SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES AND ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF "PRESCHOOL AND MEDIA PEDAGOGY"

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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR) IN FOOTBALL FOR EDUCATING MEDIA LITERACY

ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field
1.2 Pedagogy (Media Pedagogy)

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The dissertation work "The role of public relations (PR) in football for the education of media literacy" was discussed at a meeting of the "Preschool and Media Pedagogy" department at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" on 27.06.2023/Protocol No. 13 and is referred for public defense before a scientific jury in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Media pedagogy).

The dissertation is structured in an introduction, three chapters, conclusion and conclusions, literature and appendices. Scientific contributions are cited and publications on the topic of the dissertation are indicated. Special attention is paid to the "Football PR Handbook". Contains 158 pages, of which 135 pages of main text, 6 pages of literature, 14 pages of appendices, 2 pages of scientific contributions and 1 page of described publications. The text includes 9 tables and 28 diagrams. The bibliography contains 105 titles, of which 79 are in Cyrillic, 15 are in Latin, and 11 are Internet sources.

The introduction presents the socio-psychological and informational potential of football in terms of its impact on the individual and society as a whole.

The first chapter, "Program orientation of the research", contains the relevance of the problem, provoked by the need to ascertain the activity of football clubs in Bulgaria, and to identify and define the significant goals of PR experts in this professional field. There is a terminological justification of the problem, conceptual and schematic parameters of the study.

In the second chapter, "Theoretical analysis of the problem area", the main characteristics of the phenomenon "football" are presented in the context of historiography, traditions and trends related to communications, business relations and public space. The educational priorities of media literacy as a conceptual interpretation, historiography and a model for its formation and development are examined. A characterization of the football reality as an environment for realizing the interactions between the clubs, the media and the public space has been carried out.

The third chapter, "Methodological and organizational parameters of the research", contains the main parameters in the study of the orientations of respondents from the following target groups through author surveys and interviews - PR-specialists, sports journalists, professional football players and their girlfriends and wives, supporters of football clubs , owners, sponsors, guides, coaches and managers.

In the fourth chapter, "Analysis of the research results", the orientations of specified target groups are presented and defined.

In "Conclusion and Conclusions", specific and global conclusions, hypotheses and proposals for optimization of relationships between professional football clubs, the media and the public space are drawn.

On the basis of the conclusions, an author's "Handbook of football PR" was developed, as a main factor for positive relations between football clubs, the media and the public, and education of media literacy.

The public defense of the dissertation work will take place on 18.09.2023 at 2:00 p.m. in hall No. 213 of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", 69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Football is a sport created by the people and for the people. From a simple game created and practiced from the standpoint of pure and purely competitive motives, it has become, perhaps, the most popular spectacle to which commercial interests are directed. The powerful financial flows involved in the emerging football industry are causing various discussions about the direction in which this most popular sport is developing and about the change in its essential characteristics. At the center of unrelenting public and media interest, football has become a widely discussed social phenomenon.

A distinctive feature of modern society is the sharp increase in the role of information flows and the creation of a global information space. Media communications imply a two-way type of communication with active feedback. The social environment is mainly described by the concept of "publics". It is they who are the subject of research, purposeful involvement in the communication process and influence oriented towards a possible planned effect. The emergence of the need for an image of football in the public space is a natural process that corresponds to the dynamically changing fundamental societal needs in the historical, economic and social sense of the game itself. The satisfaction of public expectations requires the adoption and introduction of professionally regulated connections with the public space, which are included in the objective system of football structures, in order to realize their essential characteristics and fit into the social context of the importance of the football game.

As a strategic approach to contact with the public, two-way communications have the role of a leading factor in the formation of trust in the organization or structure. Building trust requires not only a full-fledged two-way process, but also a sufficiently long and productive accumulation of positive experience from communicating with the organization or structure. Only then is she perceived as a credible source and reliable communicator.

The specified characteristics of the football game as part of the social system and of the role of the media for two-way communication in order to update the activity of an organization or structure in the public space contain the possibility of crossing the research fields of the social phenomenon "football" and the role of relations with the media and sports journalism. In this plan, we should point out that, according to Prof. Danail Danov, "media literacy is most often associated with the development of competencies in the field of new technologies and includes the skills to properly understand the media as an environment, means and content" (Abstract of a dissertation work "Media literacy: genesis, rethinking of experience, challenges and prospects", for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences", 2019;1). For the mentioned author, not only the skills to work with information and communication technologies are important, but also "skills to use the media for a variety of purposes and in the most diverse contexts, skills to search, verify and disseminate information" (Abstract of dissertation work "Media literacy: genesis, rethinking of experience, challenges and perspectives", for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences", 2019;1). In this context of the vision of the complex understanding of the complexity of media literacy, in our opinion, it is logical to include the possibilities of modern football PR to educate media literacy as the main intermediary between the club, the media and the public space.

CHAPTER ONE: PROGRAM ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

1.1. Actuality of the issue

The understanding of sports, and respectively of football as a significant social product, implies its detailed study, including the problem of the place, characteristics, specifics, functions and importance of PR in it in the context of the study of the possibilities of educating media literacy.

The topicality of the issue of relations between Bulgarian professional football clubs and the public space stems from:

1. Still "unfading popularity" of "Tsar Football" in Bulgaria, despite lost positions at national and, to some extent, at club level;

2. Insufficient, recently, actuality in the popularization of this sport;

3. The problems and deficits in the coverage of the football game by the media.

In this regard, the following negative trends can be pointed out, arising precisely from the lack of normativity in the relations between the professional clubs and the public space in the Bulgarian football reality, which provoke the lack of media literacy in the orientations of the target groups participating in the research:

- Legitimation of financial, economic and corporate interests and relationships;

- Participation in dubious associations for illegal, gambling bets;

- Speculative actions and unregulated interventions of managerial efforts in unjustifying huge sums of transfers of football players;

- Scandalous revelations about the corruption of players, coaches and judges involved in the manipulation of results from individual football matches.

- Targeted media invasions on a global and personal level to produce a positive or negative attitude towards managements, players and fans of football clubs.

In concrete terms, the present research was provoked by the need to determine the main parameters of the activity and problems of the football clubs in Bulgaria. Establishing these essential interrelationships and interdependencies is necessary to achieve goals such as a positive image, reputation of a sports club, athlete or sports organization, as well as to increase the potential audience of football and the formation of media literacy among supporters.

1.2. Terminological justification of the problem

The presented topicality of the problem is a starting point for a terminological justification of the studied phenomena, related to the definition of the following concepts:

- "Soccer"

In a definitive plan, we accept the definition of the concept of "football" formulated by D. Kisov, namely - "a collective sports game with a ball, in which, through its defining jewelry targeting with the foot, solutions are sought for putting it into the opponent's goal, and this process generates physiological, aesthetic, educational and relaxing impact for participants and spectators" (Abstract of dissertation "Publicity of Bulgarian football activity in the sports press", 2015;9);

- Media and communications

The communicative functionality of the media is expressed in the formation of public opinion, which determines the attitudes and emotions in the behavior of consumers. Depending on the impact of the messages, the level of communication of the individual with the media implies perception (perception of the influence without internal conviction of its necessity), communication (inclusion in the process of communication, for example through social networks) and "interaction (internal attitude to follow of the stereotype).

- Image, publicity and public space

Image is the understanding and perceptions of an organization or institution in people's minds. It is a set of meanings associated with an object through which people describe, remember and associate it. As a fundamental effect of publicity, the image is subject to planning and management, which outlines one of the most essential applied spheres of relations with the public space.

Publicity builds an image and the level of fame and reputation of individuals and groups. The goal is an impact on the perceptions of members of society in terms of recognition and perception of positive or negative signs and characteristics of subjects or objects. Publicity is a process of personal legitimation that is particularly characteristic of our modern times and an opportunity to highlight one's uniqueness more clearly in the crowd, and hence to achieve wide and easy recognizability.

In the modern sense, public space is seen as a concrete space of urban forms accessible to citizens and as a virtual space of dialogue (Francois Soulage. The boundaries between aesthetics and aestheticization of public space http://institutfrancais.bg/programata/61/conference- francois-soulagesbg).

The meaning we attach to the mentioned term considers the public space in two plans: a narrow sense - a conglomerate of subjects familiar with, interested in, having and sharing opinions about a type of public activity; broad sense - global public attitudes and moods towards this activity, formed mainly under the influence of the media.

- Football club, image and public space

The reputation of any football club depends on its identity as a public image. In this plan, there is a connection between the image of the club and the public opinion created by the media in a positive or negative aspect from the point of view of its management, social mission, achieved previously announced goals, satisfied ambitions of the supporters.

"Football publicity" is "the publicly conscious image and understanding (public opinion) of the football activity organized through a respective club or as a manifestation of a national team. There are "two channels for forming the image of football from the point of view of the communication used: direct - through the immediate suggestion of the football club on the external environment - the public (part of the PR activities), and indirect - through the media suggestion (the media presentation of football) on the basis of the information available to them" (D. Kisov. Author's abstract of dissertation work "Publicity of Bulgarian football activities in the sports press", 2015; 13). Depending on this "product" there is a reverse impact of public space - to what extent public opinion affects fundamentally or indirectly, current or direct, the formation or correction of the policy of the club.

From the point of view of football PR as the main intermediary between the club, the media and the public space, the communication side of the communication is seen as an exchange of information about the club's policy between it and the objects (the media) for which it is intended. In the daily practice of the football organization in the implementation of public relations, communication is not limited only to

the movement of information flows. It is also expressed in an exchange between active entities that clarify, specify and, in general, develop the exchange of the information flow, simultaneously making sense of its content.

- Media literacy

For the purpose and tasks of the research, we accept the definition of Prof. Danail Danov, for whom the substantive relevance of the concept is related to the ability to evaluate and analyze information, and not so much to technical skills for handling media platforms, i.e. it can be defined as competence "allowing users to use media effectively, having knowledge about the media, the characteristics of media content, its forms, effects and messages, skills for critical analysis, for encoding and decoding information ... a means of communication and upward personal development" (Abstract of dissertation work "Media literacy: genesis, rethinking of experience, traditions and perspectives" for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences", 2019; 4).

1.3. Conceptual parameters of the study

The dissertation aims to present the characteristics and specifics in the construction and functioning of the connections and dependencies between elite football clubs and media structures in Bulgaria, through the role of PR specialists in reflecting the life and sporting achievements of the club in the public space in the context of creating of prerequisites for formation and development of media literacy.

The object of the research is the regularities and specifics in the opinions of football subjects regarding the relationship "football club - media - public space".

Specifically, we refer to the orientations of PR experts of football clubs, sports journalists, owners, board members, sponsors, coaches, sports technical and executive directors of professional football clubs, players and supporters in the context of establishing relationships between clubs and the public space.

The subject of the study is the degree of development of media literacy of football subjects in the context of establishing relationships between clubs and public space

The set goal of the dissertation work and the characteristics of the target, object and subject parameters of the research directed us to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

We assume that there is an interdependence between the professional-sports, social and financial-economic positions of the football structures, presented as club policies, and the way of reflecting their image in the public space, which provokes positives/negatives in the education of media literacy. In this regard, the public image of football subjects is directly dependent on the degree of development of their media literacy.

The concretization of the hypothesis determined the following main tasks of the research:

1. Theoretical analysis of the problem area related to:

- The sport "football" and the public space - psychological, social, organizational, financial and economic;

- The educational priorities of media literacy in the context of the studied issues.

- The football reality as an environment for realizing the relations between the clubs, the media, supporters, owners and sponsors and the public space.

- Study of the theoretical and practical-applied aspects of the problem of sports and football PR - psychological, social, organizational, financial and economic.

2. Study of the real situation and perspectives in the positions of target groups of respondents regarding the relations between football clubs and the public space.

3. Comparative analysis of the orientations of the target groups.

4. Deriving the parameters of PR in the Bulgarian football structures as a degree of influence on their image, social and media positions.

5. Deriving perspectives and proposals for optimization of the relationship between the football structures and the public space from the point of view of the positive image of the elite football clubs.

6. Development of a model addressing the role of public relations in football to foster media literacy.

SECOND CHAPTER. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM AREA

2.1. The "football" phenomenon and public space - historiography, traditions and trends

2.1.1. Football as a unique communication medium

As a sports game, football is practiced through the regulation and observance of certain rules, which are periodically subject to updating. Football has a long and ambiguously interpreted history (the first data about it are from around 5000 BC). It developed particularly intensively in England, France, Italy, and in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century it spread to most countries of Europe, South America and other continents. Not only national, but also international networks for the organization of football activities were institutionalized: the International Association of Football Federations - FIFA (1904); in the Olympic Games, football took its place as early as 1890, but it officially appeared in 1908; the first world championship in this sport was organized in Uruguay in 1930; since 1960, the European Football Championship has been organized; the first organization of an international tournament in South America was in 1916 ("Copa America"); followed by European Champions Cup (ECC) in 1955, Fair Cities Cup (1955), Cup Winners' Cup - 1961, Champions League - 1992, UEFA Europa League - 2009, etc. . (10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 20, 27, 30).

Football was introduced for the first time in Bulgaria under the name "kickball" by the Swiss physical education teacher Georges de Regibus in 1883. Our national football team debuted on May 21, 1924 in Vienna at the qualifiers for the 1924 Summer Olympics, losing by 0 :6 from the host. In the middle of the last century, our football already achieved significant success, finishing third at the Summer Olympics (Melbourne, 1956), second at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City (1968), fifth at the European Championship (1968). In 1962, the Bulgarian football team qualified for the World Cup for the first time. Then and during his subsequent appearances (1966, 1970 and 1974) he was eliminated without achieving victory. At the World Cup in football (1986), our representative team qualified for 16 finals, also without a win. His triumph was at the 1994 World Cup, where the team placed fourth and Hristo Stoichkov took first place in the top scorer race.

The first established Bulgarian football club (1913) was Slavia (Sofia).

The holding of a tournament (State Championship) to determine the champion of Bulgaria began in 1924.

In 1948, it was decided to create the "A" Republican Football Group as the top division. In 1950, the second level of Bulgarian football was created - "B" - Republican football group. In 1959, the basic levels of the championship were officially structured - "B" football groups.

The established structure (with minor changes over the years) existed until 2000. Then the Premier League was experimentally created with 14 teams, replacing the "A" group and the First League instead of the "B" group. This organization lasted only three years, after which the old structure was restored - "A" Professional football group with 16 teams. Since 2013, the teams have become 14, and since 2015 they have been 10 (3, 5, 10, 11, 13, 16, 20, 25, 27).

The body authorized to implement and enforce the rules of the game is an international board, which, according to prevailing assessments, is extremely conservative and bureaucratic. He is inclined to undertake only minor changes and then after long debates on a global scale, after long regional experiments and when it is proven that they aim to maintain public interest in the game, as well as its relevance.

2.1.2. The game of football and business relations

In football, as in all other types of sports, in recent decades, commercialization and the intervention of personal or corporate business intentions have significantly increased. Big global companies or corporations have found an extremely suitable field for advertising and commercial

prosperity in the public space through huge investments in the football industry. World football forums such as world and European championships, Champions League, etc., as well as state championships and tournaments, contain a powerful financial and economic potential and are the subject of large-scale investment aspirations and projects. Often, behind the declaration of intentions for charity and sponsorship, for noble purposes, there are hidden dirty interests related to corruption schemes or "laundering" of money. Extremely dangerous and difficult to prove is the recently widespread phenomenon known as speculative betting on various football competitions. Its negative effects are related to spoiling the sporting spirit of the athletes, managers, judges and participants in the betting itself, demotivating and feeling bitter among the fans of the football game, destroying the moral foundations of pure sport.

When examining the position and characteristics of PR in football, it should be noted that there are behind-the-scenes actions of organizations and circles that are far from sports and football, but which aim to use the most popular game with suspicious intentions for quick and easy profit, often in extremely large financial dimensions.

In the context of the presented trends and processes, two main target groups in the football image can be defined and these are the fans and the sponsors. The well-being of clubs, federations and individual players is due to them. Creating a positive image and reputation - these are the target elements important for the business success of football events.

The trademark is an irrevocable component necessary for the development of any business and at the same time, it is a guarantee of satisfying the wishes of consumers in the football game, i.e. to the fans. The aspirations of the supporters of a football team are mainly in two directions. One is related to the team achieving the best results in the championship or tournament in which it participates. Fans usually associate themselves with the beloved club or player, thus feeling significant and outside the usual, in many cases, not so joyful everyday life. The second direction is expressed in the need of every supporter in the stadium or in front of the TV for positive emotions that the game gives him - joy from the aesthetics of the football players' performances and from the expectation and possible victory of the favorite team in the match.

The sponsors are interested in the good results and the positive reputation of the team, which contributes to the promotion and formation of a positive image of the brand of the company or enterprise. This is a challenge for the business, which is investing more and more persistently not only to put the brand on the teams of elite football players, but also in the attributes that ensure the dress code (dresscode) of the fans.

2.1.3. Football clubs and public space

Modern sport cannot ignore the need for professionalism in the management and functioning of its public communications, i.e. not to realize the potential and opportunities of public relations (PR).

The professional attitude to the image is able to significantly strengthen and improve the activity of football organizations and individual clubs, to provide them with opportunities to obtain the desired benefits - stable development, increase in financial profits, achieving popularity and, as a consequence, good sports results . Adequately planned and implemented practices could significantly limit and extinguish the risks to which everyone involved in the performance of the football team is exposed, caused by the use of various unethical techniques - unfair competition, misinformation, malicious rumors, etc.

Professionally built PR is able to significantly strengthen and improve the activity of football organizations and individual clubs, to provide them with opportunities to obtain the desired benefits - stable development, increase in financial profits, achieving popularity and, as a consequence, good sports results. Its adequately planned and implemented practices could significantly limit and extinguish the risks to which everyone involved in the performance of the football team is exposed, caused by the use of various unethical techniques - unfair competition, disinformation, malicious rumors, etc.

The objective course of changes in modern society explains the need for prepared PR specialists with appropriate education and specialization for work in the specific football environment. There is a tendency to demonstrate a demanding and critical attitude towards these professions and activities, loaded with a high value expectation.

The position of football PR implies certain normative requirements that are imposed on his professional behavior. In this way, the control usually imposed by the club management is carried out. By fulfilling the commitments made, the benefits and effectiveness of the qualified efforts of the public relations specialist are realized. The football club has the right to issue certain expectations towards the activities of the person holding a similar position in it. The need to control the implementation of the professional parameters from the job description of the PR is based on a wide range of constant and rapidly changing needs and requirements related to the club strategy during individual periods. This guarantees the successful implementation of the commitments and the achievement of the set significant goals.

2.2.Educational Priorities of Media Literacy

2.2.1. Conceptual interpretation of media literacy

The vision of media/digital literacy stems from the key competences defined by the Council of the EU and relates to knowledge, skills and perception of information enabling the effective and safe use of media (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal content /BG/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN EU Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning).

There are different definitions of media literacy. In his analysis of the state of media literacy as of 2010, The State of Media Literacy, American media researcher W. James Potter (professor in the Department of Communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara) includes more than 40 definitions ("multidimensional space ") and includes data from various Google searches for the key phrase "media literacy" (Potter, W. J. et al. Reviewing Media Literacy Intervention Studies for Validity.//Review of Communication Research. 2019. DOI:10.12840/ISSN.2255-4165.018 pp. 38 – 66). This finding also holds true for definitions from the US Center for Media Literacy (2008), Sonya Livingstone (2008), Hans Martens (2010), the US National Media Education Association (2010), the Media Education Action Coalition, The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009), Ofcom (2008), the European Commission and EAVI in the report Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe [Final Report], commissioned by the Directorate-General for Information Society and Media and the Media Unit literacy of the European Commission from DTI - Danish Technological Institute and EAVI - European Association for Viewers' Interests (An Overview of Media Literacy. // Policy Department Structural and Cohesion Policies Culture and Education Note. 2008. IP/B/CULT/NT/2008_02). This is also noted in the report of the European Audiovisual Observatory to the Council of Europe from 2016 "Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in the EU-28", commissioned by the European Commission (Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU -28. // European Audiovisual Observatory. Council of Europe, 2016).

In the International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Oxford University, media literacy is defined as follows: "Media literacy requires a person to be active, to have developed abilities to perceive, create, analyze and evaluate media texts, to understand the socio-cultural and political context of the functioning of the media in the modern world, the conventions and representativeness of the systems used in the media; the life of such a person in society is directly related to civic responsibility" (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences. Vol. 14 / Eds.N.J.Smelser & P.B.Baltes. Oxford, 2001).

In Report of the National Media Literacy Leadership Conference. Queenstown, MD: The Aspen Institute states that "Media literacy should help people understand, create, and appreciate the cultural significance of audiovisual and print texts. A media literate individual, as every person should have the opportunity to become, is able to analyze, evaluate, and create print and electronic media texts" (Aufderheide, P., Firestone, C. Media Literacy: A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy .Queenstown, MD: The Aspen Institute).

The noted American researcher W. James Potter defines media literacy as "a tool whose primary purpose is to "diagnose a potentially negative media effect and either immunize people against the occurrence of such an effect or counteract it if it has already occurred" (Potter , W. J. et al. Reviewing Media Literacy Intervention Studies for Validity.//Review of Communication Research. 2019. DOI:10.12840/ISSN.2255-4165.018. pp. 38 – 66).

For the British scientist Professor Sonia Livingstone, media literacy is a collective competence to access, analyze, evaluate, create and distribute media content, which are stages of media literacy

(http://www.sonialivingstone/media@LSE). Robert Cubby, director of the Center for Media Studies, is of the same opinion, media literacy includes: access, analysis, evaluation and production (http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=17).

Influenced by Sonia Livingstone's vision of media literacy, Mihaela Racheva sees it as "a holistic educational approach that aims to give media users greater freedom and choice by teaching them how to access, analyze and evaluate media , and how to create and distribute media products at the same time" (Author's abstract of a dissertation work "The media literacy of 6-7 year old children in the process of pedagogical interaction in a preparatory group/class" for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor". 2015).

According to Prof. Danail Danov, "in addition to information and communication technologies, media literacy also focuses on the development of critical thinking and participation in public life through the media", and more specifically, it is "a set of technical skills for access, analysis, evaluation and creation and dissemination of content, a new educational approach based on critical thinking and the use of media tools, and also as an attitude of increased civic engagement'. (Abstract of dissertation work "Media literacy: genesis, rethinking of experience, traditions and perspectives" for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences", 2019; 4).

In this context, Prof. Danov also defines the concept of "digital-media literacy", tying it not only to technological literacy, but above all to its relation to engagement and participation in people's public life "from the consumption of social networks to the use of electronic government" (ibid., p. 4). As a projection, the possibilities for the higher strategic value of the cultural, democratic and economic parameters of modern society are aimed at. As a positive of this understanding, we should note the presentation of the concept of media literacy as an educational strategy aimed at all spheres of public space. In this context, we share Prof. Danov's opinion that we could relate it to the issue of the role of public relations in football to foster media literacy.

The main factors for the application of media literacy in different national contexts, as well as the relationship "knowledge - communication", based on the historiography of media literacy, are also analyzed.

2.2.2. A Historiography of Media Literacy

The idea of media literacy dates back to the early 1970s and was originally associated with the term "information literacy," which "describes the techniques and skills needed to use information tools and to find informational solutions to various problems "(Danov, 2019). It is a consequence of Marshall McLuhan's understanding of the effect of the media as "the medium is the message" (medium is the message), which means that the "content form" of the transmission of messages is of decisive importance for their perception (Marshall Mcluhan lecture recorded by ABC Radio National Network on 27 June 1979 in Australia. // YouTube). Computer science expert Alan Kay is of the same opinion, for whom the way ideas are presented provokes the user's way of thinking (Kay, Alan. The Infobahn Is Not the Answer. // Wired. 1994).

In 1989, the Council of Europe adopted the "Resolution on Media Education and New Technologies", which stated that "People should understand the structure, mechanisms and content of the media. In particular, people must develop their abilities for independent critical perception and evaluation of media content" (Council of Europe. Resolution on Education and Media and the New Technologies. Paragraph 5. Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 1989).

The views of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas are also important for the characteristics of media literacy, according to which the vision of modern society should not be associated only with

technology, but to a determining extent with the abilities of individuals for reasoning and reasoned critical analysis (Rutherford, Paul. Endless Propaganda: The Advertising of Public Goods. // University of Toronto Press. 2000).

The basic definition of media literacy as the ability to "access, analyze, evaluate and produce print and electronic media" was developed in 1992 by the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (NLCML) in the USA (Aufderheide, Patricia. Media Literacy. A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy). This conceptual interpretation is also adopted by the US Center for Media Literacy (CML), the National Association for Media Education (NAMLE), and the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME), three of the main drivers of media literacy and media education in the US.

In 2003, UNESCO issued a special declaration defining information literacy as "a key to the social, cultural and economic development of nations and communities, institutions and individuals of the 21st century".

As a consequence, UNESCO also developed nine standards outlining the scope of information literacy. According to them, information literacy is: "A means of achieving effective and efficient access to information; A way to critically and competently evaluate information; Skills for accurate and creative use of information; A means of finding and analyzing information related to the personal needs of each individual, promoting upward development; "Ability to properly understand all creative forms of information; An attitude towards striving for excellence in the search for information and the generation of knowledge; An expression of recognition of the importance and importance of information for the development of a democratic society; Expression of ethical behavior in relation to information and communication technologies; Willingness to make a positive personal contribution and actively participate in the creation and dissemination of information'.

Around the same period, the concept of media literacy also developed, which aims to increase public awareness of media influence and an active position of users towards everything that is published and broadcast in the media, i.e. media literacy education and training is seen as:

"1. Basic competence enabling users to use media effectively and implies: Knowledge of media, the characteristics of media content, its forms, effects and messages: Skills for critical analysis, for encoding but also for decoding text, sound, image, video , of all types of signals and messages that media subjects exchange with each other in their daily communication'.

2. "Ability to properly use and apply the media both as a means of communication and for upward personal development."

In December 2008, the Official Journal of the European Union published an Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Media Literacy' and 'Creative Online Content', which stated that 'The Committee of the Regions requests the Council and the European Parliament to continue to develop the policy on EU media literacy (with strategic objectives and progress monitoring) and to adopt a recommendation on media literacy taking into account the current CoR opinion and the principle of subsidiarity" (http://www.onair.medmediaeducation.it/_casestudies/..% 5Cfiles%5C4112009165129-749-79.pdf) and that a special section on media literacy should be added in the next MEDIA program.

In the second decade of the 20th century, with the development of social networks and digital platforms, there was a "combination" of the concepts of media and information literacy, and the emergence of the concept of "digital-media literacy" as a priority in the education of generations in a broad sense, including not only academic disciplines and the relevant digital technologies and tools, but also nurturing relationships with society and people. In this context, the science "media pedagogy"

emerged, which not only refers to the use of media as a means of learning, but also emphasizes the impact of media on different age groups through the effective and harmless use of media and media tools.

In this sense, digitally literate are those who, in addition to being technologically literate, can, through these skills, engage and participate at every level of public life, from the consumption of social networks to the use of electronic government.

It can be said that media literacy is the desired outcome of media pedagogy, i.e. media literacy training implies the presence of competencies that help learners of all ages to be able to correctly interpret the content of any type of media - print, electronic and internet-based.

2.2.3. Media pedagogy and media literacy

"The relevance of the formation of media literacy among adolescents leads to the emergence of media pedagogy, exploring: The possibilities of using the media as a means of learning and teaching; Changes in the media society, a consequence of the impact of the media on different age groups; The ways for the most secure, harmless and effective use of the media and media tools.

For this reason, the main tasks that media pedagogy sets for itself include:

1. Identification of the media that users use;

2. Clarity on consumer habits (by age) related to the use of different types of media (electronic, digital, internet, screen media).

3. Tracking consumer behavior (at different ages) as a function of their media literacy and use of media tools and technologies.

4. Analysis of the ability of users of different age groups to assess the credibility of media information.

5. Analysis of the pedagogical (parents, teachers, educators) attitude towards children's media habits.

6. Checking the existence and application of rules related to the use of the media and media tools.

7. Identifying the opportunities for education, training, lifelong learning - upward development - that digital technologies and media offer" (Abstract of the dissertation work "Media literacy: genesis, rethinking of experience, traditions and perspectives" for the award of the scientific degree " Doctor of Science", 2019; 12-13).

In this plan, the emphasis of the European Commission on media literacy is media literacy as an important part of active civic behavior in the modern information society. It defines media literacy as "the ability to perceive media, to understand and critically evaluate different media messages and media content, as well as to communicate in a protected environment" and refers to the emergence and development of media pedagogy as a current discipline in the degrees of the education system (http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/docs/media_literacy_leaflet_en.pdf).

2.2.4. A model for the formation and development of media literacy

There are many explanations for the nature of media literacy. One of the most current is that of the British researcher Sonia Livingstone, professor of social psychology, who has devoted much of her research to children, media and the Internet. Her research examines the opportunities and risks of digital and online technologies, especially for children and young people at home and school, as well as the

process of developing media and digital literacy at individual and public levels. In this regard, it can be said that she is one of the founders of media pedagogy, because in the projects and EU Kids Online 1,2,3 she explores the possible dangers of children's online presence.

In our opinion, British researcher Sonia Livingstone's theory is based on Albert Bandura's theory of social learning from the point of view of perception and interpretation of information. For Albert Bandura they are observation/perception, imitation and modeling modeling (Bandura, A. Social foundations of thought and action. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), and for Sonia Livingstone - access, analysis, evaluation, creation and distribution of media content. (http://www.sonialivingstone/media@LSE).

The social theory of learning examines the relationship between social and environmental factors and their influence on behavior.

According to A. Bandura, the process of learning moral values and rules of social behavior goes through the stages of identification and modeling. At first, children observe the behavior of other people and imitate their parents. Already at preschool age, they learn aspects of gender-role behavior, moral expectations of the family environment, forms of expression of aggression and obedience, prosocial behavior. It is at the same time a process of modeling, becoming a process of socialization. Later, the author expanded his theory in terms of social cognition, calling it socio-cognitive theory. It is emphasized that the individual does not passively perceive, but interprets the influence of the environment, i.e. he is able to actively manage life events, controlling to some extent the conditions surrounding him.

For the British researcher Sonia Livingstone, the main stages of media literacy are access, analysis, evaluation, creation and distribution of media content. (http://www.sonialivingstone/media@LSE).

1. Access, as an important part of media literacy, is the process of active interaction with the media in which users are exposed to media content from an early age. As a result, they develop interests, skills, needs and habits for using the media, making them an irrevocable and accompanying part of their development. Users have different abilities to use the media when absorbing the content - scope, volume and intensity of its perception. Material and social inequality has a particularly strong influence on the formation of media literacy. Consumers with more limited material well-being may use less frequently, less in number and variety of media, which hinders their development. Therefore, an important task of media literacy is to overcome this problem by developing and applying methods for working with technological means that children learn in kindergarten or in other educational programs.

2. The analysis of media means and media content, as a second element of media literacy, refers to the development of knowledge and tools for understanding the system of the functioning of the media, technologies, language, means of expression, the characteristics of the audience and the way in which they are taken into account when compiling the media content. More specifically, it is about: "The diversity of media forms and means, the completeness and adequacy of explanations necessary for consumers to understand media messages; The ability to distinguish fiction from reality; Having the critical skills to effectively use the media to enforce certain values and type of culture'.

3. Evaluation as a part of media literacy is related to the user's attitude to media content, to the acceptance or rejection of this content, determined by his value system. This implies the availability of methodology, means and criteria for understanding the intended messages and skills for their interpretation. It is necessary from an early age that children should be taught to appreciate the similarities and differences of the media reality with the one in which they exist and develop, to discover and understand the peculiarities of the media image of the world. Evaluation is a higher stage of analysis. It implies construction and de-construction of the evaluated object, its essence and building elements, a

complete projection in the context of the value system, as well as the drawing of conclusions and lessons. This requires clear pedagogical rules in the use of the media, as well as interdependence with the stages of access and analysis.

The problem is that using media doesn't necessarily require a habit of breaking down content into its component parts. For this, media pedagogy, which forms media literacy, is required to develop skills and habits for critical evaluation of media messages.

4. The creation of media content is the fourth element of media literacy, which runs almost parallel to the first - access. The dynamics and development of digital technologies is increasingly shortening the distance in time in which media users become distributors (distribution of media content - the fifth element of media literacy, which is related to the fourth) and creators of media content. At a younger and younger age, children become able to create their own profiles on social networks, to exchange media products - text, sound, photos, video that they have created themselves. Often highly developed technical skills do not correspond to their overall development, i.e. one can speak of a discrepancy with the emotional and cognitive (cognitive) level of the children.

The rational use of media is not the same as media technology literacy. Dealing with computer games, the skills to create and distribute moving images and three-dimensional images is not equivalent to conceptualizing, formulating and delivering a media message that responds to and pursues clear goals. Media literacy means having the ability to analyze and evaluate, which implies both the skills to create and faithfully read and understand media messages.

In conclusion, the formation of media literacy is the main goal of media pedagogy in all educational structures for adequate use of media and digital technologies, and building critical thinking.

2.3. The football reality – an environment for realizing the interactions between the clubs, the media and the public space

The main intermediary and mediator between the elite football clubs, the media and the public is the football PR, in whose perimeter of action there are a number of processes that shape the picture of interpersonal and inter-institutional relations, with communication occupying a special place among them.

2.3.1. Football PR – mediator between the club and the media

In the perimeter of action of football PR, there are a number of processes that shape the picture of interpersonal and inter-institutional relationships related to its professional realization, with communication having a special place among them.

Of course, the analysis of the essential characteristics of communication as an irrevocable component and hallmark of PR expertise is in the direction of its quality as a mediator between the football club and the public. In the present study, this aspect is studied only in the context of the chosen topic, which imposes some limitations on the scale of its more comprehensive presentation.

From the point of view of sports PR, the communication side of communication is seen as an exchange of information about club policy between it and the objects (media) for which it is intended. In the daily practice of the football organization in the implementation of public relations, communication is not limited only to the movement of information flows. It is also expressed in an exchange between active subjects who clarify, specify and, in general, develop the exchange of the information flow, simultaneously making sense of its content.

PR can also be seen as a methodology to optimize the organization and management of football clubs, to achieve their tactical and strategic goals, through up-to-date communication with the sports public and through a wide media presence.

The main method and decisive factor in the activity of football PR is the adopted technology for communicative influence and its results, characteristic of its professional position.
The characteristics of successful PR in football are mostly related to the knowledge of the media and the technologies of their use to achieve a positive and high club rating. In parallel with this, it is necessary, from the position of a mediator, for the PR expert to achieve and guarantee empathy and participation among the interested parties, to turn them into an important resource in the competition with the competition.

2.3.2. Relations between management and football pundits with supporters

The modern conditions of practice and use of the football game suggest the occurrence of many risky moments caused by multidirectional influences and pressures, to which not only players, coaches and owners, but also the supporters of the clubs themselves are exposed. This is one of the important grounds for the construction and professional functioning of PR expertise in the communication between the club and its engaged public.

Solving problems in this regard, only with the help of traditional mechanisms and means, may prove to be ineffective and may even complicate critical situations. Only the professional football expert can work successfully to win, engage and retain supporters and ensure that communication between them and club management will function optimally to motivate mutually beneficial cooperation. At the same time, his activity should mainly be aimed at expressing and implementing the mission of the football organization, namely: why it was created and exists in the public space; whose needs it satisfies; what are the reasons for the social responsibility it bears. In this sense, it is obvious the need for the presentation of the club to express directly or indirectly its essential characteristics of belonging to the ideas of the club. They must contain the formulated strategy for reaching the goals it sets and the practical actions for their realization, taking into account the interests and needs of the main parties in the club - in one are the players and management, and in the other are the members and supporters. Thus, by applying a system of purposeful such as time and place, approaches and professional techniques, the

policy of the club becomes understandable and accessible to all those who sympathize with it and the public space. We assume that this will, to a very large extent, guarantee the motivated support of the public and its active participation for its realization.

In this way, it is possible to determine the degree of empathy between fans, which is also a form of mediation of interpersonal relations in the group. The study of the moral views and emotional attitudes of the supporters creates prerequisites for the exact establishment of the place of the current and potential leaders in the fan club. In many cases, the connections with the informal leaders of the group of fans are crucial for an effective presentation in the public space, because the attitude of the fans towards the football players, coaches and owners of the clubs also determines the public attitudes towards the football club in the short or long term - its current state or prospects for its future realization.

2.3.3. Relationships at internal club level - football pundits, management, owners and sponsors

Undoubtedly, of fundamental importance in the implementation of club policy are the relationships between the football expert and the management team of the club, and above all, with its owners and sponsors, which, depending on the way they are presented in the public space, affect the image of the football structures .

The joint activity with this group of people actually determines the current environment in which the football expert realizes himself and, at the same time, is subjected to direct evaluation and control. Success in fulfilling the professional commitments of the public relations professional can be examined both as a personal and as a problem of the professional guild as a whole. Dealing with duty prescriptions is essentially a response to club expectations behind certain meaningful goals. In this sense, the control and evaluation by the club is not just a recommendation or a wish, but is an inevitable and mandatory element of the determination of the behavior of the football expert.

At first glance, it seems that the public relations expert can choose his own professional repertoire, prefer and apply one or another forms, methods and approaches to work, bring to the fore the priorities determined by him. This external activity-behavioral picture is only apparent. Although there is some degree of free choice to use their own priorities, only the club management has the right to partial or final sanction regarding the quality of the PR actions carried out or this type of activity in general.

2.3.4. Relations with the club's players

The professional football club is a social microgroup with specific norms and rules established in the process of its construction and functioning as a specific business organization.
In it, particularly sensitive deviations from behavioral norms and even minor violations or deviations from them in the internal group dynamics, directly reflect on the balance of its representatives. This high sensitivity requires the PR specialist to be particularly careful in maintaining the balance, in his role as a mediator between the footballers and the public space. In this regard, it is an important factor in stabilizing interpersonal interdependencies, covering mostly the functioning of the team in the training process and official competitions, according to the pursued goals, i.e. the effectiveness of the team activity depends to a decisive extent on the organizational and media comfort of the competitors and the service teams of the club.

A special place that the PR expert occupies in the structure of the football club is related to the direct connection with intra-group dependencies and the need to observe formal and informal norms of behavior. From the point of view of participation in the life of the club, an important source of information and a prerequisite for studying the attitudes of the players regarding the strategy of the club or the tactics of individual competitions is the knowledge of the informal relationships between the players, the possibly formed small groups in the team and the leaders in them.

In the relationship between football PR and the club's players, communication with the players' families can be neglected.

CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PARAMETERS OF THE RESEARCH

3.1. Research methodology

Understanding sport, and specifically football as the most popular sport, updates the study of the interrelationship and relationship of professional football clubs with the public sphere by:

- The opinion of PR experts on their role and importance, specifics and functions as mediators between the clubs, the media and the public space;

- The orientations of sports journalists as mediators in the relations between professional football clubs and the public space;

- The opinion of professional football players about the image of professional football clubs in the public space in the context of the media policy of the club;

- The orientations of supporters of football clubs about the media image of the club in the public space;

- The opinions of owners, sponsors, members of management and supervisory boards of professional football clubs, coaches and managers about the problems and prospects in Bulgarian football and its image in the public space.

- Interviews with professional football players and their girlfriends and wives regarding their relationships in the context of the positive/negative professional realization of the athletes.

Establishing these essential interrelationships and interdependencies is necessary to achieve goals such as a positive image, reputation of a sports club, athlete or sports organization, as well as to increase the potential audience of football in the context of the formation of media literacy.

The following methods were used in the study:

3.1.1. Analysis of literary sources on the studied issue.

The object of attention and analysis are statements and views related to:

- The sport "football" and its role in modern public relations as an image in the public space: football and modern communications; the game of football and business relations; football clubs and public space;

- The educational priorities of media literacy: conceptual interpretation; historiography; media pedagogy and media literacy; a model for the formation and development of media literacy;

- Football as a medium for realizing the relations between the clubs, the media and the public space: the football experts and the media; management, football pundits and supporters; internal club relations; communication with the players.

3.1.2. Survey of PR specialists, sports journalists, football players and supporters of football clubs.

3.1.2.1. A survey to investigate the orientations of PR professionals as mediators in the relations between professional football clubs, the media and the public space: Indicators

- Orientations towards the possibilities for changes in the image of Bulgarian club football (question 1);

- Ideas about the appearances of football PR experts: relevance of the relationship with the media and the public space (question 2); evaluation of the media environment as a field for the club's PR experts to appear (question 3);

- Representations of the attitude towards football PR experts such as: assessment by the sports journalist guild towards club PR (question #6); collegiality among PR communities (question 8).

- Presentations on the current requirements for football PR experts in Bulgaria from the point of view of the club's image in the public space (question 4);

- Ideas about the specifics of the professional implementation of football PR: main problems and difficulties in the work of football PR (question 5);

- An idea of the current qualities of football PR (question 7);

- Presents a /vision/ for the near future of Bulgarian football PR (question 9).

3.1.2.2. A survey to explore the orientations of journalists from leading media: Indicators

- An idea of the current qualities of football PR as an intermediary between the club, the media and the public space (question 4);

- Qualification and shortcomings of the football PR expert: ideas about the qualification of the football PR (question #10); representations about the shortcomings of football PR experts in Bulgaria (question 2);

- Contacts with PR experts and their specificity in the context of age differentiation: impressions of contacts with club PR experts (question #1); an idea of the age dynamics of football PR from the point of view of the credibility and timeliness of the submitted information about the club (question 11);

- Informational contacts between sports journalists and football PR experts: degree of intensity of information provided by club PRs for the public space (question 8); degree of information security for the public space of sports journalists by football PR experts (question 9);

- Roles of the football PR expert: an idea of the possibilities of the football PR experts as mediators between the club, the media and the public space (question #3); attitude towards the capacity of PR services in crisis situations (question 7);

- Non-traditional roles of the football PR expert: Roles beyond the "forwarding" of information (question #6); Attitudes of club owners towards non-traditional roles (question 5);

- Global assessment of the need and relevance of the football PR expert in the context of interaction with sports journalists from the point of view of information for the public space (question 12).

3.1.2.3. A survey to investigate the orientations of professional soccer players: Indicators

- Representations of the club's image in the public space: credibility of information about the club (question #1); image of players depending on media advertising (question 7);

- Evaluations of the media policy of the club: definition of the current state of the media policy (question #2); optimization of the club's media policy in covering the team's games (question 3);

- Preferences for communicating with the media (question 4);

- Concept of the media's role in the transfer of players (question 5);

- Presentations about the success of the club's PR expert in relations with the public space (question 6)..

3.1.2.4. A Survey of Football Club Supporter Orientations: Indicators

- Evaluation of the role of the club in the public space: image of the club (question #1); opportunities to improve the image (question 3);

- Assessment of the club's media policy (question 2);

- Ideas about the relevance of the PR expert: need for PR (question 4); role of PR in mediating between the fan club and management (question 5);

- Ideas about the knowledge and skills of the successful PR expert (question 6);

3.1.3. Interviews with owners, sponsors, members of governing and supervisory boards of professional football clubs, coaches and managers.

The interview questions were composed on the basis of the following indicators:

- Problems and prospects in Bulgarian club football: degree of public awareness (question 1); reasons for the problems in the relations between football clubs and sports societies (question 2);

- Role of the media for the image of the club (question #3) and relevance and need for a professional PR expert (question 5);

- Reasons for neglecting the importance of PR in clubs (question 4);

- Qualities of the football PR expert (question 6);

- Purpose and professional responsibilities of the PR expert (question 7);

- Attitude towards media services: when transferring players (question #8); in crisis situations (question #9); to communicate with fans (question 10).

3.1.4. Interviews with professional soccer players and their girlfriends and wives regarding their relationships in the context of the athletes' positive/negative professional fulfillment.

The interview questions were composed on the basis of the following indicators: beginning of the relationship; appearance and clothing; hobbies and obsessions; behavior of cohabiting partners; sexual relations; attitude towards children; subordination and roles; communication; conflicts.

3.1.5. Observing the reactions of the respondents when filling out the questionnaires and when choosing the answers from the interview.

3.1.6. Monitoring the activities of board members, owners, sponsors and sports technical and executive directors of professional football clubs (direct and indirect monitoring through media coverage).

We used this method as an aid in order to collect additional information on the investigated issues.

3.1.7. Statistical methods for information processing.

The processing of the questionnaires and the results of the interview was carried out using SPSS /Statistical Package for Social Science/, version 16.0 - a statistical package for social sciences, a computer program running in the environment of the Windows operating system, which is specialized for the systematization, processing and analysis of statistical information.

3.2. Organization of the study

- The research was carried out in the period 05. 2019 - 02.2023.
- The collection of empirical data in the field was carried out while guaranteeing the anonymity of its participants. Respondents were persons from the respective investigated communities, mostly renowned football clubs from Sofia, Plovdiv and Stara Zagora and, in isolated cases, from smaller settlements.
- Contacts with the research subjects were personal, carried out through meetings and with the help of e-mail. Fan participation in the research was ensured through the active support of fan clubs.
- For the purposes of the study, the method of random selection of respondents was used.
- In order to achieve a higher degree of efficiency in the processing of empirical data, a more adequate analysis of the obtained results and to ease their perception by readers, the results in the text are presented as whole numbers.
- The general population of the sample determined and used for the study through the survey and interview methods includes as follows:
- • Survey of the orientations of sports journalists - 31 people;
- • Survey of the views of current and former experts from press clubs of football organizations - 12 people;
- • Survey of the orientations of football players from professional clubs - 49 people;
- • Survey of opinions of football fans and supporters - 162 people;
- • Interview with guiding questions with owners, members of management boards, sponsors, coaches, managers - 18 people.
- • Interview with guiding questions with football players and their girlfriends and wives - 6 people.

CHAPTER FOUR. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Orientations of PR specialists as mediators in the relations between professional clubs, the media and the public space

In the elections to the question "What opportunities do you see for changes in the image of Bulgarian club football?" (indicator "Orientations towards the opportunities for changes in the image of Bulgarian club football"), the expected largest percentage of those who answered - 95%, are directed towards the performances and the achievements of the teams in various prestigious championships and tournaments.

Better organization and management of the activities of individual football clubs is also a priority in the survey, supported by 86% of the survey participants. The expectation that the creation and maintenance of own academies, preparing young and talented players, "nursed" with the traditions and ideals of the clubs, will guarantee stability and inclusion of the public, through empathy with the fate of the teams - 73% of the respondents. "Financial relief" and "better training process" remain at the back - with 27% and 22% respectively.

The answer "good PR capacity" has the approval of 36% of the respondents. The qualitative analysis of this opinion informs about how the specialists themselves see the importance of their own professional position in the attempts for real positive changes in the state of the football system, and that, in its most elite part and as a connection with the public space.

According to those polled, while 65% of the media and public space show "benevolent" and 3% "complete approval", 17% express "indifference", 13% "neglect" and 2% completely deny the football existence of PR. Apparently, the impression of the essence of their professional interventions and the effectiveness of the events held with their participation, have not convinced a certain part of the media and the public space that the presence and functioning of PR units in football clubs should be defended. This implies a more comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the established regularity.

The objective assessment of the opinion expressed by public relations experts in football clubs is also oriented to the received answers to the question "How do you assess the media environment as a field for football PR experts?". The majority of survey participants - 79% - state that it "depends on the situation", and 10% of them express a "reserved" attitude. As "benevolent", the media environment is assessed by only 6%, as "hostile" by only 2% and as "not paying attention" by 3% of respondents.

The summarized data from the shared opinions define the media space rather as not particularly comfortable and requiring a high degree of sensitivity, both in solving individual cases and in relations with different media, reporters and journalists.

However, it could be said that despite the tangible barriers characteristic of both sides, both PR specialists and media representatives are aware of the exceptional role of substantive interaction between them and are cautiously seeking compromise solutions in the implementation of their direct professional commitments requiring mutual cooperation.

Of particular interest should be the analysis of the data and the question of how PR specialists determine the most necessary requirements that should be made to them in football clubs, from the point of view of the club's image the public space (question 4) .

Limiting the number of possible answers to four apparently made it difficult for the respondents, but still, with the greatest possible certainty - 100%, they rated "broad knowledge and skills in the field of PR" and "specific knowledge" as the most important for the game of football'. With relatively less support are the need for knowledge of football lobbying – 65%, as well as excellent command of information technologies – 50%. Public relations experts are of the opinion that great knowledge in the field of "football management" is hardly necessary - 0%, but journalistic experience and very good language and foreign language training receive 45% each.

Football PR specialists also share their views regarding the specifics of the professional implementation of football PR - possible difficulties hindering its work (question 5).

The ability to grade up to three answers to the question related directs the respondents unquestioningly and, almost unanimously, to determine as the most significant difficulties "disagreement with the owners" - 100%, as well as "bad relationship with the fans" and "negative sentiments against the club from authoritative means of mass information in the public space" - 90%. It should be noted that such reasons as "insufficient material incentives" - 20% and especially possible "professional envy of important factors in the PR guild" - 0%, cannot demotivate experts.

Those involved in PR also express opinions about the attitude of sports journalists towards their position (question #6) and as a degree of collegiality in PR communities (question #8), combined in the indicator "Perceptions of the attitude towards football PR experts.

In the ideas about the attitude of sports journalists, the answer "collegial" prevails - 75%. Almost a quarter of them, however, state that they are treated "pretentiously" and even "contemptuously", which means that they encounter difficulties in realizing the image of the club in the public space. None of the survey participants indicated the choices "shows respect" or "indifferent." The results of the survey indicate that PR experts are aware of the delicacy of their place in the coordinate system of "clubs-media-public space" relations.

The assessment of the degree of collegiality in PR communities brings to the fore the choice "satisfactory" - 87%, which means that competition is an inevitable phenomenon in this professional community.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important questions in the research, including the self-evaluation of football PRs, is the categorization of the qualities they need to possess (question #7) in order to receive the expected recognition of their professional capacity in the public space.

Among the dozen proposed characteristics, the respondents give priority to five of them, the most significant for their professional appearance in the public space. Thus, the special knowledge of choosing and applying effective PR technologies and techniques and the unconditionally imposed IT skills received the approval of 95%. Football erudition also comes to the fore, being chosen by 92% of the surveyed persons, and in the next place, also with significant support - 85%, is the language training of PR experts.

Along with these preferences, which are not particularly surprising, to the package of irrevocably necessary qualities, the possession of a broad "general culture" should be added.

Loyalty to the club is also important for the respondents - 42%, which is absolutely necessary and, perhaps, that is why they considered that it is not necessary to mention it further or to highlight it as a

priority characteristic. At a lower level according to preferences, remain "closeness to the fan club" and "personal devotion to the management" with 10% of the survey participants' choices each, and the other specified characteristics do not receive their support as particularly important and necessary for the position.

One of the objectives of the study is to establish the opinion of the experts on the short-term prospects for the development of Bulgarian PR as a whole.

People practicing this occupation predictably declare that it will be necessary to "overcome many obstacles and difficulties" - 69%. Good prospects are highlighted by 15%, and even more have "quite a few doubts about improvement" of the existing situation.

4.2. Orientations of sports journalists on the relationship between football clubs, the media and the public space

In relation to the question "What are your impressions of the contacts with the PR experts of football clubs?", the representatives of sports journalism demonstrate a marked pretentiousness, with 65% of them evaluating them as "satisfactory". At the same time, none of the participants indicated an opinion such as "they are very good with everyone", while 20% of them noted "they are good with most", and at least 15% - "they are not good with most".

In the context of the age dynamics from the point of view of the credibility and timeliness of the submitted information, the interviewed media representatives tend to show solidarity in their answers as to whether they have preferences for the age of the PR experts they communicate with. 84% of those asked have no specific claims to this characteristic, 7% sympathize with people between 30 and 40 years old, 6% of them choose the age from 40 to 50 years old and only 3% - up to 30 years old.

Categoricality in presenting preferences is noted in the responses to the question "Do you think football PRs are sufficiently qualified for this position?". Respondents have the confidence to say that "most leave a lot to be desired" - 81%, leading to the assumption that they make their professional demands on their main communication partners at football clubs. The data shows that 3% of them believe that "almost all" PRs need additional qualification, and according to 16% - only "in rare cases".

To the question "What, in your opinion, is missing in football PR in Bulgaria?", which allows for more than one answer, journalists dealing with football focus their choice on the options of lack of "qualification for relations with the public space" - 72 % and "inability to work with the media" - 60%. In the background, there are answers such as a deficit of: "special football knowledge" - 20%; "language preparation" and "general culture" - 15% each; "IT skills" - 3%. Assuming that the answers reflect the relatively objective opinion of the surveyed persons, we come to the conclusion that there is clearly a deficit of specialized training in the field of football PR specialist.

In this direction, the increased skepticism of the sports journalists regarding the possibilities of the club PR to fulfill the role of mediator between the club and the public space is evident. The data obtained convincingly confirm this thesis, with 55% giving the answer "hardly" and 30% saying "no". Only 22% believe that a public relations specialist can effectively carry out such a function and choose "rather yes" and only 3% - "certainly".

The question "Do you think the capacity of football PRs allows them to help the club in crisis situations?" evokes conflicting attitudes among people in the sports journalism community. The opinions expressed by them mainly focus on two extreme alternatives, the probable reason for this being their own observations and experience of situations requiring crisis PR interventions. Thus, 11% stated "definitely no", 41% "rather no", while at the same time 15% answered "definitely yes", 31% "rather yes", and 2% noted that they could not judge . It can be seen that the expert interventions in the cases of the need for an adequate professional response in extreme situations were not noticed by a sufficiently large percentage of respondents. This fact should direct the attention of those occupying this position in football clubs and their management, to focus their efforts on acquiring the relevant qualified skills and techniques for their expected timely reaction in neutralizing negatives.

Sports journalists also give their opinions on the qualities that should be possessed by people occupying the position of football PR as mediators between the club, the media and the public space.

Unsurprisingly, the answer is that one of the most important characteristics is "communicativeness", indicated by 95% of respondents and the potential for speedy "reactions in crisis situations" - by 82% of them. Qualities such as "representativeness" - 10%, intuitiveness - 12%, "energy" - 8%, "restraint" - 5% and "resourcefulness" - 6% receive a lower degree of preference. The assumption is confirmed that this PR expertise can be accepted as successful, which really helps to overcome problems, resolve conflict cases and ensure normal "passability" in the communication channels between the club and the sports audience. The implementation of the outlined parameters is achievable by adequately and commensurately filling the information vacuum by ensuring systematic and competent appearances in various media.

The possibilities of freedom of expression and initiative in the professional characteristic of the public relations specialist in the football club are explored by means of the question "Do you think that the owners would encourage the activity of the club's PRs outside the precise guidelines for appearing in front of the media?". A relatively small part of sports journalists - 15%, believe that such an approach is impossible, the prevailing opinion is "rather no" - 71%, and the positive answers "rather yes" are only 14%. The stated opinion definitely defines the doubts of the respondents that the self-initiatives of public relations specialists will stimulate admiration and high evaluation by their employers

Certain expectations, such as proposals to update and diversify ("refresh") the role of PR in clubs, demonstrate the answers to the question "When would you accept club PR in a role other than as a literal relay of information ordered by management?". Despite the possibility of more than one answer, the respondents focused their answers exclusively around the statement that they would like "expert answers to the questions asked in the information network" - 93%. It is curious that a not very small percentage - 15% of those who expressed their opinion associated the "refreshing" of the functional characteristics of this professional position with the possibility of providing, along with the standard information, some internal club and, rather, spicy events and facts.

In contrast to the attitudes and opinions demonstrated in the answers to previous questions, when asked "Do you often use information received directly from football club PR?", the interviewed journalists emphasize the benefit of existing contacts. None of the surveyed persons shared that they "do not use information obtained in this way", 5% of them chose the answer "rarely" and 14% - "sometimes". As many as 81% unequivocally claim that "whenever such information is available" they use this information stream. It is obvious that reliable sources of information, its correctness and its systematic provision, is an important condition for forming the attitudes of the respondents, respectively, of sports journalists in general, towards public relations specialists in football clubs.

A similar impression is obtained when analyzing the answers given to the question whether sports journalists on their own initiative seek information from club PRs about the public space. The data shows that 73% do this on "specific occasions" and another 15% that it happens "quite often". Less popular answers to this question are "very rarely" with 12% support and "never" - 0%. This means that the media bring the information to the public domain, the question is how objectively they present its original source?

The last question of the survey is related to opinions on whether the presence of a qualified club PR expert would facilitate and optimize the interaction of sports journalists with the football club from the point of view of information for the public space.

This question actually summarizes the sports journalists' impressions of the professional performances and the overall positioning of the specialists who have assumed the responsibilities of making connections with the media and through them with the public space. Respondents avoided final assessments and only 5% said "definitely yes" and 2% - "rather no", while 93% claimed that it would rather optimize contacts with club communities. Not a single participant in the research shares the opinion that there is no benefit or need for cooperation with PR specialists from the point of view of informing the public.

4.3. Representations to owners, board members, sponsors, managers, coaches, sports technical and executive directors of football clubs on relations with football professionals, the media and the public space

One of the important conclusions that can be drawn is that the majority of the surveyed persons who are part of the management teams of the structures in Bulgarian club football, or 75% of them, are of the opinion that in the public space "the state and the problems of club football are only partially and fragmentarily clarified". The statement that they are presented not clearly enough and "blur" is chosen by 5% of the research participants, and 10% each say that they are "not explained" and that they are "explained very well.

When asked "What is the most important reason for the problems in the relations of clubs with the sports public?", half of the respondents identified it mostly outside the club, in the sports media, as well as the underestimation of clubs in the public space, and only 10% blamed for that the football union.

Intriguing is the opinion of the "strong" in football about the possibilities of their clubs for "the improvement of the activity of advertising through the media" and "the need for professional PR.
 in the football club reality "work is done, but not enough" - 70%, a quarter of them believe that "much more can be done" and only 5% - "we are doing our best" . At the same time, it can be noted that the outlined trends are also confirmed by the findings made from the observations of the clubs' activities by the external expertise. With them, the presence of material and financial potential is established, which would allow the realization of the possibility of effective structuring and implementation of relations with the public at the club level.

The information obtained as a result of the answers to the question "Do you need a professional PR expert?" is interesting. Football management representatives definitely demonstrate a positive attitude towards the professional services of a public relations specialist. Almost a third of the interviewees strongly support the position of such an expert in their football club. More than half - 57% give the answer "rather yes", 10% are skeptical about this issue and share "rather no", and only 3% consider that such help is not necessary in contacts with the sports public. We can assume that there is the benefit of the competences of specially prepared and qualified people who know how to adequately ensure the flow of information from and for sports organizations, and guarantee effective communication with them.

When choosing the proposed options related to the question "Where can one look for the reasons for neglecting the importance of PR in a certain club?", no importance is attached to "organizational disorders" and "financial provision of PR" - 0%. A minimal possibility of ignoring the problem in the answers of the surveyed persons is contained in the answers "reluctance for modern approaches" and "lack of communication culture" - 15% each. The essential reasons for underestimating and neglecting the possibility of improving relations with the public space are unequivocally found in the subjective factor: "misunderstanding of the benefit" - 18%; "underestimating the problem" - 82%.

The data of the study draws attention to the conclusion that the existing deficits regarding the use of the PR capacity for the overall improvement of the condition of football clubs and, as a consequence of their presentation on the football field and in front of the audience, are not significantly influenced by the material and financial provision.

Special and particularly important data for the specific objectives of the present research, provide the received answers to the question "What do you think are the most important qualities of a football PR expert?". Here you can also look for the possible motives for creating and maintaining a similar position in a given football organization. The interest of the interview participants focused on several aspects of this type of professional competence.

Among the qualities proposed for ranking, the surveyed persons bring to the fore "knowledge of the media environment", "application of PR strategies", "correctness towards the club", "language culture" and "special football knowledge", respectively with 95%, 90% , 90%, 90%, 80% of the elections. After these priorities in the ratings, "discretion" - 50%, "high general culture" with 45%, influence in mass media - 25%, "external representativeness" - 10% and personal loyalty - 0% complete the gradation of preferences. The indicated data give reason to consider that among the upper echelons of football representativeness there is a sufficiently clear idea of the nature and importance of the professional appearance of PR teams and personalities. The explanation here is contained in the managerial acumen, which prioritizes professional orientation in the studied position, placing personal sympathies and external ostentation in the background.

The survey shows that, according to the football executives, the PR specialist has great opportunities to appear in various spheres of the club's activity.

When asked "What would you use your PR for?", the information received was quite broad. Expectedly, the options "for competent contacts with mass media", "for following up-to-date information in the media" and "club contacts in the media space" are fully supported by 100%. According to almost half of the interviewees, specialists would have their place and functions as "mediator in contacts with fans" - 40%. This is a testimony that to a large extent the football management perceives and highly values the importance of the club's supporters and communication with them. Access to the people who possess strong club attachment and emotional empathy, which have become an important part of their value system, is a well-recognized necessity for the effective operation and management of the organization.

In the answers to the interview questions, it appears that there are certain expectations for a good PR expert regarding his cooperation in "business contacts with managers" with 30%. It is clear that they rely on the sense of the possibility of the realization of a given deal, on the transmission and promotion of offers related to increasing the personnel capacity of the club. It is noted that communication assistance can also be sought to overcome the "language barrier" with foreign players and, above all, in clarifying internal club regulations with 30% of the elections. A smaller portion of respondents - 20% - said that they would use the PR specialist "to save time in media relations", indicating that they would not take him as a verbatim conduit for their eventual public statements.

The answers to the question "Do you tend to use the media when contacting for transfers?" are of legitimate interest. 35% of the interviewees answered with a definite "yes", 15% with an unequivocal "no". Half of the participants in the study, however, cannot express a firm opinion and emphasize that they "cannot judge". The cited data orient the analysis in two main planes. One of them is how the participation of the media in this type of activity is understood. Probably, the hesitancy shown is due to the assumption that there are quite delicate moments in the intricacies of the negotiations, and the

possible overdose of advertising efforts would prevent their successful conclusion. The other plane in the interpretation of the lack of certainty in the answers is that the media are not prepared for this type of business contacts, and the third – that they will publish confidential and discrediting information about the club and the owner.

One aspect of the problem related to the relationship between the supporters of the football team and the club management is explored through the question "Would you use the media to connect with the fans?". The answers emphasize that this is possible, but "depends on the situation" prevails - 63%. Unsurprisingly, only 12% shared "I would very much rely on one", while a quarter preferred "direct contact" with fan clubs, in both individual and group formats. These answers provoke the thesis about the need to update the opportunities for mediators and mediator between the club community and management.

4.4. The orientations of professional soccer players on relations with clubs, the media and the public space

The characteristics of the public space and the rating of the teams have always been the focus of attention in the analyzes dedicated to the state of the clubs from the position of the managers of the individual players, which also affects their opinion and evaluations.

When they answer the question whether there is accurate and correct information about the state of their clubs in the public space, the players are quite critical, as according to 52% of them they share that this is a fact "only sometimes", another 12% that "they cannot judge" and about 1/3 of those surveyed - 36% indicate that "there is one".

The data registers a significant dissatisfaction with the way in which the teaching-training and playing process in the teams is reflected, evaluated as content (correct, detailed and positive information) and time (timely and up-to-date information) parameters. The demonstrated negative attitude can be related to and explained by the individual players' impression that their efforts and achievements are not presented sufficiently comprehensively and comprehensively, which hinders the successful construction of a positive individual image.

In relation to the football players' opinions about how much media advertising influences and determines their image and popularity, we can make the assumption that they do not fetishize the role of advertising in sports activity, since none of the respondents stopped at the answers "it is entirely due of advertising' and 'largely dependent on it'. The predominant share of opinions is centered on "depends, but to some extent" - 84%, while "does not have much influence" is only 9% and "does not depend at all" with 7%. This distribution of choices is intriguing because it clearly contradicts the widely held claim that good advertising can make a product more desirable to the consumer, with a presumption of higher quality.

After the analysis of these results, it is necessary to look for a correlation with the next question - whether the team's performances are reflected correctly in the mass media and in the public space in general. Here too, although at first glance the opinions are almost equally divided, 54% again say "rather no", and 46% - "rather yes". This can be interpreted as a confirmation of the lack of media presence and an underestimation of the motivated work put into the preparation and competitions, but already at the team level.

In order to more fully reveal the vision and concrete proposals of the football players for the media policy of the club, their answers about the possible channels of information serving the process of interaction mainly between the team and the media can be analyzed. The interesting thing here is that, despite the criticism of the way the teams are presented, only 23% of the respondents rely on their meetings with their representatives, and almost twice as many - 41% of them expect and would appreciate the development and publication of "more in-depth materials'. The presented data demonstrate a prevailing impression of superficiality of media information about football in our country, of distance from the real problems of players and teams. And here, to the joy and satisfaction of sports PRs, nearly a third of the respondents or 34% orientate and trust the specialized press center, where the public relations experts are located. Only 2% are betting on better relations with the fans, and none of them is

inclined to suggest to the club owners to expand the time, format and content of their performances to improve coordination and communication with the audience.

The credibility of the above is also evidenced by the orientations to the question "How do you prefer to communicate with the media?" (question 4). More than a third - 36%, share that they would like only direct contacts, 8% - only through the mediation of the club's managers, 56% are again of the opinion that the qualified factors in the football club, i.e. the PR experts , would be best able to make these contacts or mediate it.

The players who took part in the research also determine their attitude to whether the football club benefits from a trained PR specialist.

It is clear that this matter is particularly delicate and requires a high degree of candor that not everyone is capable of. Perhaps because of this, not a small part - 16%, answer that they cannot judge, and only 3% that it is not needed. Another 19% "I'm not sure" react quite evasively. The great majority of those asked take the firm position that the club will not make a mistake if it uses the services of such a specialist - 62%.

The data obtained in this part of the research accumulated important information about the moods and attitudes about the information situation in the specific club or in general in this sector of society. And this is happening at a time when managers and football officials are trying, using all possible techniques and means, to retain or attract better players in order to improve the game and improve the level of their teams.

In this plan, the opinion of the interviewed footballers is important as to whether they would use the media in the contacts for their possible transfer, provided that this is done with the notification of the club management (question #5).

In the answers to this question, it is once again demonstrated that, in general, players tend to trust possible media assistance. This trend is confirmed by the fact that 84% of them share that they would do so, but depending on the quality of the media, and another 8% strongly say yes. Only 3% state "rather not", 2% "don't count", and 3% cannot answer.

We assume that the critical state of Bulgarian club football as a whole undoubtedly reflects on the public image of the players. Excessive scrutiny of their daily life and, not infrequently, probing into the most intimate details of their personal existence, gives the impression that they are undeservedly favored and spend most of their time in entertainment and affluence. This creates tension both among the players themselves and between them, the media, the club management and the fans.

In the context of professional footballers' orientations to relationships with clubs, the media and the public sphere, we also studied and analyzed the relationships between current and former footballers and their girlfriends and wives.

Relationship Profiles

Profile 1: Cohabitation without marriage

He is one of the most famous football players in Bulgaria in the past. The former international and his girlfriend were one of the most popular couples in our country. When his girlfriend becomes pregnant, the footballer plays abroad and has almost no opportunity to take care of his partner.

"We are not thinking about a wedding yet. Unfortunately, she won't be able to come to me, firstly because it's cold and secondly because she has work to do. Of course, I will see her often." However, his

girlfriend tells a lot more about their life together, of course, on the important condition that this information does not go public.

Predictions and realities of connection stability

● There are good reasons for the possible subsequent stability of the relationship, related to the fact that both know the basic needs of the partner next to them and strive to satisfy them.

- His relationship and marriage needs – sexual satisfaction, friend to spend free time with, attractive appearance, household skills, admiration.

- Her relationship and marriage needs – tenderness, verbal communication, honesty and openness, financial support, commitment in cohabitation.

● The negative aspect in the forecast for a positive development of the relationship is related to the fact that she has never lived permanently with him abroad, as is the case with most football wives and girlfriends.

● Reality: The relationship is destroyed, which has a negative impact on the footballer's performances and he leaves the team.

Profile 2: Cohabitation with marriage

The goalkeeper and his wife Ralitsa are also among the quite popular couples in sports circles. He hasn't played that often lately, due to the purchase of the Marseille teenager, who is a solid starter. He often stays out of the group for the match, but this gives him the opportunity to spend more time with his family.

"Of course I allow a few questions as long as they don't go into the public space" the doorman allowed as his wife fed the baby.

Predictions and realities of connection stability

● There are prerequisites for the stability of the marriage - both of them know each other very well and during the period of the previous partnership they had the opportunity to perceive each other's opinions on more important issues of joint cohabitation, including the upbringing and education of the child.

● The negative aspect in the forecast is related to the conflicts regarding the personal needs of the partners.

● Reality: Their marriage still exists today and they are on very good terms.

Profile 3: Non-cohabiting partnership

Quite rarely in a couple where there is a football player, the woman is better known in the public sphere as a folk diva. The singer is 13 years older. This apparently does not prevent the two from having a relationship, and quite a secret one at that. People around them try in every way to stop the "rumors" that they are together. Since he is prohibited from giving statements, she shared some things from the kitchen of their relationship.

Predictions and realities of connection stability

● The prerequisites for the stability of the relationship are exhausted with physical attraction and satisfying sexual relations for both, while maintaining the distance.

● The prerequisites for the breakdown of the relationship are significantly more: the possible desire of the football player to accept the role of "child's partner", which contradicts egocentrism and the declared independence from it; her lack of interest in his needs beyond sexual pleasure; its financial independence; her life orientations of to end such relationships after a certain period of time.

● Reality: The relationship did not last long, which had a positive effect on the football player's form.

4.5. Presentations to supporters of football clubs on relations with the club, the media and the public sphere

Researching fan orientations from club football communities is undoubtedly necessary to determine strategies for interaction and communication with them. For the purposes of the present study, this target group was observed, mostly as a social association, with a certain degree of cohesion and ability to influence management decisions and building a public image of the football club.

Interesting findings can be made when analyzing the answers given to the first three questions of the survey. They are dedicated to the image of the clubs and its connection with the implementation of the relevant club policy.

When asked about the image of their favorite team in the public space, the overwhelming share of preferences is for its positive evaluation.

Asked what they see as opportunities to improve the public image of their club, 74% unequivocally say that the most important condition for this is the performances of the teams on the football field. This is a relatively objective assessment of the possibilities of success and strongly emphasizes that without real changes in the playing potential of the teams, a change in public attitudes towards a positive assessment and approval can hardly be expected. The results of the survey show that only 5% of them are of the opinion that the main factor in this regard is the owners and management of the clubs

At the same time, when they have to express their opinion about the media policy carried out by the club management, the fans are extremely critical. As many as 68% categorically state that it is "undervalued", 9% that it is inappropriate, and 8% even claim that it "lacks a media strategy".

Analyzing the data provided by the respondents, it is possible to make several assumptions.

By all accounts, it seems that supporters of the teams are comparing some high moments in the history of the clubs, which for the general sports audience are iconic, with their current unenviable state. They would like as little analogy between past and present as possible. The explanation is based on the possible damage to their sense of pride associated with the identification of belonging to something very significant in their value system.

Another hypothesis is that, looking for the reasons for the team's malaise, fans identify the ineffective club strategy to improve its condition and the need for greater efforts in the field of relations with the general public, which most likely concentrate on influencing the media.

These answers, as well as the opinions expressed in the following questions, lead the analysis to the conclusion that football fans are not, as is often claimed, very limited and closed in their club space and are not interested in comments about their "idols" - the players in the team. This is precisely what is established when asking whether their club "has room for the professional skills of a well-prepared football PR expert (question 4).

17% of respondents say that there is definitely a need for PR at the club, and a remarkable 61% are slightly hesitant, saying "maybe there is". The opposite opinions are held by a small number of supporters, as follows - with "rather doubtful" are 9%, "it is not necessary" with 5% and without an opinion are 8%. This information is particularly important as it demonstrates positive expectations that the qualified expertise of prepared PRs can to some extent contribute to stirring and refreshing the mood around the club and to the belief in a good prospect for it.

Supporters who took part in the research noted their understanding of the ability of public relations specialists to mediate and make rational contact between them and those occupying other positions in the club structure and, above all, with players and owners. In contrast to those stating "I would hardly use this successfully", "I highly doubt it" and "there is no place in this relationship", which are on the negative spectrum of the assessment and in total make up about a quarter of the respondents, 11% fully share this role. and as many as 64% also accept it, "but with many conditions". Since the topic of contacts of large groups of enthusiasts with individuals, organizations and institutions, outside their circles, is often discussed and subjected to doubts, the research data would contribute to its, albeit partial, enrichment.

Club supporters also give their opinion on "What special skills should a successful PR expert have?"

Of the options provided, they overwhelmingly choose "understands the ins and outs of public and media relations" - 97%, "protects the club community" - 95% and "can skillfully interpret what is said by players, coaches and managers" - 93% . The indicated results are categorical in the direction of the fact that more special qualities such as mastery of IT technologies and communications, of foreign languages and a rich general culture, remain behind in the ranking when determining the participation of PRs in the life and activity of the clubs.

The observation of the club's fan mass confirmed the observed trend of its serious outflow from the Bulgarian football stadiums. Public opinion comments on this phenomenon most often, emphasizing the audience of the elite teams, while ignoring its extremely mass character in the football structures of the lower levels, as well as in the so-called "mass" or "amateur" football. In the media space, there is a lack of serious and in-depth analyzes about the unsatisfactory state of children's and youth football, which are usually far from public attention. Almost always, the reasons for all this are sought first of all in the sphere of financing and the lack of sponsorship interest, which, however, only to a certain extent explains this negative trend.

Football is a spectator-oriented game, and not a small part of them are fans of the various clubs. Not only sporting performances, but also those of the fans, determine the public's attitude towards football clubs and, in a sense, their overall condition. It can therefore be argued that supporters and their communities are key links in the interdependence between teams and their public image. This fact necessitates the use of modern PR aimed at increasing the interest and motivation of viewers.

It can be confidently asserted that the fans, as consumers of the main product of the football game - the spectacle, are of key importance for the interest of the expected helpers - sponsors, advertising agencies, investors and media. Empty stadiums, even at so-called derby matches, cause them to hesitate and doubt regarding current and future financial investments in club activities. So the involvement of fans in football gives a specific character to football, seen as a business environment, which distinguishes it from all others.

After all, professional football is a product that is consumed by the public, which in turn is the target audience to which the business is trying to secure access and resources. These processes and dependencies are felt and understood by the fans themselves, who expect the clubs to seek their support to stabilize their financial and personnel situation. Here they also see the possibility of finding a mediator who will synthesize and direct their emotional and organizational energy for the well-being of the club.

CONCLUSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between professional football clubs and the public space should be seen as a complex and multifaceted process, as interactions and relationships involving various institutions, organizations, officials, media as intermediaries and mediators. When examining the relationship between football structures and the public space, it should be noted that there are behind-the-scenes actions of organizations and circles that are far from sport and football, but which aim to use the most popular game with suspicious intentions for quick and easy profit, often in extremely large financial dimensions. Economic and financial giants are constantly looking for and often find ways to use football as a tool to implement their PR policy. Large industrial cartels associate their brand with famous football teams or with their "football stars", big businessmen position themselves as active sports figures or enthusiasts.

The contacts between football structures and the public space are difficult to describe and analyze, because the constantly arising moral and psychological relationships have a significantly richer phenomenology, which can be the basis for diverse interpretations by socio-psychological and professional-ethical expertise. For this reason, it is grossly insufficient to assume that public relations alone are the only events that trigger the emergence and functioning of the interaction between the football club and the relevant public environment.

The obtained results and the analysis of the orientations of the groups of respondents led us to the formulation of the following **SPECIFIC CONCLUSIONS:**

1. Orientations of PR experts of professional football clubs in their role as mediators in the relations between the clubs, the media and the public space.
• PR specialists working in leading football clubs in our country fulfill their professional commitments in good faith, being aware of the difficulties they have to overcome in their implementation.
• In this plan, they accept the challenges to their professional appearance and self-critically interpret the claims to them, from the point of view of the image of the clubs in the public space, because, according to them, precisely the performances and achievements of the teams in various prestigious championships and tournaments, as well as better management and the maintenance of own academies preparing young and talented players would contribute to the positive image of the club.
• Their idea of the main qualities and skills they must have for communication with the media and the public space are broad and sports erudition, PR knowledge and skills, journalistic experience, loyalty to the club, IT skills, foreign language competences.
• The orientations of the target group regarding the problems and difficulties they encounter in their work are mostly related to misunderstanding with the owners and negative attitudes towards the club in the public space, provoked by authoritative media.

2. Orientations of sports journalists about the relations between football clubs, the media and the public space.
• The majority of sports journalists appreciate the effective cooperation and interaction with the football specialists, representatives of the clubs, from the point of view of forming the image of the club in the public space. Specifically, they seek information from them on certain specific occasions with the aim of relaying it to information networks.
• The up-to-date qualities of football PR, from the point of view of its mediation between the club, the media and the public space, indicated by the sports journalists, are communication and an adequate reaction in crisis situations.

• At the same time, they indicate as the main shortcomings of football experts their qualification for relations with the public space, as well as the lack of sufficient sports-technical erudition regarding questions asked in it through the information networks, and they believe that there is much to be desired in this regard. There is also skepticism about the mediating functions of football pundits in the context of communication between the club, the media and the public sphere.

3. Representations to owners, members of management boards, sponsors, managers, coaches, sports-technical and executive directors of professional football clubs about relations with football specialists, the media and the public space.
• The majority of the surveyed respondents, who are part of the management teams of the structures in Bulgarian club football, are of the opinion that in the public space "the state and problems of club football are clarified only partially and fragmentarily".
• In general, the target group accepts, in principle, that there is appropriate expertise to carry out PR activities in global practice, and they unite around the thesis that these are the specialists in relations with the public space. In this regard, two-thirds of the respondents do not have a clear position regarding the use of the media in player transfers and are guided by the possibilities of their own club expertise. Management representatives expressed almost the same vague opinion about the use of the media to connect the club with the fans.
• Although they appreciate the relevance of the football expert as a necessary or possible part of the football club's team, the management representatives do not clearly define it as a position that creates conditions for efficient activity with the public, and above all for advertising provision or for qualified interpretation of their opinion.
• The data from the interview and the observation of football practice are grounds for the finding that in most clubs PR specialists are often engaged in extraneous activities that limit their professional opportunities. Only in units of the studied football clubs is the position of PR specialist held by people who have acquired adequate education in a corresponding specialty or have previously passed through a professional qualification in the field of public relations.

4. Orientations of professional footballers for relations with clubs, the media and the public space.
• Players of professional football clubs are not fully comfortable with the inadequate information environment in terms of their efforts in the learning-training and playing process and are trying to restore the damaged and deformed professional and personal public image, and the corresponding low public image. rating.
• As the main reason for the unenviable state of their public image, footballers identify the commercially motivated and incorrect attitude, above all, of the media covering the events of their team and club, and the claims for this are aimed at the lack or insufficient precision and loyalty demonstrated in publications and broadcasts, which provokes a lack of media literacy among supporters.
• In connection with the stated reasons with a negative influence, the expectations of the club's competitors are oriented towards factors positioned exclusively outside the club.
• In relation to the conditions of the environment in which they prepare and perform, the footballers accept as something rational the functioning of cooperation channels between them and the club management, improving both the team image and their personal presentation in the public space.
• Although conditional, players are willing to delegate trust to club PR, but only if effective expertise and unequivocal loyalty are demonstrated.

5. Representations to supporters of football clubs about relations with the club, the media and the public space.
• Although the state of Bulgarian football is not at its best, the number of emotionally involved supporters, especially with the elite clubs, remains impressively high, because they give a positive

assessment of the image of their favorite team in the public space. Fans of football clubs jealously guard their territory and tend to withdraw from anyone who tries to enter it without proving loyalty to the professed values and ideals.

• For fans, the most important condition for improving the public image of their club is the team's performance on the football pitch, in second place they point to better PR in the media, in the last places are the owners and the management. This is a relatively objective assessment of the possibilities of success and strongly emphasizes that without real changes in the playing potential of the teams, a change in public attitudes towards a positive assessment and approval can hardly be expected.

• Zapalyankovites assume that between them and other positions or units in the club structure, it is possible to have a fruitful interaction, which would contribute to the positive image of the club in the public space, i.e. perceive the role of football PR as a possible mediator or, at least, as a correct information channel between them and others

• In this plan, the most valuable characteristics of a football expert are to understand the intricacies of public and media relations, to protect the club community and to be able to skillfully interpret what is said by players, coaches and managers, ie. Enthusiasts do not focus so much on the personal qualities of the specialist, but look for the rationality of his presence and the effect on the final result. The personal characteristics of the PR are only a means to achieve the goals of the teams, and these are the victories in individual matches and the conquest of cups, the presence of their teams and individual competitors on the ladders of honor and the receipt of prizes, medals, etc., the upward development of the teams as a whole.

The comparative plan of the orientations of the target groups led to the formulation of **GLOBAL CONCLUSIONS related to the following paradoxes and contradictions**

1. The majority of the representatives of the target groups clearly realize that the crisis in the football sports activity is multidirectional and that in order to accelerate the processes of getting out of it, options for qualified and effective work in the field of the club's relations with the media should be sought and public space.

2. The obtained results testify to the opinion that the processes that are the basis of the difficulties and the unfavorable position of the native football are not presented sufficiently adequately in the public space.

3. In the connections of the club such as management, players, supporters, represented by the PR expertise and the media, there are many niches and unclear parameters and, in general, delicate attitudes that reflect in the public space.

• There is a certain tension, although not clearly expressed, between the media and football experts as representatives of the clubs, related to the promotion and coverage of the football game, because both experts, and especially sports journalists, have a negative opinion about the objectivity of the media environment as a field for their appearance.

• Specifically, contacts between media representatives and club PRs function at a level that guarantees access to information about club issues, but journalists either underestimate the role of the football club representative as an informant of the public space, or have an interest in being the first to inform the public as "own discovery". This means a lack of stability in the relations between football clubs, the media and the public space.

• With the exception of sports journalists, the majority of the representatives of the target groups express the belief that public relations specialists can perform their functions competently in the interaction with the public sphere, despite the problems with the media, fans and club owners. The stated reasons

problematize the work of club PR as an intermediary between football clubs, the media and the public space.

• Shared opinions can be a serious signal to representatives of sports journalism, who, according to people in management functions in football, do not show depth in their material on these subjects, but rather seek the sensation of football life, instead of paying more attention to the real issues , which seriously hinder the development of the football game and its participants.

Hypotheses and proposals for the optimization of relationships between professional football clubs, the media and the public space

1. One of the main goals of the Bulgarian football reality should be to ensure a comfortable media environment when covering the activities of football clubs and, especially, the appearances of their players, coaches and officials in competitions during their public promotion and as a projection, image enhancement of the club in public space.

2. In this sense, the information about the possible professional potential of the media enables them to win the trust of a significant part of the staff of the teams and to look for a place for realization in various directions of the clubs' activities.

3. In order to overcome the dissatisfaction of the participants in the football clubs and supporters in connection with the dissatisfaction of coverage of their publicity by the media and their categorical intention to assert their rights for adequate coverage and evaluation of their work, efforts and individual interests, the emphasis on increasing attention and sensitivity regarding the PR activity in the clubs and the possibilities for its improvement as a realization of their image in the public space.

- In this context, the image of the structures of any modern football club requires planning, management and active participation in the process of forming public opinions through two-way communication with feedback. These policies should become one of the most essential applied spheres of football PR, because it is their positive presentation in the public space by trained public relations specialists that forms the current opinion about the symbolism and semantics of the club, of football as an ethical category and of sport as a social phenomenon.

- Attempts to develop and derive the parameters of a standardized job description of a club PR would have a positive effect for the practice, to be used in the assumption of similar professional functions by the relevant specialists. This would also clarify his profile in the club hierarchy as an intermediary between the club, the media and the public space.

The specific and global conclusions drawn, hypotheses and proposals for the optimization of the relationship between professional football clubs, the media and the public space led us to the idea of compiling a handbook of football PR, as the main factor for positive relations between football clubs, the media and the public, and educating of media literacy.

HANDBOOK OF FOOTBALL PR

or

"How to mediate between the football club, the media and the public in the context of communication"

Justification

In recent years, the idea that journalism/PR is what is spoken in front of a camera or written on social networks in order to have a reaction in society has gradually begun to take hold. To communicate with the public and deliver messages to their target groups, football PRs use a variety of methods and means. It can be said that football as a sport, because of its popularity, has the property of PR.

We offer a handbook for football PRs, for realizing their main goals and activities, for communicating with the media and presenting important information from football clubs, as well as for fostering media literacy.

Guidelines/Points of Reference

1. Let us not forget that football is first and foremost a game and as such its purpose is to bring more entertainment and positive emotions and less disappointment, anger and sadness.
2. You know that football PR works primarily for the formation and enhancement of the image of the football club, for its good reputation in the public sphere.
3. An important message for you football PRs is that for the successful mission of the football club, it is necessary to effectively manage the communication processes to attract influential partners and to ensure support from the social groups that can influence the success of the club's activities .
4. Work actively to build and improve the internal club communication system, to form a team in the broadest sense of the word, as a team of like-minded people, sharing the policy of the management and ready to jointly implement all goals and tasks. The human factor and the team/team are key factors in the activity of the football organization. Create an atmosphere of goodwill.
5. Remember that you have different approaches, mechanisms and means to influence opinion, such as a sustainable position of different social groups - of footballers, of management, of fans of the club, of media and of wider public associations. By changing the opinion, you change the actions, statements, position of the whole group or association.
6. Try to correct public opinion when a negative situation arises about the football club you work for, but with positive ways and means.
7. A particularly important component of the activity of football PR is the survey of public opinion of various social groups that are related to the activity of the club. You must implement them in the direction of determining the necessary policy and adopting management decisions, as well as in connection with the creation of an information flow for the distribution of certain important information.
8. Football PR aims to show the real achievements and difficulties of the club. Do not mislead journalists and fans, the truth has the property of always emerging and spreading.
9. Football PR monitors and uses all possible channels to gather information. You don't have to be at a place and event to find out what happened there, especially in the information age we live in.
10. Attempts by football PR to limit the spread of information will multiply the channels for it and they will become much more for it to multiply and reach the audience.

11. In communicating with the football audience, it is necessary to achieve balance and equilibrium between presenting and not communicating (keeping) information about the club.

12. Create the possible positive notoriety of the management of the club and the persons in it in the circles related to its activity.

13. Keep in mind that the club president and management are not the only sources of information. It has more to do with your own perceptions and judgments rather than those of the audience.

14. Repeatedly repeating untruths does not make something true - for example, if a stadium is empty, it will not be filled by your words alone.

15. Expanding your social media presence too much is not advisable, especially when you are in an emotional state.

16. It is recommended not to use black PR, which consists of spreading false information about the team or the people in it, negative comments and statements aimed at compromising competitors, and sometimes it also contains direct fraud. This will not help the club as a whole and those sympathetic to his cause.

17. Use mostly white PR that handles transparent, true and reliable information. It focuses on the benefits and advantages of the football club, the personalities within it and the fans, on all possible positives associated with them. This is sure to guarantee positive energy and social commentary.

18. The image and popularity of each individual player affects those of the entire football club. Football PR must prepare the players how to behave in the media space and not cause blunders. It happens that a problem competitor is removed if he damages the image, even if he has good sporting achievements.

19. It is important to know that the image of the football club largely depends on the results and achievements of its representatives. Potential partners appreciate the expediency of cooperation and investment, and visitors are interested in the victory of the team, which they feel.

20. It is necessary to proceed in such a way as to weaken the dependence of the image of a particular football player on his momentary sports achievements, especially on the weaker performance in matches. In particular, emphasis should be placed on his presence as a person in the public space. Thus, the football player becomes a full-fledged brand, and such an approach expands the consumer audience.

21. It is good to know that many people are interested in significant events in the world of football (for example, the World Cup), true fans are distinguished by their constant attention to events related to the club. For this reason, it is necessary to direct the considerable volume of information and advertisements for the club in specialized and social media.

22. For more significant football successes, carry out the necessary communication with the media in order to promote them and even hyperbolize them, and the events should be covered not only in specialized media, but also in other media with greater public significance and prominence .

23. It is important to know that cooperation and communication with all types of media is an essential component of the activity of football PR, and with specialized sports media they are of mutual interest. Without media information it is difficult to attract fans to the stadium, and without up-to-date information about the football club, circulation or media viewing/listening drops significantly. The focus of messages should be on media that have positioned themselves in the market as a source of news about football and its audience.

24. Use show elements in sports competition to attract new users and fans, even non-sports fans. The participation in the competition of celebrities from showbiz is key in this sense, for example, singers, dancers, etc. are invited. They are attractive to a certain segment of people who may stay for the sporting event as well. Give events a socially significant meaning.

25. You can organize PR campaigns and special events that will gain a lot of popularity among fans such as "Bring the child or family to a match", which will increase public interest in the football club. Not to mention the guaranteed participation of celebrities in various social spheres – athletes/footballers, musicians, artists, presenters, etc.

26. Participate and activate the creation of a comfortable environment for visitors by using new technologies, including in the distribution of tickets, teams, souvenirs, etc.

27. Give free rein to your imagination and fantasy. For example, before a match you can provide an opportunity for fans to put on their club colors in a safe way in a convenient place for them, which creates additional exposure for the football organization.

28. Keep in mind that the football club is a subject of market relations, and the market exists in the conditions of competition, which creates new, non-price parameters in the positioning of this organization - good image and reputation. Form them in a purposeful, organized and step-by-step manner.

29. Emphasize economic stability of the football organization, with budget transparency, structure and specific financial results being important. The goals here are in the direction of attracting sponsors and new fans.

30. It is important to know that one of the tools for increasing profitability is cooperation with large and publicly known companies and organizations. This expands the possibilities of the advertising campaign in the media as well. It is especially important to attract sponsors who sell related products such as sports shoes and clothing. Here, the effect is two-sided - the interest of users in the club brand increases, but the sales of the company also increase.

31. Lobby loyally and correctly for the football club and its representatives, try to search and find legal sources for its funding.

32. It is good to know that the popularity of sports events is determined by several factors: mass and wide audience; personification - attention to specific representatives of the club; competitive nature - struggle between rivals; patriotic component – support for football players is part of a national cause; variety of participants, funds; positive image - is associated with a healthy lifestyle, etc.

If your football club is successful and prosperous, if fans continue to seek and buy tickets for matches, and sponsors line up to support you, if sports journalists devote inspired stories to you, and local authorities always support the club, then it is not necessary read again and again the guidelines/reference points we have written for you!

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SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS.

I. Theoretical interpretation of the problem area.

→ Analytical and systematic analysis of:

- History, traditions and trends of the "football" phenomenon and the public space: Football and communications; Football and business; Football clubs and public space;

- Communication between football clubs, the media and the public space: Mediating functions of Football PR; Interactions of management and football pundits with supporters; Relations at internal club level between football pundits, management, owners and sponsors; Relations of the club with the players.

II. Terminological justification of the problem.

→ Concepts related to the topic of the dissertation work and experimental research are defined:
- Image, publicity and public space: A set of meanings associated with an object through which people describe, remember and associate it. As a fundamental effect of publicity, the image is subject to planning and management, which outlines one of the most essential applied spheres of relations with the public space;
- Football club, image and public space: "Football publicity" is "the publicly conscious image and understanding (public opinion) of the football activity organized through a respective club or as a manifestation of a national team in general, develop the exchange of the information flow, simultaneously make sense of its content;

III. Research projections.
→ An author's methodology for researching the orientations of the following groups of respondents was developed and tested:
- PR specialists as mediators in the relations between professional football clubs, the media and the public space;
- Sports journalists from leading media;
- Professional football players;
- Supporters of football clubs.
→ A Football PR Handbook "How to mediate between the football club, the media and the public in the context of communication" was developed.
- The purpose of the Handbook is to realize the main goals and activities for communicating with the media and presenting important information from football clubs, as well as for fostering media literacy.

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