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## THE EXCESSIVE COMMERCIALIZATION OF CONTENT IN SPORTS JOURNALISM: PERSPECTIVES ON A TRANSFER OF MEANING

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### Abstract

*Aim.* The article analyzes how a journalistic product can be converted into a commercial product by instrumentalizing editorial content for profit, within a managerial strategy based on focused marketing objectives. This takes the form of selecting the market segment considered to be the most effective, following the identification of the majority preferences of the target audience.

*Methods.* The methodology used includes a longitudinal study based on quantitative data analysis, complemented by a critical analysis of the results, interpreted from both a journalistic and marketing perspective. The study is motivated by the media event represented by the latest printed edition of Gazeta Sporturilor; highlights the differences between the logic of the media and the logic of public information and aims to capture the effects generated by this mix within the editorial approach specific to sports journalism.

*Results.* The results indicate the profiling of a transfer of metonymic meaning, which occurred in the context of a discursive construction defined by the mechanisms of agenda setting, priming and framing, whose effect can materialize in a semantic disjunction in the field of sport.

*Conclusions.* The massive presence of monosport content, a long, constant and repetitive process, with daily frequency, amplified by the effects of agenda setting, priming and framing, has had a major impact in the media space and further, a considerable effect on the public. This dynamic carried out in the media sphere had as an indirect consequence the construction of an unprecedented discursive reality in the field of local sports journalism

*Keywords:* media logic, public interest, journalism, marketing, sports.

### Introduction

Gazeta Sporturilor, GSP, last appeared in print format on October 31, 2023. GSP was not only the longest-running sports newspaper, but also one of the most famous local publications, with a history of almost 100 years. The cessation of the appearance in print, but also the controversies that preceded it, is more than an organizational management event. This major change implicitly entails the need for a retrospective analysis of the editorial evolution, both of the Gazeta Sporturilor publication and of the local sports journalism as a whole.

Just two months before the 2024 Olympic year, the financiers of Gazeta Sporturilor decided that the publication would only operate in digital format. The reasons given were the financial inefficiency of the classic format and the need to approach lucrative content, focused on popular articles, generated from the perspective of data-driven journalism (Obae, 2023). The journalists explicitly drew attention to the fact that the real reason for the closure of the newspaper was the interference of the commercial in the editorial, the financing of GSP being provided by the betting industry.

The scale of this event was unprecedented and went far beyond the limits of the sports press. The right to free expression was at the center of the public debate and thus marked the historical evolution of the newspaper until the last moment. Despite the major importance of this controversy, there remains at least one particularly significant aspect from a media perspective. The publication Gazeta Sporturilor became known under its generalist title regarding the editorial approach, but the last pages of print offered the public a quasi monosport content, with eight out of 10 news dedicated to football, although the public's preferences in this case are well below the weight of an absolute majority.

### 99 years of publishing history in sports

Gazeta Sporturilor appeared in September 1924 and operated until January 1947. In the post-communist era, it reappeared with the subtitle "independent daily" and as a symbol of the liberation of the sports movement, in December 1989 (Postolache, 1997). At the national level, the openness to sports-inspired journalism was unprecedented. By 1993, 118 periodicals had appeared, of which 66 were published in Bucharest alone. The overall picture is also very important. The 1990s, marked by technological development and media proliferation, propelled football into the public's attention more than ever, especially due to the fact that at the 1990 edition of the World Cup, Eastern European countries, including Romania, had the opportunity to participate for the first time after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

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In Romania, between 1990 and 1995 alone, seven publications appeared whose title began with *football* (Postolache, 1997). Of these, the first belonged to the *Gazeta Sporturilor*, *Fotbal*, in 1990 (Postolache, 1997). In 1993, Sportul Românesc edited *Fotbal and rebus magazin*, and in 1995, *Fotbal: la noi și în lumea bună* (Postolache, 1997).

However, despite the initial expansion, by 1997 the sports press had seen a steady decline in annual appearances. The course of *Gazeta Sporturilor* is relevant for this period and defining for the subsequent one. The impact of this traditional publication on the Romanian publishing landscape can only be understood in the context of the entire local media industry. But beyond the external, conjunctural factors, the extent of this influence can be accepted as an effect of practicing the same type of editorial management, carried out by the same editorial team over 32 years, from the beginning of the post-communist press, to the transformation of GSP into "the most important local sports brand" (Ringier, 2018), as it has been called in the last five years.

*Gazeta Sporturilor*, in addition to the reputation acquired throughout the historical journey, but also the quality of the articles dedicated to football, has distinguished itself by practicing investigative journalism, a genre initially focused on the football environment. In 2006, *Gazeta Sporturilor* started *The TransferFile*, an investigation that materialized in 2011 by summoning eight important people from local football to court and convicting them three years later (Crăițoiu, 2024). The anti-corruption revelations in the world of sports concerned two other major cases with government involvement: the *Ridzi-2 Mai* and *Gala Bute* cases. The investigations of *Gazeta Sporturilor* continued with three other investigations outside the sports field, more precisely, in the medical field: *Colectiv*, *Hexi Pharma Disinfectants* and *Secureanu - Malaxa Hospital*.

### **The popularity of football, an atypical local effect**

Meanwhile, globally, both the media and sports in general, but especially football, have evolved to industry standards, and the relationship between the two fields has turned into a symbiotic one. Moreover, complementarity has become a defining characteristic for the partnership between football and media (Fazenda & Carvalho, 2018), as media visibility has proven to be important for generating revenue and developing football as a business (Barrio & Horrillo, 2019).

In Romania, the presence of football has come to dominate the media channels regardless of the format and theme of the press channel. In the 2004 Olympic year, a study by the National Audiovisual Council, CNA, stated that 90% of the sports news broadcast by television is dedicated to football (CNA, 2004). Two international studies conducted by the International Sport Press Survey, which took into account the share of sports news published in three daily newspapers, showed that in Romania, the presence of football is overwhelming. After the first study conducted in 2005 (Jørgensen, 2005) the share of football had increased by 10 percent and reached 85% in 2011. The study was particularly relevant in the international context as well. The Romanian press ranked first in this regard, ahead of countries with historic performances in football (Horky & Nieland, 2013). In 2024, a study by MediaTrust reconfirmed the dominant presence of football, this time also manifested in the online environment. In a single month, without football competitions, between January 1 and 31, football benefited from 2,429 news and articles, both in traditional media and on social media platforms. The next positions were occupied by handball and basketball, with 630 and 308 mentions, respectively (Stănescu, 2024).

All these data, even if they do not have a constant periodicity, offer solid benchmarks for analyzing the monosport trends in the Romanian press, the origin of their manifestation and especially the social and economic conjuncture that led to their generalization and stabilization. The consolidation of monosport content was based on a product-focused marketing strategy aimed at ensuring the most effective commercial results. The choice of this product was based on the public's preferences regarding their favorite sports. As it happens in most countries, and in Romania, football is in first place in the top of these preferences.

### **Marketing of advertising content**

The hypothesis that the prioritization of football is commercially instrumented starts from a few clear premises. Media content addresses football in a share of almost 90%, although this sport currently does not exceed 30% in public preferences. The support of this hypothesis is based on a longitudinal study meant to present the evolution of the editorial content of *Gazeta Sporturilor*, from the perspective of two major parameters, represented by football and non-football, and expressed by the weight of the related articles or pages. Specifically, this study represents the completion of an analysis initially conducted after the 2008 Olympic Games. The quantitative analysis focuses on the articles published each Olympic year, on July 1, from 1992 until the Tokyo Olympic Games, in 2021, the last edition contemporary with the printed pages of the *Gazeta Sporturilor*. The only exception is July 2, 2012, determined by the newspaper's non-appearance on the previous day. The selection criterion of these editions starts from the premise that in an Olympic year, the attention paid to sports in general is greater than usual. The date of July 1 represents exactly the middle of the calendar year, even if each Olympic year coincides with the European Football Championship. From this point of view, the data obtained becomes all the more significant regarding editorial content trends. Also, in 2012, the daily edition of GSP was accompanied by a supplement dedicated to the London Olympic Games. This initiative draws attention to the editorial effort, but at the same time, it emphasizes the existing differentiation between football and non-football.

In the last edition of the *Gazeta Sporturilor*, 16 pages printed in Tabloid format, football had a share of 83%, and other sports registered 17%, in. This discrepancy falls within the standard format described by the analysis of the weights valid for the last three editions of the Olympic Games. After a peak of almost 92% recorded in 2004, at the Athens Olympic

Games, Gazeta Sporturilor presents a standardized format on the structure of content focused on football, with a share of about 85%.

In 1992 and 1996 the relationship between football and other sports was obviously much more balanced. The next four years were marked by the entry into the market of the daily newspaper Sportul Românesc, a newspaper that relied from the beginning on the superior attention paid to football, with a share of 55.5% in 1992, followed by an increase to 78.2% in 1996 (Petrică, 2011). Arrived at ProSport in 1997, the editorial team of Sportul Românesc maintains this approach in 2000, with a football presence of 76.5% (Petrică, 2011). The value of ProSport's football share is very close to that of Gazeta Sporturilor, of 75.8%. The peak of approximately 92% coincides with the presence of the editorial team transferred from ProSport to Gazeta Sporturilor, in 2003.

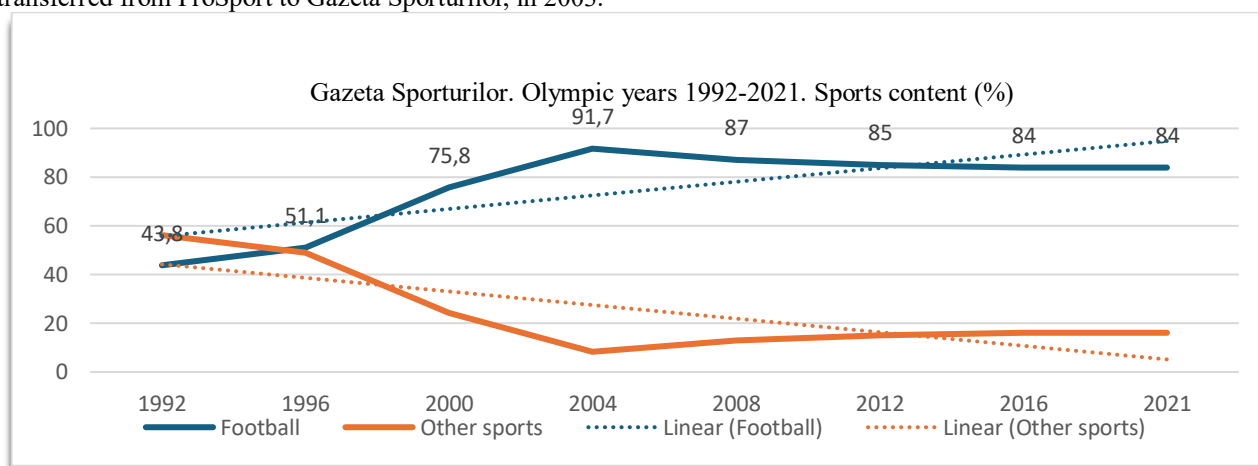


Figure 1. Gazeta Sporturilor. Football and other sports

Despite the steady increase in the share of content dedicated to football, beyond 90% in 2004, and its stabilisation at around 85% in the following years, public preferences for football were generally below 40%, according to Gallup 2003, IRES 2011 and 2014, New Challenge 2018, (Dumitru, 2018), IPSOS 2022, (Grimm & Jackson, 2022) and INSCOP 2024 polls. The most recent study conducted in 2024 by INSCOP Research showed that only 29.6% of Romanians prefer football. The only exception was recorded in 2011, with a peak of 42%. This statistical leap can only be explained by the intense media coverage of *The Transfer File*. The investigation focused on the football field, offered multiple declination values from a journalistic perspective, able to attract the interest of the public, beyond sports preferences. Very importantly, the year 2011 was irrelevant in terms of football results, but with a lot of performances recorded in fencing, boxing, canoeing, rowing, gymnastics, table tennis, cycling, totaling World and European titles, gold, silver and bronze medals (Chirea, 2012). In fact, this is a typical situation for the Romanian publishing landscape regarding the coverage of sports performances.

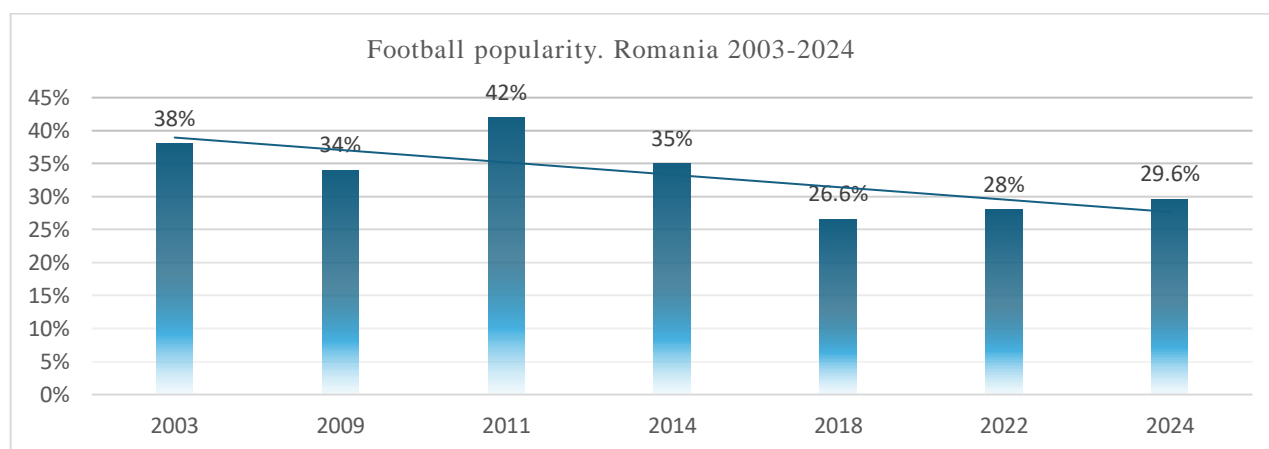


Figure 2. Football popularity

The cleavage presented above highlights the editorial focus on content designed to attract the largest audience according to their preferences towards a particular sport. This approach is significant from a commercial perspective and very similar to a marketing strategy aimed at driving sales growth – both those of the newspaper itself and those of the

advertising space. In this case, the identification of the public interested in football appears from the beginning as the most effective market segment. Moreover, by identifying the preference segment, we are actually in the area of segment marketing, considered more advantageous than mass marketing, a situation in which the company can opt for focused marketing, which implies positioning itself on the most consistent market segment (Kotler & Keller, 2008). Market segmentation does not only involve identifying the most profitable buyers, but also the fact that a company will relate to these buyers with all its resources, the target segment thus becoming the selected market segment (Balaure et al., 2022).

The editorial structure of *Gazeta Sporturilor* seen from the perspective of adapting resources to the preferences of the targeted buyers, also outlines the vision of a market-oriented strategic management. In the week of the confrontation between Steaua and Middlesbrough in the semi-final round of the 2006 UEFA Cup, *Gazeta Sporturilor* had 18 journalists designated for football and only six for all other sports, not considering the top editorial management, the editorial staff, the special reporters and the zonal correspondents (*Gazeta Sporturilor*, 2006). Considering the massive share of articles dedicated to football, as it results from the longitudinal study above, we can conclude that this editorial structure has been a constant one throughout the editorial activity of *Gazeta Sporturilor*. Consequently, the concentrated marketing achieved by targeting the most profitable audience, selected on the basis of preferences, and reporting to this audience through the vast majority of editorial resources, confirms the commercial instrumentalization of football and its use as an editorial product.

### The editorial newsgathering and selection process

The commercial approach to content and its integration into a market-oriented strategic vision is not a novelty in the practice of journalism. Specifically, both can work together in the editorial area. The mix between marketing and journalism generated in the 1990s the phenomenon of *new news*, or what we currently commonly designate by the term *infotainment*. The emergence of this phenomenon was determined by the economic constraints in which media companies operate, obliged to focus on that news that address the majority in order to sell news or advertising space on advantageous terms (Christians et al., 2009).

The process of producing news is a complex one, at the center of which are the criteria for selecting information. The stages of the process are predetermined according to the approach and implicitly the goal. The journalistic version always starts from the event, and through the selection of information, subsequently ordered by specific editing techniques, the news will be structured in such a way as to attract the interest of readers (McQuail, 2002, cited in Bârgăoanu, 2006). The marketing vision involves reversing the stages. The goal is to streamline the process by prioritizing interest in news, so that the information reaches a majority of the public as commercially profitable as possible (McQuail, 2002, cited in Bârgăoanu, 2006). The event itself will thus become a created one, different from an actual event, the one usually at the origin of classic news. In the case of *Gazeta Sporturilor*, and relevant for sports journalism, we are witnessing a similar process regarding the marketing approach. The major difference lies in the substitution of interest in news with the public's preferences for football, more precisely an in-depth integration of focused marketing, aimed at providing even greater accuracy in targeting the targeted segment.

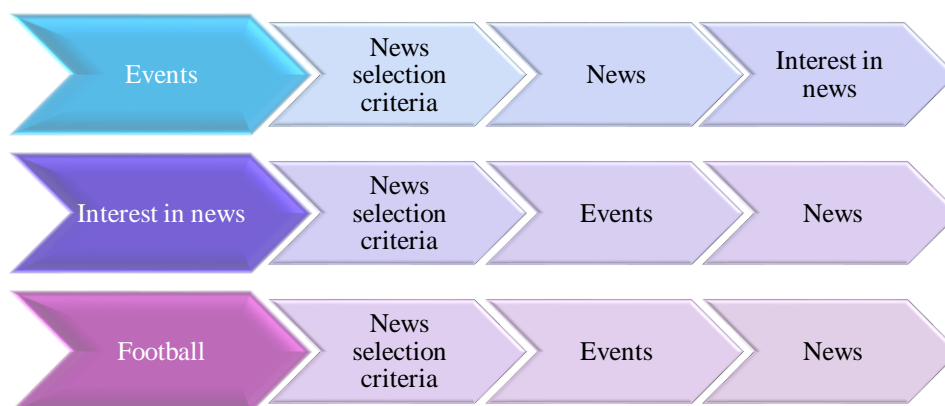


Figure 3. The journalistic and marketing approach, followed by the marketing approach in sports journalism

The commercial instrumentalization of football had the expected result. Obviously, the successive takeovers and disposals of the same publishing titles, carried out by the same companies within a few years, had a lucrative motivation. In an industry deeply marked by the prioritization of advertising revenues (Radu & Preoteasa, 2012), the turntable of these fluctuations has been the promotion of editorial management focused on football as a media product. This characteristic of the domestic press is in line with the global trends of the 2000s, a period known for the debates on the prevalence of marketing logic in the media, to the detriment of the model inspired by the public interest. In *the media logic*, press companies were seen only as lucrative enterprises with the need for content that was interesting to the public, commercially viable (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019).



### Newspaper and television, a successful partnership

Seen from the perspective of the marketing of content through football, the magnitude of this phenomenon, closely related to the prominence of *Gazeta Sporturilor*, can only be understood in its evolutionary context as a whole. The last two decades in GSP's history, starting from 2003 until the last appearance in print, in 2023, are strongly linked to the existence of two other local sports newspapers, *Sportul Românesc* and *ProSport*, influenced in turn by the impact of the most important private television in Romania, Pro TV. The analysis of these connections is relevant because their convergence reflects the emergence of the journalistic phenomenon around football, generated by its commercial instrumentalization.

Initially a sports and news channel, developed by the American group Central European Media Enterprises, CME, the Pro TV station became shortly after its launch as a generalist television, in 1995, the national market leader. Right from its establishment, Pro TV has broadcast the show *Procesul Etapei*, a production made in collaboration with the daily newspaper *Sportul Românesc*. Similar in format to the show *Biscardi's Trial*, broadcast by the Italian channel Tele+, *Procesul Etapei* was a production dedicated exclusively to football, in a special context from a media point of view.

*Sportul Românesc* was financed in 1991 by Dumitru Dragomir, a member of the Professional Football League, who became vice-president in 1992 and president of PFL in 1996. Thus, the journalistic sources and implicitly, the program resources of the *Procesul Etapei*, generated exclusives without a real competition in the fight for the audience.

In 1997, the editorial team of the daily newspaper *Sportul Românesc* resigned for the establishment of the daily newspaper *ProSport*, as part of the Media Pro company, together with Pro TV. The association of resources, their synergistic amplification at the level of the trust, but also the exit from the obvious area of the conflict of interest - with the detachment from the former employer, official of the LPF and at the same time signatory in the pages of the newspaper - (Dragomir, 1995) had the effect of propelling *ProSport* as an audience leader at national level.

With this status, *ProSport* became the property of Ringier in 2003, in exchange for 6,500,000 dollars (*Gazeta Sporturilor*, 2007). As a result of this takeover, the editorial team of *ProSport* transferred to *Gazeta Sporturilor*, owned by the Intact Media trust. After another 15 years, in 2018, Ringier bought *Gazeta Sporturilor* for 2,000,000 euros from the Intact group (Ionescu, 2018) and this time managed to keep the editorial team. In February 2023, the year of its cessation, *Gazeta Sporturilor* occupied the fourth position in the top of the most cited publications in the written press, preceded by two general newspapers and one sports and news newspaper (Stănescu, 2023).

### The 1990s and the impact of television image

The triggering moment of this dynamic is marked by the show *Procesul Etapei*, initially produced by *Sportul Românesc* in collaboration with the sports channel C31, which later became Pro TV. The exposure offered by the most watched television station in Romania had a major importance on the evolution of sports journalism and implicitly of GSP. Pro TV, the first private television station at national level, transformed the audiovisual landscape in Romania, a fact made possible as a result of a marketing strategy aimed at increasing proximity to the public (Stavre, 2004). Pro TV's strategy was to target the most lucrative segment of the public, those up to 35 years old, and its success, based on a Western format with a focus on information and entertainment, resulted in the model being taken over by all other televisions, while the promotional campaigns carried out through large-scale events were "able to fix in the public consciousness the special identity of the station" (Coman, 2003).

In 1998, about two years after its launch, the talk-show *Procesul Etapei* ranked second in the top of the debates broadcast by ProTV and fifth at national level (Marinescu et al., 1999). Very importantly, until 2003, football was at the center of these debates produced with image resources provided by Pro TV, the channel that owns the television rights of Division A, the current Superliga. The fact that the talk-show *Procesul Etapei* appeared in the most prolific period of television is even more relevant. The pre-eminence of the talk show as a journalistic genre in an age of *telecracy* as it was called by French academics of the 1990s, even if it is questionable, remains significant for the trajectory of famous figures involved in football, such as Silvio Berlusconi, Bernard Tapie and Fernando Collor de Mello, whose political success is obviously linked to the impact of television (Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 2005).

We can accept that in a country like Romania in the 1990s, when television was at the center of public attention, and the national television, TVR, the only one existing, went from a broadcast of 1,795 hours in 1989 to 12,875 hours in 1995 (Coman, 2003), the notoriety obtained with the support of the most powerful commercial TV station in history, Pro TV mattered a lot in the vectorization of the predominantly football content in the local publishing landscape.

The station's status as a promoter of commercial television in an industry at the beginning of its journey suggests the implicit attraction of a competitive advantage recognized in the business environment as a *first mover*, according to which the first company to enter the market will dominate a large part of the segment of that business. Controversially, this principle is not always considered as a guarantee of success, but in the case of GSP it is relevant. The real sources of competitive advantage are accepted as economies of scale, customer captivity - from the perspective of costs and consumption habits, costs and government protection, while the sources considered illusory, including the *first mover*, are investment strength, brand and skills - more precisely, managerial experience and creativity (Knee, Greenwald, & Seave, 2009).

### Gazeta Sporturilor brand

GSP circumscribes all sources of competitive advantage valid for the second option, which suggests that in this situation we are dealing with a competitive advantage that is as real as possible. First of all, this reality is confirmed by the success of mobility at the top of sports publications occasioned by industry management events. Secondly, however, at least as significant is the synergy of the sources that made this success possible: the *first mover*, the brand and the management skills, including the editorial one. The *Procesul Etapei* show, the first successful football talk-show, was actually an extension of the Pro TV brand. The weekly debate entered the public's consciousness through the identity of Pro TV and gained credibility thanks to the highest level of production standards, for five consecutive years.

We can admit that the exposure itself did not only function as an image association, but also as a brand association. Theoretically, this type of association represents all the links existing in the public's memory with a certain brand and constitutes a part of its value (Cătoi & Teodeorescu, 2004). As a result of this association, it can be considered that the notoriety of the main brand played a significant role in launching and promoting a brand with its own identity, marked by an original journalistic style regarding the approach to the football phenomenon.

In the space described by the media mimicry characteristic of the post-communist media, not only the written press looked at football as a guarantee of editorial success. All televisions have relied on the commercial effect of football as the main and exclusive catalyst of the audience through sport. In 2012, a study conducted among young people aged between 11 and 18 showed that football is the most popular sport in a share of 96.9%, that due to its visibility it is perceived as the sport with the highest performance – the first option, 35.5%, but also that through its "social valorization" it represents a major benchmark for its practice in case of choosing one of the sports (Dumitriu, 2014).

Indeed, in 2024, almost half of the athletes registered in Romania, 49.05%, were athletes of the Romanian Football Federation, after, compared to 1992, the total number of registered athletes registered a modest increase, compared to the considerable increase in the number of footballers (National Institute of Statistics, 2025). Much more recently, in July 2025, the cumulative rating recorded by the public broadcaster TVR and the sports extension TVR Sport, at the broadcast of David Popovici's race for the gold medal in the 200-meter freestyle event at the World Swimming Championships in Singapore, did not exceed 1%, and in the segment of young people aged between 15 and 24, the audience was zero (Udrea, 2025).

### Football and sport, a discursive reconstruction

The social valuation determined by the visibility of sports branches in the public space is obvious, but the lack of interest of the young generation suggests more than that. It is about the existence of a complex mechanism, developed over time, and signaled by the media appearance of the phrase "*football and sport*". The formulation surprises both by the frequency of its appearance in the online environment, but especially by the diversity of social fields in which it is noticed. Beyond sports publications (Gazeta Sporturilor, 2023; Hitruc, 2025) the phrase "*football and sport*" can be seen in both the commercial and educational spheres (Edupedu, 2024). "*Football and sport*" suggests the existence of discursive representations and meanings that have generated a semantic differentiation between football and sport, and over time a conceptual disjunction.

Media discourse expresses meanings, symbols and values, by assembling information in a "scheme of interpretation of the event" and implies a simultaneous positioning towards sources and the public (Beciu, 2009). At the same time, according to the structuralist view of the role and sense of discourse, *meaning* is an effect of the accepted signification as a property of language, from which it follows that the external world "is understandable" only as a product of language (Fiske et al., 2001, cited in Preda, 2006). In this context, the daily frequency of representations coming from the same sports branch over decades suggests the profiling of a monosport stereotype. Especially if we take into account that social representations involve a constant and long process, with a phased evolution; from the organization of cognitive opinions and affective states to the propagation of structured visions about a subject to a target audience and to propaganda (Moscovici, cited in Radu et al., 2015).

We can admit that this transfer of meaning was supported, indirectly, also by the confusion produced at the intersection between the title of the most important local sports brand, Gazeta Sporturilor, and its monosport content. The title of Gazeta Sporturilor implies that from a thematic point of view, the publication has a diversified agenda regarding the approach to sports, and implicitly, a multisport content. In this context, the honesty of the founder of the first sports publication in Romania, *Sportul*, published in 1880, with a predominantly equestrian content, is remarkable. With the declared desire to prevent any error regarding the title, C. Blaremborg specifies the generic meaning of the word *sport*, with reference to all the sports branches it includes, precisely in order to differentiate from the restricted scope of the content addressed, preferentially focused on "hippic" aspects (Postolache, 1997). After more than a century, the issue of the name of a publication remains just as important from the perspective of its implications. In addition to the fact that, from a market perspective, a media brand is used as an indicator in the processing of the content of the message (Laaksonen et al., 2019), the name can impress us through traditional associations, according to the Juliet principle, or it can communicate an idea to us through phonetic symbolism, according to the Joyce principle, and thus remains an immutable part of the marketing mix (Collins, 1977).

The above statements become very relevant in the case of Gazeta Sporturilor. Founded in 1924, with a 99-year tradition, GSP has been a brand of Romanian sports journalism and has evolved to the status of leader in the field, kept

until its last appearance in print, in 2023. But from the perspective of content, throughout the historical course, it has transformed from a multisport newspaper into an almost exclusively football publication. In this context, we can consider that the semantic differentiation between football and sport occurred against the background of the logical association between the newspaper's title and its quasi-football content. This dynamic was favored by the *Gazeta Sporturilor* brand, which, in addition to traditional associations, constantly acted as a cognitive mediator, and the whole process resulted in a transfer of metonymic meaning. At a conceptual level, as a result of media dominance, football has replaced the idea of sport as a whole, and the other sports, seen as *extra-football*, have taken on a secondary meaning and a peripheral role, but have kept their sports referential, under the generic name of *sport*.

### **The case of *Gazzetta dello Sport***

Formally, the situation is apparently similar to that of the thematic newspaper *Gazzetta dello Sport*. Published in April 1896, the Italian publication is a globally recognized brand. Its content is also mostly football, but despite this similarity, there are at least two major differences. These appear as a result of the number of pages of the newspaper. Specifically, even if the obvious majority is dedicated to football, there is enough editorial space for the presence of the other sports. In addition, the sports branches approached surprise by their diversity and implicitly, by the value of information. The *Gazzetta dello Sport* has 56 pages and is printed in Berliner format, an intermediate size between Broadsheet and Tabloid.

A very good indication is the edition of April 26, 2025. It was a special day, marked by the funeral of Pope Francis. From a journalistic point of view, this edition has a special significance, since the event in Rome presented in the pages of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, confirms the mission of the press regarding the public interest, regardless of its thematic sphere. Of the total of 56 pages, four were dedicated to this event, 34 went to football, and nine dealt with current events in Italian and international sport. The rest of the pages were divided between the most important foreign news, sports-inspired fashion, TV program and advertising. With the mention that of the 34 pages, two had as their approach fashion and the history of football footwear, the rest of the pages dedicated to football focused on Serie A teams, but also dealt with international competitions. Articles on the other sports reported events in cycling, motorcycling, basketball, volleyball, tennis, athletics, swimming and judo, inspired by global or national events.

Taking into account all 34 pages, *Gazzetta dello Sport* had a share of football content of 79%, and the other sports accounted for 21%. Although the presence of the other sports is obviously superior, overall, the two weights are comparable to those of the *Gazeta Sporturilor*, as they appear in the last print edition; but the journalistic impact is much different. In total, compared to the 16 pages of the *Gazeta Sporturilor*, the *Gazzetta dello Sport* offers 40 pages more, and the editorial space displayed by the Berliner format is much more generous than the GSP Tabloid one. The volume of information is much higher, and the quality of the engagement elements is spectacular.

Looking at the majority shares of football content in the two newspapers, a major difference appears again. With one circumstantial exception, Romanian football did not achieve any real performance at international level, but it benefited from massive media exposure, especially after 2000. The only notable results are the qualifications for the final tournaments of the World Championships, but the last of these occurred more than a quarter of a century ago, in 1998. The exception is represented by Steaua Bucharest's triumph in the European Champions Cup in 1986. In the midst of the communist period, Steaua, the team of the Ministry of National Defense, actually functioned as a half of national team camouflaged in a departmental team, thus used as an image vector for the single party at the international level, while the other half, Dinamo Bucharest, belonged to the Ministry of the Internal Affairs.

### **Conclusions**

We can accept that the narrative generated by the media exposure initially offered by the notoriety of the most watched television station in Romania, but also by the transfers and takeovers of media companies worth millions of dollars, at the center of which the same editorial team was for almost two decades, amplified the notoriety and credibility of *Gazeta Sporturilor*, and implicitly, commercial instrumentalization of football.

The massive presence of monosport content, a long, constant and repetitive process, with daily frequency, amplified by the effects of agenda setting, priming and framing, has had a major impact in the media space and further, a considerable effect on the public. This dynamic carried out in the media sphere had as an indirect consequence the construction of an unprecedented discursive reality in the field of local sports journalism.

The almost exclusive focus on football over at least twenty years suggests the emergence of a transfer of metonymic meaning whose result may be the semantic differentiation between football and *sport*, an *umbrella term* meant to generically group all the other branches considered to be of secondary importance. Amplified by the phenomenon of media mimicry characteristic of the post-communist period, the scope of football content has constantly increased, in the absence of notable results and especially, despite the significant performances regarding the tradition of the other sports successfully practiced in Romania.

However, the single-sport prioritization of the editorial agenda, both in terms of approach and use of resources, implies the reduction of the publishing space necessary to reflect the events generated by the other sports, which means that the business logic becomes lucrative to their detriment, even if public information supported by exclusively journalistic criteria remains a priority at the formal level.



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