



## EMERGING SOCIAL IMAGINARIES IN WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

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### KEYWORDS

*Imaginary  
Discourse  
Social Networks  
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Female Gender  
Advertising*

### ABSTRACT

*Social imaginaries are conceived as schemes that allow us to perceive something as real, explain it and intervene operationally in what contemporary societies consider to be reality. This work seeks to infer the social representations that emanate from the advertising strategies that were produced and disseminated by UEFA (Union of European Football Associations), as well as by its official sponsors, in the promotion of the women's football championship: UEFA Women's Euro 2022. The results demonstrate the social function that brands acquire when representing, legitimizing and promulgating a transnational and globalized vision of women in football and in society.*

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## 1. Introduction

This article aims to examine, interpret, and describe the social imaginaries and representations that proliferate women's professional football, predominantly through a socio-semiotic and cultural analysis of advertising discourse.

The primary objective of this study is to deduce the meanings and social representations stemming from the advertising strategies produced and disseminated by the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) and its official sponsors in the organization, promotion, and celebration of the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 international women's football championship.

Building upon this sporting event, this paper examines football as a practice that effectively integrates and transforms aspects of shared social reality. From this perspective, and in line with assertions by some scholars, football emerges as a social phenomenon that commands attention above other societal, cultural, and sporting activities (Ramírez & Restrepo, 2018). As these scholars suggest, "sport, and football in particular, captivate a significant portion of the global population's fleeting or enduring interest in a manner that few other human attractions can achieve independently" (p.112).

Thus, in alignment with the research trajectories of recent decades, football remains a domain where contemporary civilizations and societies express themselves, and these expressions are scrutinized through educational, economic, sociological, cultural, and psychological lenses (Ramírez & Restrepo, 2018). Within this context and the specific aims of this study, the research seeks to explore the social imaginaries instrumentalized in representing women in football and society through advertising discourse and presentation.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. *An Approach to the Concept of Imaginary in Advertising*

In line with the advertising strategies devised and disseminated by UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) and its official sponsors for the organization, promotion, and celebration of the international women's football championship, UEFA Women's Euro 2022, this study investigates advertising practice as a discursive space, where representations and imaginaries influenced by contemporary social realities are constructed and propagated.

Within this framework, imaginaries are conceptualized as semantic frameworks and communicative tools that encapsulate and materialize the diverse realities within a given society. In line with this perspective, corporate entities serve as communicative and discursive vehicles leveraging such imaginaries to establish, disseminate, and validate various value systems and beliefs within the social sphere (Basterra, 2020; Caro, 2012, 2014; Castoriadis, 2007; Torres Cubeiro & Carretero, 2020). Consequently, advertising messages are conventionally perceived as discursive practices within the consumer domain, serving information and promotional purposes for goods and services. Simultaneously, these discourses facilitate the identification, comprehension, and visualization of societal occurrences and phenomena. Echoing this sentiment, as posited by Van Dijk, "Discourse, in various ways, constructs, constitutes, alters, defines, and contributes to social structures" (Van Dijk, 2002, p.19).

In conclusion, advertising practices serve as a suitable subject for analyzing societal representations to establish direct correlations between specific socio-cultural categories (such as gender, class, or ethnicity) and particular elements of the collective imaginary within a defined context. From this stand point, imaginaries are conceptualized as socially constructed frameworks that shape our perceptions and facilitate an understanding of what is perceived as reality. This typically occurs through the discursive expression of a specific group, collective, or community (Pintos, 2014; Segovia et al., 2018). As articulated by Pintos (2003), imaginaries are "constructed social scenarios that enable us to perceive, explain, and intervene operationally in what each social system regards as reality" (p.164).

### 2.2. *Socio-Cultural Functions of Globalization and Advertising*

If we move beyond the economic perspective, which regards globalization solely as a global economic phenomenon, capitalist globalization can also be interpreted as a process of imaginatively instituting various societal spheres, as highlighted by prominent scholars (Baudrillard, 2009; Castoriadis, 2007;

Caro, 2012, 2014). These theoretical viewpoints converge in emphasizing the socio-cultural ramifications of globalization, where in contemporary societies adopt a global perception of reality transcending individual local contexts. In essence, economic globalization contributes to and shapes socio-cultural imaginaries that are accepted and normalized at a transnational level, subsequently internalized as representations of a shared socio-cultural imagination (Castoriadis, 2007; Caro, 2012, 2014). Thus, it is noteworthy how contemporary capitalist globalization not only functions as an economic entity but also assumes specific roles impacting reality and influencing the social representation processes of individuals worldwide.

In summary, it is pertinent to underscore the institutional and ideological role undertaken by corporate discourse and advertising practices of commercial entities. These practices propagate, normalize, and establish particular modes of thought and social conduct concerning various issues, tensions, and societal demands affecting diverse cultural contexts worldwide (Basterra, 2020; Caro, 2014).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Objectives**

Taking the above theoretical context as a reference, this paper poses the following research questions:

- What meanings, imaginaries, and social representations are conveyed by the advertising strategies formulated and disseminated by UEFA and its official sponsors for the organization, promotion, and celebration of the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 women's football championship?
- What relationship exists between the imaginaries presented in the advertising strategies of UEFA's sponsors and the phenomenon of globalization?
- Do brands producing content assume any social role in promoting a specific portrayal of women in professional football?

To adequately address these inquiries, this paper delineates the following objectives:

- To identify, interpret, and ascertain the typology of imaginaries, representations, and social meanings arising from advertising discourse concerning the role of women in professional football.
- Identify, interpret, and evaluate the role of UEFA's corporate sponsors as creators of advertising campaign sport raying the female gender through football.

#### **3.2. Methodological Approach**

This research adopts two methodological approaches: firstly, content analysis (Krippendorf, 2013); and secondly, a methodological approach centered on multimodality. This entails analyzing audiovisual content and considering all modes of expression involved in the communicative construction of the meaning. Hence, it encompasses written, oral, auditory, gestural, and visual modes contributing to the process of signification (Van Leeuwen et al., 2001). Nonetheless, the study prioritizes visual images as the primary semiotic resource for portraying the social and cultural representations of female football players. Additionally, it examines the use of verbal language (both written and oral) in the analyzed content, acknowledging it as a vital semiotic element that enriches, complements, and contextualizes the social meanings depicted. In conclusion, this methodological amalgamation provides a robust and dependable framework for objectively, systematically, and quantitatively analyzing, describing, and interpreting the social meanings conveyed by the advertising content.

#### **3.3. Sample**

In line with the predetermined objectives, the selection criterion for the units of analysis is guided by the promotion of the European Women's Football Championship, orchestrated by UEFA in 2022. UEFA demonstrates its commitment to promoting gender equality in this sport through its communication platforms, namely the UEFA web site and the *WePlayStrong* project website:

Join our community. WePlayStrong.com is the world’s number one digital media platform & community dedicated to women’s football. Launched in June 2017, the *Together #WePlayStrong* platform aims to give girls and women who play football as well as super fans of the women's game a cool place to hang out and immerse in their passion for the game together. Our content is made for the players and fans, by the players and fans. That's what makes it so special and loved and it highlights the skills, confidence and friendships that come from playing and supporting the game (<https://www.weplaystrong.com/index.html#/about>).

In this regard, data extraction has focused on advertising campaigns released by UEFA and its official sponsors in the months preceding and following the championship (July2022), specifically from 01/03/22 to 30/08/22. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the brands or corporate entities comprising UEFA's roster of official sponsors, the following figure, "List of Official Sponsors," presents the information available on UEFA's official website:

Figure 1. List of official sponsors.



Source(s): UEFA 2022 website (<https://es.uefa.com/partners/>).

Following the data extraction phase, analysis was conducted on 11 advertising campaigns created and disseminated by UEFA and its associated official sponsors: *Volkswagen, Visa, Just Eat, Hisense, Heineken, Grifols, Booking, Adidas, Nike, and Lego*. These campaigns were distributed through the respective corporate websites and YouTube channels. However, this study primarily examined the dissemination of brands' content through the YouTube platform. The accompanying table provides a comprehensive list of the campaigns and content analyzed:

Table 1. Sample ratio

Brand	Brand URL	Name of the campaign	Brand Youtube URL	Duration
UEFA #weplays trong	<a href="https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/0273-149d7b8cb4a4-47d601e61e9c-1000--uefa-together-weplaystrong-launches-new-tv-advert-on-inter/">https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/0273-149d7b8cb4a4-47d601e61e9c-1000--uefa-together-weplaystrong-launches-new-tv-advert-on-inter/</a>	UEFA Together #WePlayStrong: Skills for Life	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91Nkrmnc3ew">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91Nkrmnc3ew</a>	0:30 (725frames)
LEGO	<a href="https://www.lego.com/en-gb/uefawomenseuro2022?age-gate=grown_up">https://www.lego.com/en-gb/uefawomenseuro2022?age-gate=grown_up</a>	Girls Are Ready	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7c7XGuUCFk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7c7XGuUCFk</a>	0:35 (853frames)
JUSTEAT	<a href="https://justeat-101.co.uk/https://www.visa.co.uk/about-visa/sponsorships-events/wuefa2022.html">https://justeat-101.co.uk/https://www.visa.co.uk/about-visa/sponsorships-events/wuefa2022.html</a>	JustEat101	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TarEB8M7Ypg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TarEB8M7Ypg</a>	0:30 (666frames)

Brand	Brand URL	Name of the campaign	Brand Youtube URL	Duration
VISA	<a href="https://www.visa.co.uk/about-visa/sponsorships-events/wuefa2022.html">https://www.visa.co.uk/about-visa/sponsorships-events/wuefa2022.html</a>	Visa Supports UEFA Women's Football	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCdLtLnGeeo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCdLtLnGeeo</a>	1:00 (1,501frames)
NIKE	<a href="https://www.nike.com/es/a/euro-copa-femenina-2022">https://www.nike.com/es/a/euro-copa-femenina-2022</a>	Never Settle, Never Done	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_dXwDJxHhc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_dXwDJxHhc</a>	1:22 (1,954frames)
HISENSE	<a href="https://hisense.co.uk/womens-euros-2022/">https://hisense.co.uk/womens-euros-2022/</a>	Remember the Day	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15Fq7l53Jb0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15Fq7l53Jb0</a>	01:00 (1,290frames)
GRIFOLS	<a href="https://www.grifols.com/es/grifols-committed-to-women-s-sports">https://www.grifols.com/es/grifols-committed-to-women-s-sports</a>	Proud Partner of UEFA Women's Football	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_dAYyvoBeBw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_dAYyvoBeBw</a>	00:29 (619frames)
BOOKING	<a href="https://news.booking.com/bookingcom-renews-partnership-with-mens-and--womens-uefa-european-football--championships/">https://news.booking.com/bookingcom-renews-partnership-with-mens-and--womens-uefa-european-football--championships/</a>	It Starts with a Booking	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvLvYDrQmEo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvLvYDrQmEo</a>	1:56 (2,664frames)
HEINEKEN	<a href="https://www.heineken.com/global/en/sponsorships/uefa-women-s-euro-2022">https://www.heineken.com/global/en/sponsorships/uefa-women-s-euro-2022</a>	Cheers To All Fans	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m85z3mzVxQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m85z3mzVxQ</a>	1:25 (1,916frames)
VOLKSWAGEN	<a href="https://www.volkswagen.co.uk/en/life/uefa-womens-euro-2022.html">https://www.volkswagen.co.uk/en/life/uefa-womens-euro-2022.html</a>	Not Womens Football	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjTSI70i8Y0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjTSI70i8Y0</a>	00:55 (1,356frames)
ADIDAS	<a href="https://news.adidas.com/football/adidas-reveal-murals-celebrating-stars-of-uefa-women-s-euro-2022-as-the-record-breaking-tournament-/s/76d4f3dd-0f7c-43a0-a663-c9e94a9a5086">https://news.adidas.com/football/adidas-reveal-murals-celebrating-stars-of-uefa-women-s-euro-2022-as-the-record-breaking-tournament-/s/76d4f3dd-0f7c-43a0-a663-c9e94a9a5086</a>	Nothing is Impossible: Mapi León	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4OVELYppiY&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4OVELYppiY&amp;feature=youtu.be</a>	0:41 (945frames)
		Nothing is Impossible: Millie Bright	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZDiUw5Ukvg&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZDiUw5Ukvg&amp;feature=youtu.be</a>	0:35 (794frames)
		Nothing is Impossible: Viavianne Miedema	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As2sTN4Iikw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As2sTN4Iikw</a>	0:40 (732frames)
		Nothing is Impossible: Wendie Renard	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xa3eb-JXNI8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xa3eb-JXNI8</a>	0:40 (732frames)

Source(s): Authors elaboration based on NVivo.

### 3.4. Methodological Process

In line with the methodological approach, this study employed qualitative research software, NVivo, and the VLC media player multimedia player (a freely available open-source software developed by the Video LAN project) to comprehensively triangulate the various discursive resources embedded within the audiovisual content. Notably, this analysis maintains a cross-cutting perspective on multimodality, reflecting the shifting communicative paradigm in virtual spaces. Consequently, the examination of audiovisual content integrates diverse modes of expression—written, oral, auditory, gestural, and visual modes—that collectively construct meaning (Van Leeuwen et al., 2001). Nonetheless, the primary focus

of this paper lies in the utilization of visual imagery as the principal semiotic resource for socially representing women's professional football. Additionally, the verbal language (both written and oral) within the analyzed audiovisual content is regarded as a fundamental semiotic element that supplements, directs, and contextualizes the conveyed social meanings. Consequently, the content analysis process folds through the following three phases:

- First, the data was extracted and the 16,747 frames that comprise the 11 campaigns in the sample were sorted.
- Second, coding pattern and category definition process was conducted to facilitate an initial analysis. At this juncture, data was coded emergently, encompassing all discursive manifestations evident in the portrayal of social representations concerning female football players.
- Third, a secondary sample analysis was conducted to enhance and elaborate upon the final coding of the content.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Quantitative Approach**

The following results illustrate how sponsoring brands portray the role of women in women's football through their communication efforts. A notable finding is the visual representation of 273 women, reflecting a range of physical and morphological characteristics. Data coding facilitated the classification of sports women into two cultural groups: 96% of the content depicted female sports women associated with African, Latin American, or Asian socio-cultural contexts, while 93% associated them with Western or Caucasian socio-cultural contexts. Nationality or multicultural origin was verbally or visually expressed in 72% of the content based on this coding.

Furthermore, the analysis identified significant aspects concerning the representation of sports women. Specifically, the study distinguished between main (protagonists of the narrative), secondary (complementary characters), and incidental roles (brief appearances). In 58% of the videos, multiple women were featured without clear protagonist, while the remaining 42% show cased a single female footballer, with 53% being Western and 47% from other cultural backgrounds. Additionally, 68% of the videos depicted celebrities or professional footballers of international renown, serving as iconic representations of women in football. Notably, despite the use of international celebrities, 98% of the content featured anonymous sportswomen promoting inclusion and gender equality. These individual sailed from diverse groups, backgrounds, and multinational contexts and were represented through varied attributes and physical features.

### **4.2. Qualitative Analysis**

Through a qualitative examination of the content, this study aims to interpret and deduce there presentation of female athletes, particularly focusing on their cultural dynamics. In essence, the qualitative findings involve describing both the visual and verbal representations depicted, while also considering the interconnections and relationships apparent among female players, adult women, and young female athletes. Thus, what follows is a representative analysis of the 14 units of analysis comprising the examined campaigns:

### **4.3. Unit of Analysis 1**

The following content was published on International Women's Day (8th March 2022) on YouTube. It was produced and distributed by the digital platform UEFA/*#weplaystrong* as part of the campaign titled "Skills for Life". The content has a duration of 30 seconds and consists of 725 frames. Throughout the content, six girls dressed in football uniforms representing different nationalities are consistently depicted in various societal contexts and professional environments.

In 75% of the scenes, these six girls, representing diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, are portrayed as leading adults in various activities reflective of professional social realities such as business management, medical surgery, health services, and fire services. The selected stills provided below illustrate the most significant socio-cultural meanings conveyed within the entire content.

In one instance, a girl of colour is shown leading a managers' meeting, while in another scenario, a young woman with distinctive phenotypical characteristics is depicted directing activities in a professional kitchen. Notably, both scenes feature integrated written text reading: "Football gives you skills that last a lifetime."

Aligned with the video's messaging, UEFA asserts in a written description accompanying the content that its social mission is centered on fostering confidence, leadership, communication, resilience, focus, and personal skills development among girls and young women. This initiative aims to equip them for success both inside and outside of all sports.

Figure 2. Unit of Analysis 1.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91Nkrmnc3ew>

#### 4.4. Unit of Analysis 2

The subsequent content was produced by the corporate brand Lego as part of the campaign named "Girls are Ready". It has a duration of 35 seconds and comprises 853 frames. The content unfolds in a single sequence that is developed on a professional soccer field. Throughout the video, professional footballers Steph Houghton and Lucy Bronze, both representing the English national team, are portrayed alongside two young girls.

Across the duration of the content, the adult players engage in instructing, motivating, and inspiring the two underage girls regarding football and the forthcoming European Championship. Concurrently, a written text is displayed throughout the video, stating "Girls are Ready". According to the accompanying written description, the brand articulates its aspiration to encourage future generations of women towards effecting positive change in gender equality.

Figure 3. Unit of Analysis 2.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7c7XGuUCFk>

#### 4.5. Unit of Analysis 3

The following content was published on YouTube in July 2022. It was created by the corporate brand Just Eat as part of the campaign titled "JustEat101". The content spans 35 seconds and comprises 666 frames. Within the content, a female instructor from the UK narrates the events depicted in the transcript provided below:

101 years ago, women's football was banned in the UK. What!?! And now it's bigger and better than ever. This summer, the whole nation will be watching. But why should stop there? Grass roots is the foundation of football. So let's make that foundation even stronger. JustEat are kick-starting 101 women's teams, for everyone inspired by the Euros to pick up their boots. BE PART OF THE101!

In the video, various young women with distinct and diverse physical characteristics are prominently featured. Additionally, the brand explicitly expresses its commitment and social purpose towards promoting gender inclusion in both sport and society through written text:

Just Eat, proud UEFA Women’s Football partner, is today launching a new initiative to encourage girls and women across the UK to pick up their boots and get on the pitch. The food delivery app is inspiring female sporting talent by providing 101 grass root teams with the ultimate starter pack, alongside expert advice from industry veterans. The initiative comes 101 years since women’s football was banned in the UK as it was deemed ‘quite unsuitable for females and should not be encouraged.’ Now, with the sport going from strength to strength, and the Women’s Euros taking place on home soil -and attracting record breaking attendance - the initiative aims to enable more girls and women to get involved in the beautiful game. While this year’s Euros will no doubt capture the imagination of millions of women and girls across the country, access to women’s grassroots football remains a challenge. New research from Just Eat reveals one fifth of females aged 16-65 want to get involved in the sport but do not know where to start, and 90% are unaware if they even have a local women’s grassroots team.

Figure 4. Unit of Analysis 3.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TarEB8M7Ypg>

#### 4.6. Unit of Analysis 4

The following content was created by the corporate brand Visa as part of the campaign titled “*Visa Supports UEFA Women’s Football*”. It has a duration of 1minute and consists of 1,501frames. The content portrays a diverse array of girls, young women, and adult women from various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, depicted with rich phenotypic diversity across different sporting and social contexts. Most of the content features both girls and international professional players engaging in the sport. Comprising 36 distinct scenes, the content is accompanied by a voice over narration detailing the following:

It’s an exciting time for women’s football. 21 million women and girls participate in the beautiful game across Europe and at Visa we celebrate every single one of them. We are very proud to announce our groundbreaking partnership with UEFA to support and accelerate the growth of women’s football throughout Europe. We want to inspire, enable and leave a legacy to girls and young women to follow their dreams. With UEFA, we’re planning to bring women’s football to the Forefront because of visa we believe in acceptance everywhere, from pitch to the boardroom.

As the brand states in the written description accompanying the content, the corporation’s social purpose seeks to support and accelerate the growth of women’s football to inspire, empower, and build a legacy that enables women and girls to follow their dreams.

Figure 5. Unit of Analysis 4.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddCbtLnGeeo>



#### 4.7. Unit of Analysis 5

The following content was produced by the corporate brand Nike and is part of their campaign called, “*Never Settle, Never Done*”. It has a duration of 01:22 minutes with 1,954 frames. Throughout the video, a diverse array of girls, young women, and adult women are portrayed across various football pitches, as well as in multiple urban and social settings. The video prominently features young girls and women with diverse attributes and physical traits from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting a rich phenotypic representation. According to the written description accompanying the video, the brand aims to honour the confidence and skills of women and girls who are poised to revolutionize the game in the future.

The video features prominent figures from various realms of the sport, including Leah Williamson (England captain), Marie-Antoinette Katoto (France player), Alexia Putellas (Barcelona player), Ada Hegerberg (Norway player), Magda Eriksson and Pernille Harder (Chelsea players), Rocky Hehakaija (freestyle star), and numerous girls from youth teams across Europe. Additionally, the video highlights the contributions of organizations such as Street Football X Barcelona and the Women's Soccer School Barcelona, which provide opportunities for girls and women to partake in the joys and benefits of football. Furthermore, the content showcases the Level 7 Academy in London, established by former professional footballer Mollie Kmita, which aims to integrate education and football to foster growth and development.

**Figure 6.** Unit of Analysis 5.



Source(s): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd\\_XwDjxHhc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd_XwDjxHhc)

#### 4.8. Unit of Analysis 6

The following content was published in July 2022 by the corporate brand *Hisense* and is part of the campaign called “*Remember the Name*”. It has a duration of 01:00 minute with 1,290 frames. Throughout the video, the main characters are an adult professional football player and an underage girl. As seen in the transcript below, the content features a series of scenes wherein both players are playing football. The narration, delivered via voice-over, underscores the empowerment of girls and women in the following manner: “Tonight is the night. To remember the name. The speed. The power. The passion. You not only stand as women, but as legends. Be on the front page. Respond with glory. Win the trophy. Be the chosen one. To be remembered.”

**Figure 7.** Unit of Analysis 6.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15Fq7153Jb0>

#### 4.9. Unit of Analysis 7

The following content is part of the official sponsorship of the corporate brand *Grifols*. It has a duration of 29 seconds and comprises 619 frames. The content portrays a succession of girls and adult women undertaking various roles within the healthcare sector. As articulated by the brand across its content and communication channels, the corporation endorses social and sporting endeavours through football, recognizing the sport as a potent platform for advocating gender equality, motivating girls, and fostering the empowerment of women across diverse spheres of social and community existence.

Figure 8. Unit of Analysis 7.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdAYyvoBeBw>

#### 4.10. Unit of Analysis 8

The following content was uploaded to YouTube by the corporate brand *Booking* in July 2022. It is part of the campaign titled "*It Starts with a Booking*" and has a duration of 1 minute and 56 seconds, comprising 2,664 frames. The content features 29 distinct sequences portraying the experiences of a girl engaged in football throughout various aspects of her school and social life, consistently alongside male classmates and friends.

The brand conveys its commitment to gender equality through depictions of sporting and urban settings, where in the young protagonist is portrayed as aspiring to become a professional footballer. Furthermore, the protagonist is depicted within a professional football stadium, where she encounters her admired professional female footballers: Millie Bright from England and Linda Dallmann from Germany.

The brand's communication practice aims to promote gender diversity, challenge outdated stereotypes, and facilitate the inclusion of women and girls in football on a global scale.

Figure 9. Unit of Analysis 8.

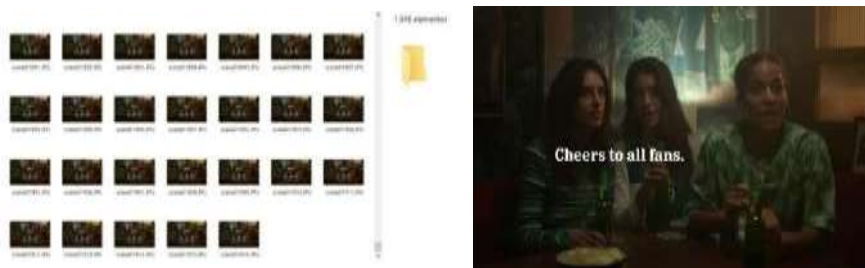


Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvLvYDrQmEo>

#### 4.11. Unit of Analysis 9

The following example is content produced by the brand Heineken and is part of the campaign titled "Cheers to All Fans." It was published on YouTube in May 2022, lasting 1 minute and 24 seconds and comprising 1,916 frames. Across the 22 scenes featured in the content, several adult women of diverse nationalities, phenotypical appearances, and ethnic backgrounds are portrayed. The video portrays these women as fans and supporters of international women's football, aiming to promote the global integration of women and challenges exist and stereotypical perceptions of football fans. Accompanying the video, the brand provides the following written statement, "What image comes to mind when you think about a football fan? Women fans? They make up almost half of football fans across the world, so that makes sense."

Figure 10. Unit of Analysis 9.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m85z3mzVxQ>

#### 4.12. Unit of Analysis 10

The following content was uploaded to YouTube by the corporate brand Volkswagen in July 2022. Its pans 55 seconds and consists of 1,916 frames. Across various scenes, the content portrays diverse young female football players engaging in the sport within a range of social and sporting settings. The video showcases a phenotypical diversity among the female players, accompanied by a voice-over advocating for the recognition of women's roles in football:

We don't dream women's dreams. Our training? Not women's training! The sweat on our fore heads – not women's sweat. We know what we want - and we know how to achieve it! By persevering, fighting and running until we can't anymore. And then continue pushing! Our heart beats not for women's goals, but for dream goals! We discuss tactics – not women's tactics. We go out and give our all for 90 minutes. As ONE team. That's why what we love with every ounce of our bodies, every thought and every beat of our heart, is football.

Figure 11. Unit of Analysis 10.



Source(s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjTSI70i8Y0>

#### 4.13. Units of Analysis 11, 12, 13, and 14

The following example pertains to the campaign produced and published by the corporate brand Adidas in June 2022. This campaign comprises four videos articulated with 3,203 frames, to tallying a duration of 02:35. These videos feature professional football players, namely Mapi León, Millie Bright, Vivianne Miedema, and Wendie Renard. Hailing from Spain, England, the Netherlands, and France respectively, these players serve as communication conduits for the brand to promote and represent the evolving role of women in professional football. In doing so, they articulate their social purpose to positively influence society concerning gender equality and inclusion. For instance, Millie Bright says, "I want to use my platform to help people. I feel the responsibility to set the tone and be a good role model. Give back to the ones that support me day in and day out." Mapi León, Wendie Renard, and Vivianne Miedema express similar sentiments:

[Mapi León]: In the end, I hope me coming out had a very positive effect on other people. If I'm the inspiration you need, then I'm glad to be seen. Being brave is my way of life, it's who I am.

[Vivianne Miedema]: I think my goal really is to inspire children to be whoever they want to be. And I think that inspires me to be the best version of myself every day as well.

[Wendie Renard]: The story with my teacher is that we had to make a list of what we wanted to be when we grew up, and I put professional footballer at the top followed by air hostess. She came over and said, “there’s no such thing as a professional footballer who’s a woman”. She didn’t believe in me. I did.

**Figure 12.** Units of Analysis 11, 12, 13, and 14.



Source(s): <https://news.adidas.com/football/adidas-reveal-murals-celebrating-stars-of-uefa-women-s-euro-2022--as-the-record-breaking-tournament-/s/76d4f3dd-0f7c-43a0-a663-c9e94a9a5086>

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the content produced and disseminated on YouTube by UEFA and its official sponsors utilize the female gender as a cultural construct within contemporary society, forming the foundation of these organizations' communicative strategies. Given these communicative practices and the intricate consumer landscape, it is reasonable to assert that the advertising discourse of such globalised brands and mechanistic entities functions as semiotic drivers and creators of images, symbols, and narratives, projecting a commercial perspective of the female gender. Notably, the feminine imagery articulated by UEFA and its official sponsors serves as a mechanism or discursive tool that encapsulates and represents a prevalent societal issue. From this perspective, advertising practices structured around current global affairs provide insight into the social issues shaping the international agenda. Thus, the imaginaries, meanings, and discursive representations evident in the analyzed contents serve as communicative practices with social implications, facilitating an understanding of these contemporary societal dynamics:

- Analyze what is happening in a globalised socio-cultural reality in relation to gender equality.
- Interpret certain ideological modes of thought and action in relation to the role of women in society.
- Describe specific social orders that are staged, and that seek to question, change, and transform a given social reality.

In this context, multinational corporations engaged in promoting the European women's football championship utilize the cultural perception of gender from a dual perspective. Firstly, these organizations leverage social issues such as inclusion and gender equality as contextual frameworks to imbue their image and products with symbolic value, aligning with the view that culture, as posited by some scholars (Fernández et al., 2019), is utilized to confer significance and worth upon the brand. However, considering the reciprocal relationship between brand and culture, it can be argued that such discursive practices become societal practices in themselves, as this communicative event assumes distinct functions in mobilizing, producing, and shaping culture at a fundamental level. Thus, through the creation, presentation, and utilization of audiovisual language, each content or advertising campaign

serves as an ideological instrument that portrays, assesses, and legitimizes a specific perception of the female gender, both within professional football and broader society. Consequently, the YouTube channels of these brands serve as potent platforms for disseminating concepts, ideologies, and representational systems through a semiotic (audiovisual) framework that communicates social meanings.

Furthermore, due to the enduring symbiosis between advertising and society, the discourse of commercial brands assumes an institution-building role in its own right, as advertising possesses the capacity to replicate the intricacies of the social milieu. Along similar lines, this study illustrates the use of corporate communication as a tool that generates and disseminates social discursive frameworks rooted in consumerism. Despite its primary commercial objectives, these advertising practices extend beyond mere informational, promotional, and merchandising activities. In line with this perspective, a highlight that all discourse situated within a social context fulfils three essential functions (Aliaga et al., 2022):

- To represent, identify, and institute reality utilizing an ontic function.
- To value, classify, and legitimize using an axiological function.
- To suggest, prompt action, and normalize through a pragmatic function.

Thus, these conclusions reaffirm the view point of the author Antonio Caro, who argues that advertising assume ostensibly neutral ideological roles extending beyond mere economic perspectives (Caro, 2010, 2012). Consequently, the ideas, behaviours, and attitudes depicted in the analyzed content also contribute to shaping the perception of the role of women in sports and globally interconnected societies. Further exploration within this framework may involve aligning the findings of this study with the research conducted by Susan Khamis (2020). Khamis's analysis of the 2017 Super Bowl reveals the emergence of novel communication strategies by major global corporations, termed "Branding Diversity". This concept denotes corporate communication processes that address tensions, demands, and issues concerning contemporary social and cultural matters, aiming to challenge discourses promoting inequality or social division from other societal domains. Recognizing such communicative practices as a burgeoning form of social communication suggests that global market brands possess the ability to shape, validate, and standardize certain social ideologies and actions, akin to other societal institutions in politics, culture, or religion.

From this perspective, and drawing upon the obtained results as a foundation, the content reveal show UEFA and its commercial sponsors employ a discourse imbued with cultural nuances, advocating for a naturalized, globalised, and inclusive perception of women worldwide, transcending their nationalities, physical attributes, or multicultural backgrounds. In essence, these multinational corporations construct, promote, and portray a transnational socio-imaginary narrative depicting the ideals, norms, and aspirations pertaining to female football players, encompassing both individual dimensions and various societal spheres.

In summary, this research aims to enrich the examination of discourses generated by corporate and commercial entities, which utilize the cultural concept of gender as a fundamental component of their institutional communication tactics. Aligned with this aim, the study seeks to invigorate current and forthcoming research trajectories that explore the socio-cultural underpinnings of certain commercial communicative strategies. Its objective is to gauge the legitimizing influence wielded by globalised commercial brands as they present an emergent, normative, and naturalized perspective of femininity or women.

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