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Rethinking Women's Football Attendance in an Emerging Destination: Constraints, Marketing Awareness and Interest through a Pluriversal Lens

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Abstract: Women's football is increasingly recognised as an important component of the sport tourism industry, with potential to diversify audiences, stimulate domestic travel, and advance gender inclusivity in emerging destinations. Yet, despite the growing interest, attendance remains inconsistent, complicating conventional measures of spectator demand. This study compared individuals who had attended women's football matches in an emerging destination, South Africa and interested non-attendees, examining associations between attendance status, perceived financial and logistical constraints, perceived marketing awareness, and interest in the sport. A cross-sectional online survey was used to gather data (N=378) using non-probability convenience and self-selected sampling methods. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and hierarchical binary logistic regression to compare attendees with interested non-attendees. Findings indicate that stronger interest in women's football is significantly associated with a lower likelihood of non-attendance, whereas perceived financial and logistical constraints and marketing awareness were not significant. Gender did not add explanatory value. A pluriversal perspective informs the interpretation of the experiences that the standardised measures leave unexplored. For event organisers and destination marketers, these findings emphasise the need to convert existing interest into actual attendance, re-evaluate access barriers that standard measures might miss, and develop strategies to better engage diverse audiences in women's football.

Keywords: Attendance constraints, marketing awareness, pluriversality, spectator attendance, sport tourism, women's football

Introduction

The global football market grew from $1.8 billion in 2019 to $3.02 billion in 2021, with projections reaching $3.87 billion by 2027 (Rourke, 2023), proving its significant potential and economic benefits for the host destinations (Chinhanga et al., 2024). Attendance at sports events remains a key indicator of the social, cultural, and economic vitality of the global sports industry (Prasetyo et al., 2025). Non-attenders of women's football events who express interest complicate traditional measures of spectator demand, since attendance counts record their

absence without revealing whether practical barriers or motivational dynamics explain the absence. For sport tourism, this distinction is critical because participation determines who encounters host destinations through football events. Prior research, such as Tichaawa and Hemmonsbey's (2022) study of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Cameroon, has linked spectators' destination perceptions to cultural diversity and sport positioning. However, the experiences of existing interested attendees provide only a partial basis for understanding the broader audience for women's football.

Research on women's professional football identifies venue accessibility, local economic conditions and club organisation as factors relevant to attendance (Chahardovali et al., 2024; Hadwiger et al., 2025; Valenti et al., 2025). These studies establish the importance of the conditions surrounding football matches, while allowing for analysis to examine how attendance histories differ among individuals who have already expressed interest in the sport. Spectators often form emotional and psychological attachments to sports through experiences that transcend affordability and fixture availability. For instance, spectators may develop a strong connection to their teams based on shared identities or community values. This is evident when big teams play, as stadiums reach capacity and tickets are sold out, highlighting how group enthusiasm turns interest into attendance. In their study of women's football fandom, Allison and Pope (2022) highlight the importance of factors such as individual playing histories, personal relationships, and active participation in online communities, with motivations including sporting enjoyment and commitments to gender equality.

A better understanding of the dynamics of women's football attendance requires attention to the conditions surrounding matches, the ways audiences encounter the sport, and their levels of interest. Spatial and economic conditions situate attendance within the costs and practical arrangements of reaching venues, while marketing and communication shape routes into awareness and engagement. Traditional match-level demand models often fall short of addressing the factors that distinguish those who attend matches from those who express interest but do not participate.

Pluriversality recognises multiple ways of knowing and being, challenging the assumption that a single account can adequately represent diverse social realities (Escobar, 2020). Applied to tourism, this perspective directs attention to the relationships and material conditions through which participation acquires meaning (Pernecky, 2024). Thus, it informs scrutiny of whose experiences attendance measures represent and which experiences remain outside their categories.

This study examines whether perceived financial and logistical constraints, perceived marketing awareness, and interest in women's football differ between individuals who are interested in and have attended women's football matches and those who are interested but have not attended in an emerging destination, South Africa, and whether these factors are associated with attendance status. In this study, by including interested non-attendees of women's football matches, the study extends the comparison beyond existing spectators to an audience that stadium-based recruitment would exclude. It therefore provides evidence relevant to

understanding both established attendance and potential first-time participation. Event organisers can use this information to better balance affordability and communication efforts, while also enhancing engagement with women's football.

Literature review

Spatial and economic conditions of women's football attendance

The academic discourse on sports attendance has historically overlooked niche segments and emerging markets, often failing to utilise disaggregated data to capture the complex realities of spectator behaviour. Attendance research has been dominated by quantitative demand equations that model attendance as a function of socio-economic and sport-related determinants, including ticket price, income, population size, and the availability of substitute goods (Valenti et al., 2020). Econometric studies have explored different aspects of attendance, such as where the match is held, the characteristics of the competition, and the relationship between women's and men's teams, to explain variations in crowd size (Chahardovali et al., 2024; Croft & Tena, 2025), whereas research on fandom focuses on how social bonds and sporting passions make participation desirable (Allison et al., 2025; Allison & Pope, 2022; Rosa et al., 2024). (Valenti et al., 2025) have demonstrated that weekend scheduling, favourable weather, and shorter travel distances increase attendance, and are linked to higher stadium capacity, more predictable outcomes and favourable odds for the home team. In addition, these researchers put forward the notion that fans of integrated clubs attend women's matches less when they clash with the corresponding men's fixtures, except in double-headers, suggesting that substitution effects shape women's football matches. These studies' implications point to the need to improve scheduling and matchday facilities, and to harmonise calendars across men's and women's competitions to avoid fixture clashes, ensuring that supporters don't have to choose between men's and women's matches and thus reducing divided audiences. In addition, creating opportunities for men's football supporters to also engage with women's matches through joint marketing, double-headers, or shared club structures to generate spillover effects, where enthusiasm for one competition boosts attendance in the other. While both types of research, econometrics and fandom studies, explore why people engage with women's football, they address different aspects of the phenomenon: econometric studies examine external factors affecting attendance, whereas fandom studies examine the motivations of individuals already interested in women's football.

Venue location and club organisation shape the conditions under which attendance takes place. Chahardovali et al. (2024) associate greater distance from city centres with lower attendance at women's league matches, indicating that aggregate crowd sizes reflect accessibility as well as audience interest. Hadwiger et al. (2025) show that integration with men's clubs can support larger crowds, but that these benefits depend on how clubs develop the opportunities arising from integration. This resonates with the caution that insights from men's football cannot be directly applied to women's football, as the sport has historically supported hegemonic masculinities and gender dominance that influence women's roles within

the sports industry (Valenti et al., 2020). Evidence from emerging destinations such as Côte d'Ivoire has pointed to spectators' disinterest in women's championship competitions, which was attributed to inadequate spectator infrastructure, limited financial support, and a lack of professionalism, resulting in a less attractive spectacle (Songuifolo et al., 2025). The integrative review of women's football studies similarly contests the explanation for low demand, urging researchers to examine contexts such as Sweden and the United States, where women's teams and players have become popular and accepted (Valenti et al., 2018).

Marketing awareness and routes into engagement

Women's football faces persistent inequalities in the allocation of televised sports news and highlights coverage, leading to an institutionalised disparity in visibility (Cooky et al., 2021), making it difficult to achieve sufficient visibility and convert that visibility into stadium attendance. Studies of football media show that men's competitions continue to receive disproportionate attention, even when women's competitions are available for coverage (Cooky et al., 2021; Lenartowicz & Organista, 2023). This imbalance limits how often potential spectators encounter women's teams, players and fixtures. Awareness of a sporting event involves several distinct components, such as general knowledge of the fixture itself, engagement with promotional materials, including advertisements and social media campaigns, and practical considerations that enable attendance, such as transportation and scheduling. The relevance of communication depends partly on the information it provides. General exposure to women's football differs from knowing when a particular match takes place, how to obtain tickets and reach the venue.

Marketing may support the shift from being an interested non-attender to an interested attender of women's football events by reducing informational barriers and creating opportunities to interact with teams and players. Broadcast exposure, fixture announcements, ticket information, social media content, reminders and match-day promotions can make events more readily identifiable and accessible to potential spectators (Taylor & Leslie-Walker, 2025; Valenti et al., 2018). These activities may also support revenue generation and sponsorship by demonstrating an identifiable and engaged audience. Yet the promotional literature frequently combines communication mechanisms that perform different functions. Fixture announcements and ticket information address practical knowledge gaps, while player-centred content, social networks and community engagement may strengthen psychological attachment over time. Game-day promotions and product giveaways can encourage attendance at a particular match, but they offer limited evidence of sustained audience growth. Marketing awareness should consequently be understood as more than exposure to advertising; it concerns whether communication makes an event knowable, relevant and sufficiently compelling to enter a spectator's set of behavioural choices.

The assumption that greater promotion will necessarily produce larger crowds is contested by Valenti et al. (2020) who argued that attendance also responds to the quality and significance of the sporting contest, including competition stage, team reputation, competitive intensity and the attractiveness of

the fixture. Liu et al. (2025) further indicate that stadium attendance and digital consumption have different determinants, demonstrating that online visibility or engagement cannot serve as a direct proxy for willingness to attend in person. The relationship between marketing and attendance is therefore conditional, as communication may draw attention to a fixture, but conversion depends on what the event offers, when and where it is staged, and the strength of the spectator's connection to the sport. This helps explain why high-profile tournaments can produce temporary increases in attendance without generating comparable demand for recurring domestic league fixtures.

Pluriversality and the boundaries of attendance explanations

An attendance measure records presence at a match, but cannot establish the full meaning of an individual's relationship with women's football. A pluriversal perspective draws attention to forms of engagement that this classification leaves unrepresented, including community relationships and digital participation (Escobar, 2020; Pernecky, 2024). In this study context, this perspective questions whose experiences are recognised when attendance becomes the principal indicator of participation. This issue goes beyond national differences. Research on minority ethnic women spectators highlights questions of representation, cultural understanding, and religious accommodation that complicate claims of inclusivity at women's football events (Taylor & Leslie-Walker, 2025), implying that the formal availability of women's football events does not guarantee an equally meaningful or welcoming opportunity to participate. Similarly, emerging destinations such as South Africa should not be treated as a homogeneous alternative to an equally homogeneous Global North as the complex relationships through which gender, ethnicity, religion, and place influence a sense of belonging differ, nor can men's elite sports from the Global North be uncritically adopted as the primary yardstick for evaluating the growth and cultural reception of women's football elsewhere (Wu & Pope, 2026) as they cannot account for patriarchal boundariesor systemic structural limitations inherent to Global South contexts.

Moreover, there are methodological tensions. Standardised survey items make comparisons possible by placing respondents within common categories, whereas a pluriversal commitment asks what those categories leave unrecognised. The reviewed evidence explains variation between matches, meanings among supporters, and satisfaction or behavioural intentions. Thus, this study adopts pluriversality as an interpretive framework, guiding assessment claims about transferability and the significance of non-attendance. It addresses the gap of focusing only on individuals interested in women's football who are already attending events by comparing interested attenders with interested non-attenders and examining perceived marketing awareness alongside perceived financial and logistical constraints and interest in women's football. Perceived marketing awareness captures respondents' assessments of the influence of broadcasting, advance fixture information, social media, reminders, online ticket information, promotional content and engagement with teams or players, while perceived financial and logistical constraints measures respondents' assessment of the

influence of ticket price, transport cost, financial circumstances and free entry and interest measures respondents level of interest including being somewhat interested, interested, to very interested. The study's comparison moves the literature beyond the general proposition that women's football needs lower entry ticket prices and greater exposure and towards the more precise question of whether logistical and financial constraints and marketing awareness help explain the conversion of existing interest into attendance.

Materials and methods

A quantitative, cross-sectional online survey was conducted in South Africa between June and September 2025. Participants were recruited through social media using non-probability convenience sampling with voluntary self-selection. Eligibility was restricted to adults aged 18 years or older who expressed an interest in women's football. A screening question excluded respondents who selected "not interested", leaving an analytical sample comprising those who were somewhat interested, interested or very interested. Online recruitment enabled participation by both previous attendees and interested non-attendees, although coverage was restricted to those reached through the selected digital channels. Because the number of eligible individuals exposed to the survey invitation was unknown, a response rate could not be calculated. The final dataset comprised 378 complete, usable responses.

The structured questionnaire comprised three sections. Section A captured gender, age group and employment status; Section B measured interest in women's football and attendance status; and Section C assessed the perceived influence of financial and logistical considerations and marketing communication on attendance decisions. The financial and logistical index averaged four items, while the marketing index averaged eight items. Both used a five-point agreement scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items were grouped according to their intended conceptual content rather than by statistically extracted factors. Table 1 presents the operational definitions, coding and analytical roles of the variables.

Table 1. Operationalisation of the analytical variables

Variables	Operational definition and coding	Analytical role
Attendance status	Whether a respondent had attended a women's football match or wanted to attend but had never attended. Responses were recoded as 0 =interested attendees (attended almost every match, attended major matches only, or attended sometimes) and 1 = interested non-attendees (never attended but would love to).	Dependent variable
Level of interest	Self-reported levels of interest in women's football, coded 1 = somewhat interested, 2 = interested, and 3 = very interested.	Predictor
Perceived financial and logistical constraints	Mean of four items assessing the perceived influence of ticket price, transport cost, financial circumstances and free entry. The items were coded on a five-point agreement scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).	Predictor
Perceived marketing awareness	Mean of eight items assessing the perceived influence of broadcast visibility, advance match information, consistent marketing, social media, reminders, online ticket information, digital promotional content and online engagement with players or teams.	Predictor

Variables	Operational definition and coding	Analytical role
	The items were coded on a five-point agreement scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).	
Gender	Captures the gender that respondents identify themselves as Coded as 1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = prefer not to say, and 4 = Other (Specify)	Block 2 covariate

Data were cleaned to ensure accuracy, consistency, and completeness, and analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 32. Frequencies and percentages described the respondent profile, interest levels and attendance categories. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the two multi-item indices. Independent-samples t-tests were then used to compare the mean perceived influence of financial and logistical constraints, marketing awareness, and interest intensity between attendees and interested non-attendees. Homogeneity of variance was evaluated using Levene's test, and Cohen's d was used to quantify the magnitude of each group difference. The three observed interest categories were retained as an ordered set of scores, with a one-unit increase representing a move to the next level of interest. Binary logistic regression was used to examine whether perceived financial and logistical constraints, perceived marketing awareness and interest level were associated with the odds of being an interested non-attender. Gender was subsequently entered as a control variable. Binary logistic regression was appropriate because the primary outcome was dichotomous and represented the theoretically relevant distinction between realised attendance and an unrealised desire to attend. Results were evaluated using the omnibus likelihood-ratio test, −2 log-likelihood, Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke pseudo-R^2 statistics, Wald tests, odds ratios, and 95% confidence intervals. All tests were two-sided, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Johannesburg School of Tourism and Hospitality Research Ethics Committee (STHREC) before data collection (Ethical clearance code 25STH26). The survey introduction explained the study's academic and publication purposes, assured respondents that their information would be treated confidentially and anonymously and stated that participation was voluntary. Respondents could discontinue without penalty, and only those who consented and met the age requirement proceeded to the questionnaire.

Results

Sample characteristics

As shown in Table 2, most of the respondents were male (64%), and aged 18–24 years (53.4%), with students accounting for the largest employment status category (35.7%). Most selected 'interested' or 'very interested', consistent with the recruitment being restricted to people expressing an interest in women's football. Most respondents (82.5%) reported attending women's football events at least sometimes, major matches, or almost every match.

Table 2. Sample profile

Variables	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	242	64.0
	Female	136	36.0
Age	18-24 years	202	53.4
	25-34 years	95	25.1
	35-44 years	54	14.3
	45 years and above	27	7.2
Employment status	Student	135	35.7
	Unemployed	57	15.1
	Self-employed	37	9.8
	Part-time employed	29	7.7
	Full-time employed	97	25.7
	Other	23	6.0
Interest in women's football	Somewhat interested	42	11.1
	Interested	172	45.5
	Very interested	164	43.4
Attendance status	Attender	312	82.5
	Interested non-attender	66	17.5

Note: *No respondents indicated either prefer not to say or other for gender and therefore those categories are not shown in the table. Attenders comprised of respondents who attended almost every match, major matches only, or sometimes. Interested non-attenders had never attended but indicated that they would like to do so.*

Construct reliability and descriptive statistics

Both indices, perceived financial and logistical and perceived marketing awareness, showed acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Their sample means were above the neutral midpoint of the response scale, indicating average agreement that the assessed considerations influenced attendance decisions. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and reliability results.

Table 3. Descriptive and reliability statistics for the multi-item measures

Measure	Number of items	M	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived financial and logistical constraints	4	3.41	0.92	0.759
Perceived marketing awareness	8	3.37	0.67	0.731

Note: *All multi-item measures used a response scale from 1 to 5, where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neutral, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. M=mean; SD=standard deviation*

Attendance group comparisons

Levene's tests were non-significant for perceived financial and logistical constraints ($p = 0.163$), perceived marketing awareness ($p = 0.210$) and interest in women's football ($p = 0.645$); as a result, equal variances were assumed. The mean for perceived financial and logistical constraints was 3.39 (SD = 0.94) among attenders and 3.51 (SD = 0.86) among interested non-attenders. This difference was not statistically significant, $t(376) = -0.99$, $p = 0.321$, $d = -0.135$. The corresponding means for perceived marketing awareness were 3.37 (SD = 0.67) and 3.36 (SD = 0.63), respectively, and the difference was also non-significant, $t(376) = 0.08$, $p =$

0.934, d = 0.011. Interest in women's football differed between the groups. Attenders reported a higher mean interest score (M = 2.40, SD = 0.62) than interested non-attenders (M = 1.95, SD = 0.73), and the difference was statistically significant, t(376) = 5.12, p < 0.001, d = 0.693 (Table 4). These results show that attenders and interested non-attenders did not differ significantly in perceived financial and logistical constraints, whereas attenders reported significantly greater interest in women's football than interested non-attenders.

Table 4. Independent-samples t tests by attendance status

Measure	Attendance group	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Perceived financial and logistical constraints	Attender	3.39	0.94	-0.99	376	0.321	-0.135
	Interested non-attender	3.51	0.86				
Perceived marketing awareness	Attender	3.37	0.67	0.08	376	0.934	0.011
	Interested non-attender	3.36	0.63				
Interest in women's football	Attender	2.40	0.62	5.12	376	p < 0.001	0.693
	Interested non-attender	1.95	0.73				

Note: *Interest in women's football used a response scale from 1 to 3, where 1= somewhat interested, 2= interested, and 3= very interested. M=mean; SD=standard deviation*

Binary logistic regression

The logistic regression model estimated the probability of interested non-attendance, coded as 1. Block 1, included perceived financial and logistical constraints, perceived marketing awareness and interest in women's football and was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 25.019$, $p < 0.001$. The model produced a −2 log likelihood of 325.092, a Cox and Snell R^2 of .064 and a Nagelkerke R^2 of .106. Interest in women's football was the only statistically significant predictor in Block 1 (B = −0.990, SE = 0.210, Wald = 22.243, p < 0.001). Its odds ratio was 0.372 (95% CI [0.246, 0.561]), indicating that each one-category increase in interest was associated with 62.8% lower odds of belonging to the interested non-attender group. Perceived financial and logistical constraints (p = 0.313) and perceived marketing awareness (p = 0.519) were not statistically significant. Adding gender in Block 2 did not improve model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.005$, p = 0.944. The final regression model remained statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 25.024$, $p < 0.001$, with −2 log likelihood = 325.087, Cox and Snell R^2 = .064 and explained 10.6% of the variation in interested non-attendance (Nagelkerke R^2 = .106). Interest remained statistically significant (B = −0.992, p < 0.001, OR = 0.371, 95% CI [0.245, 0.563]), whereas perceived financial and logistical constraints, perceived marketing awareness and gender were non-significant (Table 5).

Table 5. Hierarchical binary logistic regression predicting interested non-attendance

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p	OR	95%CI for OR
Block 1						
Perceived financial and logistical constraints	0.182	0.180	1.019	0.313	1.199	[0.843,1.707]
Perceived marketing awareness	-0.158	0.245	0.416	0.519	0.854	[0.529, 1.379]
Interest in women's football	-0.990	0.210	22.243	p < 0.001	0.372	[0.246, 0.561]
Block 2						
Perceived financial and logistical constraints	0.181	0.181	1.001	0.317	1.198	[0.841,1.707]
Perceived marketing awareness	-0.157	0.245	0.414	0.520	0.854	[0.529, 1.380]
Interest in women's football	-0.992	0.213	21.777	p < 0.001	0.371	[0.245, 0.563]
Gender (Female vs Male)	0.021	0.300	0.005	0.944	1.021	[0.567, 1.839]

Note: *N=378. The model event was interested non-attendance (1); attendance was the reference outcome (0). Gender was coded male = 1 and female = 2, making the reported gender odds ratio the female-to-male comparison. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. Block 1:* $\chi^2(3) = 25.019$, $p < .001$, *Nagelkerke* $R^2 = .106$. *Block 2:* $\chi^2(4) = 25.024$, $p < .001$, *Nagelkerke* $R^2 = .106$

Discussion

Among respondents who expressed interest in women's football, individuals who have attended women's football matches reported stronger interest than those who have never attended. The association remained statistically significant when the two perception indices and gender were included in the model. This finding supports the established body of research in attachment and identification to sport attendance (Kim et al., 2019; Kim & Trail, 2010), extending this logic to the women's football context in an emerging destination. Interest's association with attendance may suggest that interest encourages attendance, attendance strengthens interest or both.

The lack of a significant effect of perceived financial and logistical constraints is consistent with evidence showing that when fans are highly engaged, factors such as price and access become less influential. Simmons et al. (2021) found that as fan passion grew, ticket price became increasingly less influential in attendance choices. It is equally consistent with the perceived marketing awareness measure showing no significant effect, as broadcast visibility, promotional reminders, and social media exposure did not differentiate between those who convert interest into attendance and those who do not, supporting the idea that marketing communication influences attendance intention indirectly, primarily through its effect on social engagement. These findings suggest that marketing communication indirectly influences attendance intention through social engagement. This represents a significant divergence from previous research on women's football, which demonstrated that factors such as venue location, travel distance, and fixture scheduling in relation to men's matches significantly influence turnout, as discussed in studies by

Chahardovali et al. (2024); Hadwiger et al. (2025); Valenti et al. (2025). The divergence from the literature supports the pluriversal argument advanced in the introduction, which holds that factors influencing women's football attendance vary with population, market context, and the stage of the fan experience under study. While previous research focused on match-level demand across all spectators, this study focused on a subgroup that had already shown interest.

The pattern directly addresses the difference mentioned in the introduction between traditional attendance numbers and the paradox of engaged non-attenders. Since attendance figures only show presence or absence, they alone cannot determine whether a gap between interest and action results from missed opportunities or unfulfilled motivation. The findings here suggest that, for this sample, it is mainly the latter, consistent with broader evidence indicating that intention is a necessary but insufficient condition to produce behaviour, with psychological factors often being the key to understanding who transforms intention into action and who does not (Feil et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2026). Previous South African studies have identified factors like local community support and media coverage (Mabasa & Chauke, 2025), along with qualitative insights emphasising playing histories, personal relationships, and online fan community participation (Allison & Pope, 2022), suggesting potential sources of the attendance gap.

The study results show that gender does not improve model fit once factors such as interest, constraints, and marketing awareness are considered, adding more complexity to the interpretation. Instead of suggesting that gender is irrelevant to women's football spectatorship, the study findings align with evidence that gender differences in sport consumption often diminish when psychological and situational factors are considered together (Genchev et al., 2021; Tainsky & Xu, 2019), lending support to the view that observed gendered patterns in participation and spectatorship emerge from structural resources and engagement pathways (Gemar & Harding, 2025). In the context of women's football in an emerging destination, where the sport has historically been associated with limited accessibility, this is a meaningful null result, suggesting that once a person, regardless of gender, has developed sufficient interest, gender itself does not further predict whether that interest is realised as attendance.

Regarding theoretical implications, the pluriversal perspective informs the boundaries placed on these findings. Although the survey identifies differences within shared response categories, it does not establish whether respondents attach similar meanings to attendance, interest or financial considerations. The study does not capture the community relationships and forms of belonging through which engagement may develop. The analysis, therefore, offers a partial account of participation, consistent with the need to examine how research categorises some experiences while leaving others unexplored (Escobar, 2020; Pernecky, 2024),

In practice, sports event organisers and destination marketers should focus on adjusting their strategies instead of abandoning their existing ones. The study indicates that potential attendees do not perceive significantly higher barriers or have lower awareness of marketing efforts than current attendees. As a result, campaigns that only offer price cuts, free entry, or additional promotions are

unlikely to close the attendance gap effectively. A better strategy is to deepen engagement with interested individuals through social interactions, community events, and ongoing media coverage of players and teams, fostering emotional attachment that can turn passive interest into attendance (Allison & Pope, 2022; Mabasa & Chauke, 2025). In as much as access barriers are relevant to women's football events, traditional measures such as affordability and awareness might overlook the specific obstacles interested non-attenders face. Organisers should explore the attendance gap through methods such as interviews or ethnographic studies with interested non-attenders to uncover insights that standard surveys may miss. At the destination level, converting interested non-attenders into attendees boosts participation and improves perceptions of South Africa as a women's football sport-tourism destination.

Conclusions

The study examined whether perceived financial and logistical constraints, perceived marketing awareness, and interest in women's football differed between individuals who had attended women's football matches and those who expressed interest but had never attended, and whether these factors were associated with attendance status in an emerging destination. Women's football attendance in South Africa was clearly differentiated by interest in the sport. Respondents who had attended matches expressed stronger interest than those who wished to attend but had never done so, and this association persisted after perceived financial and logistical constraints, perceived marketing awareness and gender were considered. The two perception measures did not significantly distinguish the groups, while gender added no explanatory power. The observed association concerns respondents' reported level of interest. Although the study did not establish whether interest reflects team attachment, personal identity or other meanings associated with sport, a pluriversal interpretation recognises that spectators encounter women's football through different contexts, social relationships and meanings, and that attendance is best understood in relation to those experiences. For tourism sport event organisers and destination marketers, the task is to connect interest in the game with accessible and meaningful opportunities to attend. Audience development calls for attention to relationships with teams and players, the experience of attending, and clear information about fixtures, prices and transport. Financial accessibility and communication remain relevant considerations in organising events. Women's football attendance is best approached as participation situated within spectators' lives, with interest informing engagement and practical arrangements shaping the opportunities through which that engagement can take place.

The study contributes a comparison of attendance histories within an already-interested audience, identifying an association between the strength of interest and

previous attendance while clarifying the limits of the two perceived-influence measures. Its contributions are also that the findings offer a pluriversal interpretation, tailored to the sampled audience and the measures applied, serving as a foundation for future research on first-time attendance without suggesting a universal solution.

Despite the study's contributions, it is not without limitations. Social media recruitment produced a self-selected sample concentrated among men and younger adults; the findings do not represent people beyond the digital recruitment channels or those not interested in women's football. The cross-sectional, self-reported measures cannot determine whether interest preceded attendance or vice versa. Moreover, the data are vulnerable to recall inaccuracies and shared-method bias, which may inflate observed associations. The proportions of variance explained by the full model indicate that a significant portion of the variance differentiating attenders from interested non-attenders remains unmeasured by the structured Likert-scale survey. Only gender was added as a covariate, leaving possible confounding by age and employment. Future research should follow interested non-attendees over time, link responses to verified attendance and geographical access, and use interviews to examine locally meaningful experiences that the present measures could not capture.

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