

# The first century and beyond: A content analysis of Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal

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**Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository**

**Original citation & hyperlink:**

Oddy, R & Bason, T 2017, 'The first century and beyond: A content analysis of Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal' *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, vol 7, no. 4, pp. 444-458

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/SBM-08-2016-0044>

DOI 10.1108/SBM-08-2016-0044

ESSN 2042-678X

Publisher: Emerald

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## **Abstract**

### *Purpose*

In 2016, Sport Business Management: An International Journal (SBM) published its 100th article. While a number of other journals have been analysed as to their content, no such study has yet been applied to SBM. This article produces a content analysis examining the first century of SBM articles in order to map out what this outlet has published, and to what extent the journal has achieved the objectives set out in the first issue.

### *Design/methodology*

This paper employs a content analysis approach, with each of the first 100 research papers being analysed and coded by the two authors.

### *Findings*

This study has found that there has been a general focus on sport marketing throughout the first 100 papers, while football is the dominant sport that has been studied. Over the course of the 100 papers, the majority of articles employed quantitative methods, with surveys being the most used method of collecting data. The authors were initially principally based in Europe and North America; however, the geographical location has widened over the period in question.

### *Originality/value*

While there have been a number of other journals which have had a content analysis, this is the first such study into SBM.

**Key words:** Sport, business, management, content analysis, SBM, Sport Management  
research, methods

**Article Classification:** Research paper

## Introduction

Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal (SBM) is recognised as one of the leading publications of empirical and conceptual research in the business and management of sport. The journal addresses the development of sport as a business, and the management practises within this context. At its inception, SBM set out to cater for three areas: first, research addressing the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the sport industry; second, to apply existing theories in business and management theory to the sport industry context; and finally, to use sport as a lens to better understand other industries (Chadwick, 2011).

Since the journal's inception in 2011, the sport business landscape has developed and evolved greatly. In 2010 Nike, the world's most valuable sports brand was worth \$10.7 billion. The American company continues to lead the way, growing its brand to now be worth \$27 billion (Ozanian, 2016). As articulated by the Founding Editor, *'it is in this context that one hopes in the coming years, Sport, Business and Management will both reflect continuing developments in the business and management of sport, and perpetuate its further development.'* (Chadwick, 2011:11). The aim of this paper is to map out the content of the journal, and the extent to which it has achieved its objectives set out in the first issue. More specifically, the following research questions are put forward: (1) What research methods have been employed?; (2) Who has published in the journal?; (3) What has been the gender focus of the papers?; (4) Which sports have provided the context of the research?; (5) What management functions have been utilised?; and (6) To what extent have the first 100 papers covered the areas set out in the first issue? While examinations of sport business and management literature have become more prevalent in recent years, this is not yet exhaustive.

Therefore, the contribution of this paper is to conduct a content analysis examining the first 100 papers of SBM, which is one such journal yet to be explored in this context.

Undertaking an examination of the journal will provide a measurement of the development and credibility of the sport business literature, which should be monitored with regularity to identify trends, and critically appraise contributions to the advancement of knowledge (Mondello and Pedersen, 2003). This paper is therefore organised into five sections. Following this introduction, we discuss the background to this study. The methodology employed is the next focus, followed by the core of the paper where we discuss the findings and discussion. The authors conclude with propositions to the editorial board and suggesting potential avenues for future research to be published in SBM.

### **Sport Business and Management in academia: A brief account**

Grounded in both business and leisure, sport management as a discipline continues to grow at a significant rate. Three important factors have stimulated this trend: the advancement of sport specific degree programs; the creation of peer-reviewed academic journals; and the formation of scholarly and professional associations (Chelladurai, 2005; Costa, 2005). The formation of NASSM (North American Society for Sport Management) in 1985 became the catalyst for the creation of the *Journal of Sport Management* (JSM) two years later. The journal's inception in 1987 marked the first-ever academic outlet steadfast to the discipline (Anagnostopoulos and Bason, 2015). Following the founding of NASSM, other sport management societies came into existence: European Association for Sport Management (EASM), created in 1993, preceded Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMANZZ), Asian Association for Sport Management (AASM), and finally World

Association for Sport Management (WASM). In establishing their own publications, these associations set the tone for the creation of a number of academic journals dedicated to sport management and business (such as *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*; *Sport Management Review*; *European Sport Management Quarterly*; *International Journal of Sport Management*). Further, sport management is now accepted in more mainstream management conferences. For example, there is a specific ‘Managing Sport’ track at the European Academy of Management conference, with SBM publishing an annual special issue devoted to the best papers submitted.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the evolving competitive environment in both amateur and professional sport led to an increase in sport business research (Seifried, 2014). Sport business effectively extended the focus on the production of sport to the exchange between producers and consumers (Westerbeek, 2011), with sport now being viewed as another form of business, albeit one with special features which require tailored management practise to ensure success (Dolles and Soderman, 2013). The sport business industry is composed of several segments, the most widely referred to are those initially categorised by Pedersen *et al.* (2011) and later expanded by Pedersen and Thibault (2014) to further encapsulate changes in the industry.

Sport management’s quest for legitimacy led scholars to undertake approaches similar to other fields of management (de Wilde and Seifried, 2012). The recognition that many sport management journals now receive continues to grow; the 57th edition of the *Journal Quality List* recognises JSM to be publishing outstanding research and European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ) as a highly regarded journal in Business School ranking lists. The increase in sport business and management-focussed research has stimulated

several studies examining how research in the field has matured over time. This paper adds to that body of knowledge using the unique context of SBM. These studies can be separated into two distinct themes: focussing on the methodologies the scholars utilise (de Wilde and Siefried, 2012; Kent, Jordan, and Inoue, 2009; Quarterman *et al.*, 2005; 2006), and the content incorporated (Ciomaga, 2013; Peetz and Reams, 2011; Shilbury, 2011a; Shilbury, 2011b).

### *Methods*

Several studies have examined the methods used in sport business and management journals, with JSM (Barber *et al.*, 2001; Kent *et al.*, 2009; Peetz and Reams, 2011; Quarterman *et al.*, 2005; Quarterman *et al.*, 2006), ESMQ (Balduck *et al.*, 2004; Pitts *et al.*, 2014), SMR (Balduck *et al.*, 2004), International Journal of Sport Management (IJSM) (Quarterman *et al.*, 2010), International Journal of Sport Communication (Abeza *et al.*, 2014) and Sports Management International Journal Choregia (Anagnostopoulos and Bason, 2015) each being studied.

These studies have found a proliferation of quantitative methodologies (for example, Quarterman *et al.* 2010), with Barber *et al.* (2001) noting that the majority of JSM papers favoured using survey data, and Kent *et al.* (2009) identifying a preference towards using convenience sampling in the same journal. While Rudd (2008) calls for more mixed methods in sport management research to strengthen the validity of results, Ciomaga (2013) recognises that more advanced quantitative methods, along with qualitative methods have emerged in the sport management field, reflecting the evolution of the body of knowledge.

### *Content*

Much of the research identified in the previous section not only identified the research methods used, but also the segment of the sport business industry. While the categorisation of segments varies from paper to paper, many have identified primary focuses on the areas of organisational management, sport marketing and the social context of sport (for example, Pitts and Pederson (2005) and Pitts *et al.* (2014)). This has not been restricted to sport management, as Pedersen and Pitts (2001) conducted an in-depth analysis of Sport Marketing Quarterly (SMQ), identifying the specific sport marketing segments that have been used. Given the nature of the area, it is perhaps surprising the sport context for the research has not been covered to the same extent. Lambrecht (1991) identified an early dominance of the university and college setting in JSM, with this bias being developed into a heavy weighting to intercollegiate athletics as a context (Pitts and Pedersen, 2005).

### Impact

In addition to investigating the content of journals, Shilbury (2011a) took this further through the determination of the most cited sources in four sport management journals. As noted in the first paper of SBM, sport does not occur in a from the general business world (Chadwick, 2011), and Shilbury went on to examine the influence of sport management and marketing research in mainstream journals, finding that mainstream marketing journals are both more willing to publish papers in the sport context and cite sport specific journals, than management journals (Shilbury, 2011b).

As articulated, there has been a heavy focus on the content of sport management and marketing journals. Thus, this paper will utilise the 19 content areas set out by the Founding Editor in which “*researchers might carry out further sport, business and management studies*” (Chadwick, 2011:7). This will enable the authors to establish the extent to which the



journal has achieved the objectives set out in the first issue. The 19 content areas are summarised in Table I.

<insert Table I: Summary of potential research areas and foci for academic researchers>

## **Method**

This research is a content analysis of the first 100 papers published in SBM, dating from 2011-2016. Content analysis is a technique that has been extensively incorporated into similar studies in the field (Kent *et al.*, 2009; Peetz and Reams, 2011; Pitts and Pedersen, 2005) and is primarily used for interpreting ‘*the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns*’ (Hseih and Shannon, 2005:1278).

### *Categories*

This research draws heavily on previous similar analyses of sport management journals, in order to allow for cross-journal comparison. Thus, first the demographics of the authors were considered (gender and the country and the institution in which they are based), with the geographical focus of the papers also being noted. Given the ‘international’ nature of this journal, it seems prudent to consider whether it does indeed have a global focus. Similarly, while sport has long been male dominated, female participation is growing while the Olympic Games in London saw every delegation provide a female athlete (Fink, 2014). Thus, viewing

whether this increase has also taken place in the academic world seems sensible. It should be noted here that, as with the work of Pitts *et al.* (2014), each instance of an author was counted, despite several authors publishing on multiple occasions.

As discussed in the account of the academic field, there have been two foci from similar studies; methods and content. Methods was studied first, taking into account whether papers are empirical or non-empirical, qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods, the data collection methods used, and finally the theories and frameworks that are used to structure the papers. This then moved onto the content of the paper discussing the gender and sport focus. Following this, in order to view the subjects from a management perspective (this is after all, a 'business management' journal), the papers were inductively coded to view the management functions used. Rather than just analysing each of these categories in turn and on their own, this research considers how each category interacts with others. Finally, the papers were coded in accordance to Chadwick's initial areas of focus for the journal (see Table I), to view the extent to which SBM has followed the initial vision of the journal.

### *Coding procedures*

In order to enhance the reliability of this research, a pilot study was taken with each author assigned eight randomly selected issues (Kaid and Wadsworth, 1989). Critically, the same coders who undertook the pilot study then performed the final coding process (Peetz and Reams, 2011) and achieved an inter-coder reliability score between the 0.85 and 0.90 range which is deemed acceptable (Pitts *et al.*, 2014).

## **Findings**

### *Articles*

The 100<sup>th</sup> paper published in SBM (Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016) occurred in the first issue of the sixth volume, comprising of a total of 20 issues from 2011 to 2016.

During the first two years of publication, 2011 and 2012, just three issues per year were published. This increased to four issues in 2013 and 2014, and expanded to five in 2015. This trend has seen an increase in the number of papers per year, starting with 16 in 2011, and rising to 26 in 2015. Interestingly this is a similar strategy to the one undertaken by ESMQ (Pitts *et al.*, 2014), and is symptomatic of the growth in scholarly activity in the domain. The number of papers per issue has remained constant; every issue has had five, apart from volume one issue one, volume four issue two and volume five issue two, which each had six papers, and volume three issue four which had four papers. Similarly, the length of the articles has been consistent, with each paper being on average 15.5 pages.

### *Authorship*

The 100 articles in the study were written by a total of 246 authors, ranging from single author papers to the two papers with five named authors. The majority of papers had two or three authors (31 and 37 papers respectively), while 19 were single author and 11 had four authors. Of these 246 authors, 19 published twice, three published three times and Richelieu published four papers. Interestingly, the majority of authors who published on multiple occasions were based in North America. The gender of the authors was clearly dominated by male authors, comprising 189 of the 246 authors (77%). 55 of the authors were female (22%), while it was not possible to code two. These figures were similar when considering just first authors on papers; 77 of the 100 first authors were male, with 23 female first authors. Further, of the 19 papers which were submitted by a single author, 18 of these were

male with only one paper being published by a solo female author. The male dominance of SBM continues when considering the author gender for individual papers; 96 of the 100 papers analysed had at least one named male author. However, as figure 1 shows, the proportion of female authors has increased, from 18% in 2011 to 33% in 2015.

<insert Figure 1: Male and Female Authorship>

Authors based in 26 different nations had papers published, from Europe, Asia, North America and Australasia. Europe and North America dominate the journal, with 212 authors based in these continents. Unsurprisingly, these authors focused on the sports most associated with those areas; North American authors focus on basketball, American football, ice hockey and collegiate sport, while 28 of the 100 papers were written by European authors on football. It should be noted that 21 of these 246 authors are from Spain, with these data being skewed by a special issue in 2014 which featured exclusively Spanish based authors. The dominance of European and North American based authors has lessened over time; there were no papers from Asia in the first two years, but since 2013, authors from India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Iran have published, focusing on Asian sport.

<insert Figure 2: Continents of Author Location by Year>

Finally, the authors were coded as to their affiliations, using the categories identified by Peetz and Reams (2011). 243 of the 246 authors were based at a university (98.8%), of which 27 (11%) were identified as being students. The remaining three (1.2%) represented government departments and consulting firms.

## *Methods*

Of the 100 papers, 85 were empirical, with the remaining 15 being non-empirical. Thus, it makes little sense to split the sample into these two categories, as done by Anagnostopoulos and Bason (2015). Of the 85 empirical papers, most of the papers employed quantitative methods (54), with 22 being of a qualitative nature and nine identifying themselves as mixed methods. Therefore, it is unsurprising that surveys were the most used method of collecting data (27), followed by interviews (17). Finally, 49 different theories and frameworks were identified, with the most used being stakeholder theory (four papers), while two papers each used the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Agency Theory or Legitimacy Theory. No other theory was identified as being used more than once.

## *Content*

### Gender Focus

The papers were analysed to identify their gender focus. Any papers with a focus on a male sport, such as the Premier League, was categorised as 'male', which consisted of 37 of the papers. Conversely, only two papers were categorised as having a 'female focus'. One of these papers (Cortsen, 2013) focused on the marketing of the female golf player Annika Sörenstam, while the other (Williams *et al.*, 2015) looked at female members of NFL teams. Articles that were considered to have both male and female perspectives were 'both' (Peetz and Reams, 2011), and make up 27 of the 100 papers. Finally, papers with no identifiable gender bias were categorised as 'neither' consist of 34 of the papers. As Figure 3 shows, the

percentage of male focused papers has fallen since 2012; the same period of time has seen the number of female authors increase.

<insert Figure 3: Gender Focus>

### Sport Focus

20 different sports were identified as having been used, with football clearly being the most dominant; 32 of the 100 papers focused on football. These 32 football papers were more than four times as many as any other single sport; ice hockey was the focus of seven papers. The third most written about sport was basketball (five papers), meaning that of the three sports that were written about the most, two (ice hockey and basketball) are predominantly American sports. 20 papers did not have a focus on a specific sport, while a further seven papers were written about the Olympic Games. This makes football's dominance all the more apparent; of the 69 papers that focus on single sports (as opposed to the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, general sport, or health/fitness), nearly half of these (46.4%) look at football. Seven papers considered non-traditional sports such as health clubs (three papers), e-sport (two papers), Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and extreme sport (one paper each).

Cross tabulation analysis was conducted to explore the link between sport focus and geographical context. 28 of the 100 papers looked at football in Europe; 10 of these in UK or Spain. Four papers considered the impact of football on a global scale, with just one concentrating on football in Japan (Sumida *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, the only sports in Europe with two or more papers are basketball (Spain) and cricket (UK).

Elsewhere, the already mentioned 'American' sports were typically written in the North American context (aside from two papers on Spanish basketball, and one on collegiate sport in Asia). This is symptomatic of the papers written in the Asian context; of the seven papers on Asian sport, badminton, cricket, golf, football and the Olympic Games all featured. As alluded to, there is a large focus on European (42 papers) and North American sport (20), with just seven on Asian sport, six viewing Australasia and no papers on South American or African sport.

<insert Figure 4: Type of Sport>

### Management Function

The authors coded the papers inductively into their management function. It is clear that there has been a strong focus on marketing, with 37 papers on this area. Many of these were written by North American scholars; 35 papers have a USA or Canadian based author, with 20 of these focusing on the marketing of sport. Comparatively, despite there being 20 papers from UK based authors, just two of these look at marketing. Instead, UK authors have tended to focus on finance (six papers) and human resource management (four papers). Indeed, these two management functions are the two most written about after marketing (23 on human resource management, and 12 on sport finance).

### SBM Focus

Finally, this paper has sought to investigate the extent to which the first 100 papers have covered the areas set out in the first issue (Chadwick, 2011). It should be noted, that while

some of the categories are similar to those in the Management Function section, they are not synonymous. For example, while the previous section noted 37 papers featuring marketing, Chadwick's areas distinguish between 'marketing' and 'sponsorships, endorsements and image rights'. While Chadwick recognises these as distinct areas, when considering the broader management functions, papers in both of these sections would be considered just marketing.

Of Chadwick's 19 areas of focus, six have not appeared at all; Ethics in sport; Role of public sector v private sector; Public Relations (PR) and the media; Agents and representation; Legal, ownership and property issues; and Risk and security. Similarly, nine papers have been coded as 'other', as they do not fit into any of the initial areas. These have tended to be papers on the actual playing of sport, rather than the management functions. While cumulatively, the marketing based papers represent the largest proportion of papers, the single largest area is that of human resource management, followed by marketing, sponsorships, endorsements and image rights, and finance.

<insert Table II: Area of SBM focus>

## **Discussion**

### *Methods*

The dominance of surveys in the data collection methods are symptomatic of the mainstream sport business and management journals (Balduck *et al.*, 2004). This suggests that SBM is producing few articles that push the boundaries of research in the field, which is required to support its quest for legitimacy (Ciomaga, 2013). The authors assert that future articles using surveys should consider the threat of non-response error and the use of pertinent methods to



control this error (Kent *et al.*, 2009). There is a wide variety of theories and frameworks used throughout the first 100 papers, but while stakeholder theory is most widely adopted (four papers), many are implemented no more than once. This can perhaps be attributed to the relatively large number of unique authors (218) and provides variety in the journal.

### *Content*

There is a heavy male gender focus to the articles published in SBM. This trend is in sync with the general sport business and management body of knowledge and arguably contradicts the number of females in the field (Pitts *et al.*, 2014). The authors note that the journal has no control over the demographics of submitting authors, but it is encouraging to see a recent increase in the proportion of female authors in SBM.

SBM is categorised as an international journal by its very title; however, until 2013 there was little evidence that this was the case with a significant dominance of European and North American authors. This further narrowed the sporting focus of the journal as these authors invariably produced research using their national sports as the context. Sport is a global business and a journal devoted to publishing in the business and management of sport should reflect this. It is reassuring to see that since 2013 more international authors, notably from Asia, have published research in the journal with a focus in this case on Asian sport. Given the large number of papers on marketing and football, it is of little surprise that there have been 10 papers considering the marketing of football, with seven focusing on the marketing of football within Europe. Of these 10, three were written by North American based authors. A further nine papers were written by North American authors on the marketing of either basketball, American football, ice hockey or collegiate sport.

However, as noted, there have been no papers from academics based in, or, focusing on sport in, South America or Africa. This is perhaps surprising given the strides both areas have made in recent years to become major players in the global sport industry. For example, the 2010 and 2014 World Cups, and 2016 Olympic Games were held in South Africa and Brazil respectively. While it is possible that there has been too much of a focus on football in SBM, the sport is a potential avenue that could be used to shine a light on geographic areas that have thus far been ignored.

Similar content analysis studies have identified a significant disproportionate amount of focus on certain industry segments, whilst neglecting many others. SBM has taken a similar direction, whether by choice or coincidence, by concentrating a majority of papers in the fields of marketing and HRM. This is in contradiction with the descriptions and definitions of sport business and management which suggests that the literature is not reflective of the field. It is clear that the journal has digressed somewhat from the objectives set out in the first issue.

### **Concluding notes**

Firstly, it is important to note that the papers published in SBM are a reflection of the submissions received, and thus, it is not necessarily possible for the editorial team to influence the direction of the journal. Further, these results have several similarities to the studies undertaken by Pitts *et al.* (2014) and Peetz and Reams (2011), and so the criticisms offered in this paper are likely to be reflective of sport business research in general, rather than specific concerns for SBM.

Firstly, a relatively high level of focus on some industry segments, most notably marketing and HRM has also been highlighted in similar studies into other sport management journals. Furthermore, the lack of female gender focus of articles in SBM correlates with other mainstream Sport Management journals, namely ESMQ. Pitts *et al.* (2014) found less than one percent of papers had a female focus, which suggests that female sport is an under-researched area, and thus provides a potential focus for future research. Correspondingly, SBM has been heavily dominated by male focused sports, in particular football. It seems that there is the opportunity for researchers to conduct replication studies of these areas, in other sports, and in particular, in women's sport, which has been notable for its growth in recent years (Fink, 2014). While SBM is limited by the papers that it receives, the authors propose that a call for a female sport special issue could provide a suitable catalyst. While European football and North American ice hockey and basketball are the contexts with the largest focus, these are also the most commercialised, perhaps limiting the access that researchers have to stakeholders within the sport. Researchers who wish to speak to key stakeholders may consider that less popular and commercial sports are more accessible.

An issue highlighted by this research is one of the nature of 'sport business and management'. The first paper in issue one notes that SBM is "*deliberately intended to specifically address the growth of sport as a business and the practise of management within this context*", indicating the management and business focus of the journal. Yet, this content analysis draws attention to the number of papers focused in what we term 'on the pitch' issues. While sport data analytics is clearly a growing area, it is perhaps questionable as a 'business management' function, other than success on the pitch can lead to improved business performances.

The authors have established that the journal has some way to go in order to achieve the objectives set out in the first issue. Six of the 19 areas of focus are yet to be explored; it would perhaps be thought that the sport industry has moved on from these areas, but given the current global sporting climate, each is still relevant. For example, insights into gambling, doping and match fixing (Ethics in Sport) and managing safety and security at sporting events (Risk and Security) are two specific areas that the authors encourage future journal submissions to shed light on.

This paper informs the journal's key decision makers as to what has been published and importantly how the scope and breadth of the journal can be enhanced. However, it should be noted that previous content analyses of similar journals have also revealed a historic narrow focus in sport business and management journals; this is perhaps an issue that goes beyond the scope of a single journal, and relies on a general change of focus of sport academia. The authors have identified that by referring back to the objectives set out in the first issue and subsequently broadening its scope, SBM can enhance the sport business and management field further.

#### *Limitations and future research*

While this paper offers a descriptive content analysis of the first 100 papers in SBM, this is not the only methodology that could be used. Authors write journal articles to get published, and hope to see their work referenced in other academic outlets. Therefore, a study conducting a citation analysis could be useful, to see not only which types of articles are referenced, but where they are cited. If authors are aware that work on a particular management topic is likely to be cited in mainstream business journals, then there would be more focus on these. In addition, the technologies used for analyses such as this one may

allow researchers to conduct more in depth studies. For example, the likes of Leximancer would allow researchers to offer a more in depth qualitative study (Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2014). This could be of more use over a longer period, as it would allow researchers to highlight changes in language in sport management over time.

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