social media have begun to challenge this perception, and it is modernizing public memory in terms of creating alternative spaces within which women's footballing achievement can be celebrated. The suggestion being that biased coverage perpetuates stereotypes, dampens fans' support of women's teams and stymies growth. To challenge this, the media could use more inclusive reporting that conveys women's football as competitive enough on par with men; attitudes thereby altered; fan interest raised and gender equality in Ghanaian sport continually enhanced.

5.3.2 Opinion of Female Footballers

The findings suggest that public opinions of female footballers in Tamale are shaped by both the quantity of media attention and the interpretive narratives attached to women athletes. Framing theory explains that portrayals influence how audiences assess competence, legitimacy, and value. If female footballers are primarily discussed through narratives that emphasise gender norms, appearance, or novelty rather than performance, tactics, and professionalism, then public perceptions are likely to undervalue them as serious athletes. Research on women's football media coverage demonstrates that framing choices can shape public perceptions of the women's game and the legitimacy accorded to women players, especially during periods when attention is already limited (Parry *et al.*, 2021).



In addition, Hallin’s spheres provide insight into how opinions are structured by what is considered “normal” within sports discourse. Where men’s footballers are discussed within a sphere of consensus that assumes legitimacy, women footballers may be discussed within a sphere of legitimate controversy, where their sporting status is implicitly treated as conditional. This contributes to uneven respect and reinforces scepticism about women’s footballers’ competence and relevance, even when evidence of performance exists (Iseri, 2019). Therefore, opinions of female footballers are not simply individual preferences, they are shaped by patterned media representations and the discursive positioning of women’s football within sports journalism.

5.3.2.1 The Members’ view of female footballers

The study established that the general perception of female football in Tamale seems to be influenced by limited and partial media reports which portray women’s football as either less competitive or subformant to men’s. This supports Jones *et al.* (2021) who stated that underreporting of women’s football creates devalue for female athletes and Mensah and Annor (2021) who observed that media focus on gender not performance reinforces stereotypes. Bruce (2016) also highlighted how celebratory narratives are limited to men’s football, with women’s involvement often written as the unusual and/or difficult. Yet, as Hutchins and Rowe (2012) suggest, digital platforms create new arenas where female footballers are portrayed in a favourable manner, potentially contributing to changing attitudes among younger audiences. The consequence being poor or minimal representation undermining expectation of recognition of women, fanbase and sponsorship. Addressing public perceptions requires greater balance in media narratives that frames skill, success and professionalism to encourage girls into the game, attract investment and promote gender equality in Ghanaian football.

5.3.2.2 Media trust

The findings based on the empirical data collected, we can conclude that trust towards sport media in Tamale is differentiated, whilst men chiefly trust news regarding their football due to its regularity and specificity this cannot be said of this for women who perceive such type of reporting as unreliable, trivial or tokenistic. This is consistent with the findings of McCombs and Shaw (1972), who argued that when an issue is routinely set on the media agenda it acquires credibility, as well as Billings *et al.* (2015) report, positive and comprehensive coverage fosters audience trust in the media. Similarly, Asiedu and Alhassan (2019) observed that discrimination against women sports diminishes public trust in the fairness of media representation. Yet Hutchins and Rowe (2012) believe digital platforms have played a role in the reestablishment of trust by reporting on women's football directly and transparently without recourse to traditional media gatekeepers. The insinuation is that poor trust in coverage of women and football leads to a lack of legitimacy and interest from the public or sponsors. Establishing balanced, open and enduring coverage from both genders is a key tool in increasing trust of the media and building confidence for fans while promoting gender equity within Ghana's football.

5.3.2.3 Impact on game attendance

According to the findings, imbalance media coverage influence directly attendance at matches in Tamale as attendances at men's matches are seduced by immense publicity while women's games suffer low turnout owing to little advertisement and hype. This supports Billings *et al.* (2015), who also proved that continued media exposure of sports, stimulate fan engagement and attendance; as well as Asiedu and Alhassan (2019) noted that women sports visibility among the public in Ghana is low due to lack of knowledge about match schedules and what some female athletes are able to

do. Amankwah and Mensah (2020) likewise observed that wide media coverage of the Ghana Premier League tends to enhance attendance for men's matches. Yet, as Hutchins and Rowe (2012) highlight there are limited new material benefits from digital platforms and that is certainly evident in terms of media promotion where/because mainstream coverage often significantly out reaches women's match day promotions via livestream broadcasts and twitter updates feature on social media pages. The assumption is that as long as there is not a more equal media promotion of women's football, the struggle for healthy stadium attendance, strong revenue and followers will go on. To confront this, media are required to actively promote women's matches with the same enthusiasm as men's and help expose them to visibility that can increase turnout at games, support sponsorship and advance the development of women's football in Ghana.

5.3.3 The Media Influence in Football Development

The findings demonstrate that media coverage plays a significant role in shaping football development in Tamale through visibility, stakeholder interest, and resource mobilisation. Agenda-setting theory explains that sustained attention drives perceived importance, which influences the priorities of fans, sponsors, and administrators. When men's football consistently dominates programming and discussions, it becomes more likely to attract attendance, institutional focus, and private sector interest, while women's football, receiving less routine attention, struggles to access comparable developmental opportunities. In contemporary media settings, agenda setting can be reinforced through cross-platform interactions where broadcast content and online engagement amplify each other, strengthening the developmental advantage of already dominant football narratives (Agyei, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2025).

From a media economics perspective, media influence on football development is closely tied to sponsorship, broadcasting value, and commercial incentives. Sport broadcasting and related rights, sponsorship, and advertising are widely recognised as key economic components of modern sport systems, shaping which competitions attract investment and visibility (Mondello, 2022; Jayawardhana and Hartono, 2018). In such contexts, media coverage does not only reflect football popularity, it also helps create the conditions for financial growth by signalling which football products are commercially worthwhile. This implies that expanding consistent media coverage of women's football is not only a symbolic inclusion issue but also a practical development strategy that can improve sponsorship potential and institutional support. Framing matters for development outcomes because stakeholders invest not only in what is visible, but also in what appears legitimate and valuable. Positive performance-centred frames can mobilise fan commitment and sponsor confidence, whereas dismissive frames can weaken trust and reduce willingness to invest. Evidence that women's sport continues to receive limited sports news coverage suggests that improving both visibility and narrative quality is necessary for meaningful development outcomes (Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, 2024; Parry *et al.*, 2021).

5.3.3.1 Media-driven motivation

The study demonstrates that media-led motivation is instrumental in stimulating involvement and dedication to the game of football as promoting men's games consistently encourages interest from fans, players and sponsors while neglect of women's football dampens enthusiasm and role models. This supports Billings *et al.*, who demonstrated the importance of positive sports narratives on fans and players in winning loyalty and moral respectively, and Asiedu and Alhassan (2019) who also observed that media coverage for women athletes in Ghana are scanty which could serve as

motivation for both playing body and fans. The prestige of men's football - and thus its symbolic value - is further reinforced by media interest (Bruce, 2016) which serves to favour it as 'the' (in effect only) symbol of footballing excellence. On the other hand, Hutchins and Rowe (2012) argue that social media has started to offer inspirational visibility for women's football, permitting players' achievements to be celebrated beyond mainstream outlets. The insinuation is that, without the sort of purposeful positive coverage their male counterparts continue to receive and benefit from in abundance, women's football risks being sidelined and marginalized nature/nurture swaying female preference away from the beautiful game at a young age as well as a casual-community level. Promoting inspirational stories and successes of women players can also prove to be a great means for motivating the younger generation while advancing women football in Ghana.

5.3.3.2 Community support

The study also revealed that media attention significantly affects community support for football in Tamale, with men's football garnering widespread support via massive publicity and women's football finding it difficult to attract community attention owing largely to the lack of media visibility. This corroborates Adomako Ampofo and Boateng's (2022) finding that heavy media attention on men's leagues in Ghana attracts crowds and sponsorship, and Asiedu and Alhassan (2019), that the underrepresentation of women's sports lessens public discourse, and societal awareness. Bruce (2016) also contended that media framing perpetuates the perception of football as a male dominated pursuit which decreases local enthusiasm for women's teams. Nevertheless Hutchins and Rowe (2012) points out that digital platforms can legitimate grassroots involvement of women's football, with fans and communities brought directly into contact with local clubs.

The message being sent is that if women's football can't secure regular coverage, then it will never have community support; participation rates and corporate sponsorship will plummet, and long-term potential development of the game will be stunted. Intentional media coverage of women's games could bolster local pride in the club, improve community participation and provide the social bedrock needed for an egalitarian rise of football in Ghana.

5.3.3.3 Gender stereotype changes

. The study exposed how the media can play a role in resisting or reinforcing gender stereotypes on football; the current coverage in Tamale served to sustain for example, that Football is predominantly a man's game, not only that but similarly underplaying women's accomplishments. This is consistent with Bruce's (2016) contention that media framing often reinforces established gender norms in sport, and Mensah and Annor's (2021) observation that stakeholders tend to emphasize gender rather than ability in their coverage of women athletes. Fink (2015) is also critical that a portrayal of women's football which tends to focus on narratives of oppression and resistance "re-inscribes stereotypes" as opposed to treating it as just as competitive. Yet they also note that inclusive media practices can proactively subvert stereotypes, by depicting women's football as professional and exciting (UNESCO, 2021: UN Women, 2022) and that digital platforms are already presenting alternative stories about doing gender through on/off-field footage of footballers (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). And the inference is that unless it's challenged, women's football will continue to struggle for support and respect. This would involve the need for a change in media representation through placing greater emphasis on women with substance, talent and professionalism; for this to filter into social narratives which does not

view every action or progression of women footballers as attributed solely to their involvement in sexual activity.



CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the overview, conclusion, recommendation and recommendations for further research. The findings reveals that Ghanaian sports media in Tamale show gender disparities where men's football is given more attention comparatively more than women's football, as there are fewer structured commentaries and analyses, skewed to prime time and day. Influences on agenda-setting included editorial policy, opportunities for sponsorship, print journalists' biases and sociocultural norms that prefer men's football. As a result, public perception and attention are highly influenced towards men's football, resulting in lack of visibility, recognition and sponsorship for women footballers. The media perform a dual role in promoting men's football and re-enforcing gender inequality, effectively constraining the development of women's football as it is happening in Tamale the study finds. Recommendations include supporting gender-sensitive journalism, providing the opportunity to create specialist media for women's football, stimulating equitable support from sponsors as well as use of social media and facilitating the work of female journalists and friendly legal changes. The study also recommends further investigation into differences in media agenda-setting across regions and contribution of digital platforms to promoting diverse football communication in Ghana.



6.1 Summary of Findings

The study examined Ghanaian sports media's aspect of agenda setting in football communication in the Tamale Municipality Northern Region. The results are presented according to the objectives.

Extent of Media Coverage

The study showed considerable discrepancy in media representation of men's and women's football. Men's football was continually offered comprehensive, well-developed attention in format (until recently) on the airwaves, television screen and press alike. Coverage also included live text commentary, previews and reports. On the other hand, women's football failed to get enough coverage. In many cases it was only mentioned in passing or briefly reviewed post event. Not even the triumphs of major women's football players at National and International tournaments got due attention, continuing the tradition of gendered disparity in football media representation.

Determinants of Agenda Setting

A few factors contributed to why football topics made the shortlist. It was that the editors liked men's football because they thought it had more public interest or higher commercial value. Commercial and advertising values linked to the Ghana Premier League which also included the Black Stars fuelled media attention towards male competitions. Journalist biases, institutional frameworks and social norms informed the hierarchy of contents, that more often than not pushed women's football to the periphery.

Institutional and Cultural Influences



The research revealed that the way football was covered in the media is shaped significantly by institution and culture constructs of gender roles. Men from sports bodies and male only editorial circles consolidated the hegemony of men's football stories. The greater difficulty young women experienced in promoting entertainment by means of advertising women's football, can partly be understood within the context of sociocultural presumptions concerning it in Tamale- as suffused with "empowerment" and or "struggle" rather than professional success.

Effect on Public Interest and Perception

However, lopsided media coverage influenced the public perception of football in Tamale. Good, congratulatory men's football coverage led to high public interest and trust, while sidelining of women's football made it less visible and thus had lower viewer numbers and attendance. Frustration was expressed by female footballers that their achievements were unseen and did not provide role modelling for children, discouraging younger girls from playing football as a profession.

Role of Media in Football Growth

While women's football is a marginalised form of media, the study demonstrated that intentional, inclusive media work can affect support and reception in communities, challenging stereotypes and constructing a positive future for women's football. Results revealed that sports media in Tamale serve as conduit to perpetuate gender inequality in football communication. The men's game pervades the media culture because so much money, public investment and cultural hegemony conspire to render a women's game neglected and stunted in its development and place

in society. Such opportunities will only be realized through deliberate policy changes and gender sensitive journalism that can open up the potential spigot for an inclusive development of football.

6.2 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Ghanaian sports media, using the concept of agenda setting influences football communication in Tamale, Northern Region. Actually, the results indicate that media discourse is gender-focused (men's football consistently being prioritised while its female equivalent continues to be marginalised). This skew mirrors commercial and institutional interests as well as long-standing sociocultural norms through which boys and men represent themselves in football. The "agenda-setting function" of the media is a strong determinant of public interest and perceptions. In continually presenting men's football as of greater significance and interest, the media helps perpetuate cultural attitudes that dismiss women's involvement in the game. As such, although female football is achieving great things, it remains invisible to the mainstream. This lack of support doesn't just mean fewer sponsorship and resourcing opportunities but it also discourages younger girls from playing the sport.

The paper argues that, in Tamale, sports media are inherently mediating and constitutive of the promotion of football one hand, and gender relations on the other. First, they effectively convey mass zeal from fans and commercial backers through men's football. Second, however deciding for women's football. If left untouched, this imbalance will derail all genuine efforts to create an inclusive and fair football environment in Ghana. In the end, fair media treatment is about not just representation but recognition. Through presenting alternative stories and making women's football part of the established narrative, sports media has a role in changing perceptions about



gender, increasing public engagement and ensuring that football becomes an instrument for change in Tamale and beyond.

6.3 Recommendations

The following suggestions are made in light of the findings and conclusion of this study to bridge the gap in football media reportage, and promote inclusive sports communication in Tamale.

Sports media organizations should adopt more inclusive editorial practices

Since the study found that sports media in Tamale give greater prominence to men's football than women's football, sports media organizations should make deliberate efforts to adopt more inclusive and balanced editorial policies. Media houses, sports presenters, and journalists should allocate more airtime and discussion space to women's football in order to improve its visibility and public recognition. This recommendation is consistent with the view that media attention shapes issue salience and public awareness

Sports journalists and presenters should increase routine coverage of women's football

The study revealed that women's football is often mentioned only briefly or when major national events occur. Sports journalists and presenters should therefore provide more regular coverage of women's football leagues, matches, players, and related developments. Consistent reporting can help challenge the perception that women's football is less important and can contribute to increased audience interest and engagement. Research has shown that low media exposure contributes significantly to the marginalization of women's sports (Cooky *et al.*, 2015; Fink, 2015).



Football authorities should strengthen collaboration with the media

Football administrators and sports authorities, including those responsible for women's football, should strengthen their engagement with sports media organizations. This can be done by providing timely match information, media briefings, player profiles, and promotional materials on women's football activities. Improved collaboration between football authorities and the media may help increase the quantity and quality of coverage given to women's football.

Advocacy groups and stakeholders should promote awareness of gender equity in sports media

The study showed that cultural perceptions and established media routines contribute to the limited visibility of women's football. Stakeholders such as football associations, gender advocacy groups, and civil society organizations should promote awareness of gender equity in sports reporting. Sensitization programmes, media campaigns, and stakeholder dialogue can help encourage more balanced representation of men's and women's football in the media (Gill, 2007).

Further studies should expand the scope of research

This study focused on sports media agenda-setting in Tamale. Future researchers should conduct similar studies in other regions of Ghana in order to compare patterns of football media coverage across different contexts. Future studies may also adopt mixed methods approaches to examine both the content and audience effects of sports media coverage of men's and women's football.

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APPENDICE A- Interview Guide

Title: *Exploring Sports Media Coverage and Its Impact on Public Interest and Perception of Female Football in Tamale*

Target Participants

1. Sports journalists (radio, TV, print, online platforms)
2. Sports media executives and editors
3. Football stakeholders (club managers, players, coaches)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This interview seeks to understand how sports media in Tamale selects and prioritizes football content and how this affects public perception of the sport. Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Do I have your consent to proceed with this interview?

Section 1: Media Coverage of men and women Football in Tamale

- 1) How would you describe the level of media coverage given to female football-related issues in Tamale?
 - 2) Can you estimate the frequency with which women's football (e.g., Ghana Women's Premier League) is featured compared to men's football?
 - 3) What types of stories dominate coverage of men's and women's football respectively? (e.g., match reports, interviews, controversy)
 - 4) What do you think accounts for the differences in coverage between the two?
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Section 2: Factors Influencing Topic Selection in Sports Media

- 5) What factors influence the choice of football stories or issues to report on in your media outlet?
- 6) To what extent do commercial interests (advertising, sponsorships) shape football media coverage?
- 7) Does audience interest in men's vs. women's football influence editorial decisions?
- 8) Are there editorial policies that guide coverage of women's football specifically?
- 9) How accessible is information or content about women's football in Tamale?

Section 3: Media Framing and Public Perception of Football

- 10) In your opinion, how does the media's current coverage affect public interest in women's football in Tamale?
- 11) Does the way women's football is portrayed in the media affect how seriously the public takes it? If yes, how?
- 12) Have you observed a difference in fan engagement or match attendance when there is more coverage of women's football?
- 13) What kind of media framing (e.g., empowerment, challenges, potential) is usually used when covering women's football?
- 14) How do social media platforms contribute to shaping perceptions of women's vs. men's football in Tamale?

Section 4: Recommendations for Improving Football Media Coverage in Tamale

- 15) What changes do you recommend to improve the visibility of women's football in Tamale?
- 16) What role should media institutions play in promoting gender-balanced football coverage?
- 17) How can football stakeholders (e.g., clubs, associations) collaborate with the media to improve coverage of women's football?

Thank you for your time and insights.

Your responses will help us understand the role of sports media in promoting football in Tamale.

