



# Master's degree thesis

**IDR950 Sport Management**

**Themes and Concepts of the previous six years of the  
International Journal of Sports Marketing and  
Sponsorship**

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## **Preface**

I am now reaching the conclusion of my studies at Molde University College. For the past two years, I have been a part of the Master of Science in Sport Management programme. These two years have been challenging “on-and-off the field”, as the global pandemic made it hard for everyone. The least challenging part though, was to find interest in the topics the programme exists of. My main interests are sport marketing, social media, and sponsorship in sports.

The thesis will investigate the International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship from 2016 until 2021 – meaning the latest 6 years. Systematically analyzing and gathering data article by article, provides interesting findings on typical trends and descriptive data of the journal from year to year. Changes in focus areas, sports researched, demography of contributors and more indicators provides interesting information and valuable insights in the state of the journal, and how it has progressed and changed over the last 6 years.

I would like to thank my supervisor Christos for guiding me through this project, as well as giving me this idea and providing me with access to the articles I have analyzed. Without you, I would not have known this was possible approach to the master’s thesis. I would also like to thank all the staff of the Sport Management department at HiMolde, as well as our guest lecturers. The academic content over the two years have been interesting, meaningful, and enlightening.

Finally, I want to thank my fellow students, especially Abhishek, Enerik, Priam and Subash. You guys are the highlights of my time at Molde University College. I am forever grateful for getting to know you.

## Summary

The research aimed to systematically analyze the content of the International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship from 2016-2021. A descriptive analysis was conducted tracking the gender of authors, nationality of institutions, empirical or non-empirical data, marketing or sponsorship focused paper, methodology used, theoretical approaches, what sport is on focus and more.

The thesis also included a content analysis where the text-mining tool and software Leximancer was employed. The software found a bunch of concepts and themes and generated a visualization of those for the readers to see.

The findings of the studies found that male authorship is dominant. It also found that USA is the most represented country – by far. Empirical data is drastically more frequently gathered than the non-empirical data. When it comes to methodology, there is no doubt that quantitative methods are more often employed than qualitative and mixed methods.

The Leximancer part of the analysis found that many of the keywords reappears in this study from a previous study of the same journal. Marketing is the most prominent theme, and once again football is the only sport that is identified by Leximancer, and the most researched sport as found in the descriptive analysis. It is also found that professional is a theme, but nothing about amateur sports, indicating that the focus of research is mainly on professional sports.

Based on the findings, I point out that there is a possible issue to be investigated further with the male dominance in authorship. I also suggest that future research should do more research on amateur sports, as there seems to be an imbalanced focus on professional sports and that there has been for quite some time.

Keywords: *Sports; Marketing; Sponsorship; Football; Professional; Consumer; Effect; Gender balance; Nationality; Methodology;*

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# 1.0 Introduction

Sport marketing and sponsorship has grown in interest by researchers in the last decades, as well as changed its way of being practiced in the industries. (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). With growing academical attention, I want to look at the specific journal “International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship” and find out how the state of research is, how the last six years are compared to other journals and previous years of the same journal. This journal is a well-cited journal that have been running since 1999.

The content of journals has been researched for lots of years and in many different fields. From research on single journals related to for example music (Yarbrough, 1984), Psychology (Buboltz Jr, Miller, Williams, 1999), to research on multiple journals (Bozkurt et al., 2014) have been conducted previously. Examinations has been done on sport-related journals as well. For example, on what research the scholars conduct (Peetz and Ream, 2011), but also on how they do it in terms of methodology used. (Kent, Jordan, and Inoue, 2009).

With a content analysis like this, it opens an opportunity to understand and become aware of the things you might else not ever had thought about. It provides valuable feedback and insights to publisher, researchers as well as readers – all depending on what the analysis seek to extract from the journal articles.

In this case, I wish to identify changes and developments of the journal over the years, and to find relationships, similarities and differences between the articles published in the journal. The analysis seeks to reveal what methodologies have been employed in the articles, who has published, which sports are represented the most, which gender are researched on etc.... The findings will also help the journal evaluate whether they succeed in reaching their aims.

In addition to all this, an analysis of a journal like this will give a deeper understanding of the content of the journal and illustrate an overview of the state of research and research gaps related to sport marketing and sponsorship. Information like this is valuable for all



academics, scholars and students in the fields covered by the journal, as it will help map out and clarify what needs further investigations and which indicators that are underrepresented.

## **1.1 Research questions**

The aim of this research is to identify trends and habits of different kinds in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship. The research will look at both descriptive statistics about the authors demographics and the type of research conducted, as well as identifying semantic structures and trends via the text-mining tool Leximancer. This thesis poses the following research question: “*Who has, and what has, been published in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship the last six years?*” with the following “follow-up questions”

*RQ1: What are the demographical and geographical trends of authorship in IJSMS?*

*RQ2: What have been the general trends of research approach in IJSMS?*

*RQ3: What are the key concepts and themes of the content published in IJSMS?*

## **1.2 Background**

Although it's a growing interest by researchers on sports related matters, and content analysis of sport journals are becoming a more common thing, the International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship have yet to be the scope of one a content analysis of this kind.

Regarding my personal interests, I wanted to write my master's thesis about something related to marketing, social media, and sponsorship in sports. I but struggled to a satisfying approach as well as something fitting my personal research-skills. Sharing my thoughts in class, Professor Christos A. gave me this idea about the International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship as this was a project that he had in mind. It was fitting for my personal interest, as well as being something feasible for me to go forward with.

With a project like this I will learn a lot about sponsorship and marketing, as well as giving real life value to the journal and to others like me wanting to write about the sport marketing

and sponsorship topics but not knowing which direction to go. The last part is a motivating factor, as giving real-life help and meaning is something I am motivated by.

### **1.2.1 International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship**

The International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship is a quarterly academic journal and is one of the leading journals when it comes to the sport marketing industry. Since the inception of the journal in 1999, it has consistently published four issues per year, and is still running. Professor James J. Zhang of the University of Georgia – USA, is the editor of the journal. (Emerald Publishing, 2022; Resurchify, 2021).

According to their own websites the journal seeks to cover numerous areas related to sport marketing. Globalization, technology, brand awareness, consumer behaviors, demographic analysis are among the areas mentioned, but are not limited to. (Emerald Publishing, 2022). The also state the following regarding the aims and scope of the journal:

“The journal provides a vital resource to both academic and industry experts. For academics it is an opportunity to publish the highest quality, peer-reviewed research. Practitioners can use the information (including case studies) to find important data, develop strategies, create presentations and understand how the industry is changing.”  
(Emerald Publishing, 2022)

With a reputation and industry standing like this journal has, there is no question it deserves to be looked at in an analysis like this thesis plan to conduct. The analysis will reveal and benchmark which areas that has been covered the most, the areas that lack research, provide descriptive analysis of the articles of each issue that can provide helpful feedback based on the objective indicators.

## **1.3 Thesis structure**

Following this introduction chapter, a literature review will be concocted in chapter two. The material reviewed will be split in to two parts. The first part will consist of content analysis of other journals that have been conducted in the past. The second part will be about the main theories and school of thoughts in sports marketing and sponsorship.

After the literature review, the thesis moves on to chapter three: methodology. In this chapter methods and research approach to gather data, that will help provide an answer to the research questions, will be carefully and comprehensively explained. Moving on from methodology chapter, the findings, and results (chapter four) of the study will be presented and discussed (chapter 5) while drawing connections to the literature reviewed in chapter two.

The thesis ends with a conclusion chapter (chapter 6) where the thesis in its full capacity is concluded, the research questions are answered, and practical implications and future recommendations provided.

## **2.0 Literature review**

In this chapter, literature related to this thesis and its research topic will be reviewed. Given the nature of the research, the literature review will be split in to two parts. One part will focus on other similar content analysis of different journals, the other part will be about the main schools of thoughts in sport marketing and sponsorship and the state of research of today (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020; Ratten & Ratten, 2011), as well as the main theories used in sport marketing and sponsorship.

### **2.1 Review of content analysis of other journals**

Starting with the review of other content analysis that have been done in the past, as well as content analysis of articles across journals and publications. This is something that has been done by many before me, and in many different areas.

Betts and Lansley published a content analysis of the first ten years of International Journal of Project Management (IJPM) in 1995. With the research, they aimed to find out who has published in IJPM, what has been published and where it was written. They also tried to look at whether or not there is a style of papers published in IJPM and research emerging.

The data used in their analysis was papers published from its inception in 1983 to 1992, making it ten volumes, 40 issues and a total of 347 papers. The total amount of authors contributing to these papers was 352, coming from 32 different countries. Most of the papers

was written by just one author, with a total of 258. 64 papers were written by two, 15 by three and two by four and one by five and six.

For the analysis they split the ten volumes into two groups of five years. They did this because they thought that the first five years would leave trails of the journal being in its formative years, while the last part analyzed would correspond to a maturing age of the journal.

Their findings are that most papers in the journal are reviews, rather than case studies (31%) or empirical data (11%), and that this didn't change much from the first five years to the latter five. UK and USA were also the dominant countries contributing to this particular journal. They also see that the papers came mostly from private practice or universities, and that private practice contributed more in the first five years, but that universities contributed more in the last five years.

The rest of the findings are sector-specific findings related to the field of project management. They did not use any software like Leximancer to develop these findings, and they all seem to come from systematically going through paper by paper and developing a database where they did the quantitative analysis.

In 1997, Hyman and Steiner published a content analysis mapping the first eight years of the Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship where they give insights of the most prominent authors, institutions as well as the methods used and topics the journal has published over the first eight years. Hyman and Steiner did not use Leximancer in this analysis.

Hyman and Steiner examined 189 of the Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship (JBE) from 1989 to 1996. They tried to summarize the authorships, the sources used, topics addressed, methodology used and research designs of the first eight years of JBE. It's very apparent that they really went systematically into this analysis.

Hyman and Steiner summarized the first eight volumes of JBE in a very detailed and systematic way. They looked at purely quantitative findings and present them in tables. In total they presented 17 different tables with different focus points in their analysis of the journal. They looked at output per year, institutions contributing, authors and their

background, Single/Multiple authorship, gender and rank of the authors, citations, type of studies and methodology used in the articles of JBE.

Their study leaves you with a lot of information about the journal and what it consists of. They find that JBE has a consistent number of articles per issue with a consistent number of pages per article. They also find that JBE had consistency in number of words per article in their journal, tables per article and the use of a colon in the title. The findings and information provided do a good job of demonstrating the attention to detail that Hyman and Steiner were looking for in their analysis. Leximancer or similar software was not used in this analysis.

In 2015, Anagnostopoulos & Bason published a content analysis like the one I will do, using the Leximancer software. They conducted a content analysis of the Sport Management International Journal Choregia (Choregia). The analysis examines the authors demographics, the paper type (empirical or non-empirical) before the Leximancer analysis, where the tool will create concepts and themes from the papers of the journal and visualize the findings.

Anagnostopoulos & Bason's analysis of the Sport Management International Journal Choregia is a sports-related journal that uses Leximancer as a tool to extract data from the many papers of the journal. They examined the abstracts of 88 papers from 2005 to 2014 with the aim of mapping published research of the selected journal. Their paper aims to discover semantic themes and concepts within the articles of Choregia during the first 10 years, as well as finding out how Choregia had developed during those years.

As mentioned, Anagnostopoulos & Bason used Leximancer in their paper, a tool I will go into more detail later in this thesis. Before the Leximancer analysis, they provide some descriptive data about author demographics and paper type, before presenting the findings of the Leximancer analysis.

They find that most of the authors come from Greece (Choregia is Greek), and that it started off quite balanced between empirical or non-empirical papers used in the journal, but that from 2010 and out empirical works were the dominant type. The Leximancer analysis find that management, information, and managers are making up the most prominent theme of all the papers, alongside future and research.

Interestingly, the only sport to be recognized as a concept by Leximancer was football, suggesting that football was the main sport researched in Choregia. Another concept was professional, while non-professional or amateur were not concepts. This could indicate that most of the studies and research in the 88 papers of Choregia in the given timeframe was focused on professional sport, with the most researched sport being professional football. Greece was also a concept linked with football, indicating that Greek football is common research topic in the papers analyzed.

Another content analysis of a sport journal was conducted in 2017 by Oddy and Bason. They did a content analysis of the first 100 papers published in *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*. They did not use Leximancer in their research. They look at - like Anagnostopoulos & Bason, 2015 – authors demographics and research nationality, empirical / non-empirical, methods used and more frequent measures that have been used in previous content analyses, to compare their findings to them. They also provided an overview of sports researched in the paper, with football being the most dominant sport of focus.

Oddy and Bason analyzed the first 100 papers of the journal *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal (SBM)*. The aimed at providing an answer to what research methods have been used, who has published in SBM, gender focus in the journal, what sport is most prominent in the journal, management functions and more.

Oddy and Bason have a systematic approach and go through each and every article the seek to examine. Out of the 100 papers, 85 were empirical. There is also a massive overweight of male authorship. North America and Europa are the two continents that provide the most papers to SBM. The content of the first 100 papers of SBM more focused around male sports than women, but a lot of the papers look at either neither gender or both when doing their research. Not surprisingly, football is the most researched sport of SBM.

These are just a few examples of other papers that review journals as a type of research. The only one of these examples that used Leximancer was Anagnostopoulos & Bason's mapping of Choregia in 2015. Compared to the other examples that did not use Leximancer, Anagnostopoulos & Bason's research provided something different to the table, rather than

just descriptive analysis and quantitative data. Their study is and paper structure / model is something that I will take inspiration from when building my thesis.

## **2.2 Review of main school of thoughts**

The International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship is as its name suggests, a journal about sport marketing and sponsorship. I will now therefore go on to review some of the main school of thoughts in sport marketing and sponsorship, before diving into the methodology used in my research. Some of the theories and/or concepts I will dip into here, might very well be used in some of the papers of the journal I will analyze.

Firstly, I will cover some theories and concepts related to the sponsorship-side of sports marketing before I go on to cover to some of the theories that are more related to the marketing side. It's not a clear line between the two sides of the journal, and there might be some overlap between literature covered.

### **2.2.1 Theories related to sponsorship-linked marketing**

Activation & Leveraging are something that is key to both marketing and sponsorship, and are terms that is about, and try to describe, how to make the most out of a sponsorship in sports. (Cornwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005). By leveraging and activation they describe it as “sponsorships are leveraged with collateral spending. activation is that part of leveraging that builds interaction and involvement.” (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020)

Cornwell & Kwon describe it as a commonly accepted notion that sponsorships need to leverage and activate to be useful. Studies about activation and leveraging suggests that it can increase awareness to the sponsor and that way increase sales or product purchase (Herrmann, Kacha, Derbaix, 2016).

Paying for a sponsorship only gives the sponsor the rights of associating itself with the sponsee, while all the extra marketing and advertising costs related to the sponsorship are examples of activation and leveraging. The ratio from spending on sponsorship rights to spending on leveraging and activation range from 2:1 to 8:1. (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013; Seguin, 2007).

Multiple reasons for sponsorship to fail has been identified by the authors Shank and Lyberger (2014). The reasons range from bad timing to lack of long-term commitment, with many more. Interestingly, they also list lack of resources allocated to activations as a key reason for why sponsorships fail.

This is evidently a big part of sponsorship-linked marketing, and it would be of no surprise if papers included in *The International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* focus this phenomenon and theory, and ultimately of Leximancer to generate a concept from this theory. Another theory topic is about the transferring of meaning between the brands of a sponsor and a sponsee because of a sponsorship. Transfer value, balance theory and co-branding theories all are relevant to this topic.

Moving to the balance theory, a theory used to describe the attitude change toward a sponsor because of a sponsorship. (Dean, 2002). Sponsors have the right to associate their brand with the sport property they sponsor. The balance theory tries to capture the effect the sponsorship has on the attitude towards the sponsor brand. Dalakas and Levin (2005) find that sponsoring a sport property usually have a positive effect on fans attitude towards the sponsor's brand. Important to note is that they also find that the attitude might as well change negatively by fans of a competing or rival sport property. An example can be if you are a big fan of Red Bull Racing Formula 1 team, you might have positive feelings toward the Red Bull brand and buy their drink when you are thirsty. On the other side, if you are a big fan of their biggest Formula 1 rival, Mercedes F1 team, you might have a negative attitude towards anything associated with the Red Bull Racing F1 team.

The negative effect of sponsorships is also captured by Reisinger, Grohs & Eder (2006) in their study of adverse effects of sponsorships. In their study they find, by using the balance theory, that the brand attitude might have a bad affect by sponsoring a disliked sport property. Much like Dalakas and Levin's (2005) study found. Reisinger et al. (2006) also find that sponsoring two rivaling sport properties might increase costumer awareness, but it might also have a negative affect towards the attitude towards the brand, even though it is increasing its costumer awareness by sponsoring two rivalling sport properties.

Balance Theory is therefore also expected to feature in some of the articles of *The International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. The theory dates back many



years, and was first introduced by Heider (1958), an Austrian psychologist, and has been used by scholars in the sports industry in the effort to understand psychological effect of sponsorships on consumers. This theory is related to the meaning/image transfer theory. This theory builds upon the transferred value from a sport property to a brand that becomes a sponsor. (Gwinner, 1997). An example of this transferred value from sponsee to sponsor is the Norwegian cycling team UNO-X Pro Cycling Team. Their main (and name) sponsor UNO-X is a Norwegian chain of gasoline and petrol stations, this obviously doesn't really relate to cycling, but their highly visible involvement in a professional cycling team might be helping UNO-Xs image to be "greener" and more sustainable. If it really helps UNO-X is unclear, but it certainly fits the theory of image transferring through sponsorship.

This theory is like the balance theory based on the psychological affects the sponsorship has towards consumers perception, feelings, and attitudes to the sponsor. This can also affect both positively and negatively, depending on if you are a fan or a fan of a rival of the sport property that is being sponsored. Studies find that the negative feelings toward a team will transfer those feelings to a sponsor of that team. (Angell, Gorton, Bottomley & White, 2006).

The effectiveness of a image transfer and consumer attitudes as a result of a sponsorship strongly depends on the perceived fit of a sponsorship. Also known as congruency theory. Congruency explains how the two parties of sponsorship fits together and is the most frequently investigated theory related to sponsorship. (Cornwell et al., 2005). If a sponsorship is not congruent, it might result in damaging the sponsors image, the sponsee's image, or even both images. (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020).

One of the most widely studied aspects of sponsorship is the importance of fit or congruence between sponsor and the sponsored property (Fleck & Quester, 2007). Cornwell et al. (2005), suggest that a congruent fit between sponsor and sponsee result in generally more positive outcomes than what an incongruent sponsorship would do. Congruency was further investigated by Cobbs, Groza, & Rich (2016) when they investigated how congruency & portfolio size affected the sponsorship success, and their study found that:

*"Incongruent sponsors should aim to align with sponsored properties that possess either small portfolios inclusive of another incongruent sponsor, or larger portfolios composed primarily of co-sponsors congruent to the sponsored property.*

*Conversely, situations that pair the incongruent sponsor with a single congruent co-sponsor or within a larger group of incongruent sponsors should be avoided.”*

There are many other theories that could have been presented here, and the journal will consist of a lot wider specter of theories than I briefly presented here. Some of them might be featured enough to be recognized as a theme and concept by Leximancer, but we will get to that part later in this thesis. Now let's, look at some theories in sports marketing and sponsorship that are not specifically related to the sponsorship side, and more towards the marketing side.

## **2.2.2 Theories related to Sport Marketing**

While the previous theories have been more on the sponsorship side of marketing, there are also many theories in sport marketing that is not that heavily linked with sponsorship. But first of all, what really is sports marketing? Fullerton & Merz (2008) tried to break it down and provide a conceptual framework for sports marketing.

They point out four domains of sports marketing: theme-based strategies, product-based strategies, alignment-based strategies, and sports-based strategies. Theme-based and alignment-based marketing are classified as marketing through sports of non-sports related products, while the domains product-based and sports-based are classified as marketing of sports and products that are directly sports related.

They also interestingly place the two domains alignment-based strategies and sports-based strategies as sponsorship-based domains, and theme-based strategies and product-based strategies as domains of traditional use. Domains of traditional use are marketing strategies that typically are aimed towards the private market of selling a business to consumer (B2C) product through sports, or for a sport product to promote themselves to attract more fans to a for example. Sponsorship-based domains are typically strategies where non-sport products enter sponsorship with sport properties (e.g. hair wax using David Beckham in a commercial) or when sport products market themselves through sport properties (e.g. Adidas sponsoring David Beckham).

Fullerton & Merz (2008) highlights the difference of marketing of sports, and marketing through sports, and that way illustrate that sports marketing isn't just a football team trying to get fans in the stands, to exaggerate a little, but also a whole lot more, which might lead us to expect a broad spectrum of concepts and theories included in International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship. With that said about the general understanding of sports marketing, it's time to look at one interesting development in marketing in general that have changed things and opened a few doors of creativity and innovation over the recent years. Digitalization.

Digitalization is an important thing in sports marketing that has developed many sides in sports, and has even led to a new sport, e-sports. (Xiao et al., 2017). One interesting theory/concept linked to digitalization is gamification. Hamari, Koivisto & Sarsa (2014) deem gamification as a “*next generation method for marketing and customer engagement in popular discussion*” in their literature review of empirical studies on gamification.

Gamification is being described as “persuasive technology” that aims to motivate consumers and influence user behavior with game designs. (Blohm & Leimeiser, 2013). By adding different and new elements that are inspired by games, into other areas that doesn't traditionally invite consumer to play games can be a way of adding something extra. Blohm & Leimeiser find many positives with gamification. Increasing user satisfaction, conveyance of optimism, facilitation of social interaction, provision of meaning and more.

Gamification is increasingly possible due to digitalization and can be used in marketing and sports. Maybe one of the most popular examples of gamification is Fantasy Premier League, a game developed by Premier League where fans can play in a way that motivates them to follow the league and watch the game closely. Another term that arises with games like this is “gamblification”. Masey and Hamari (2022) provide the following definition to gamblification:

*«Gamblification is the (increased) presence of gambling (or gambling-related content) in non- gambling contexts in order to realise desired outcomes. It incorporates two main aspects: affective (employing cultural values/signifiers of gambling); and effective, (employing gambling games and activities).»*

While gamification might be a more positively associated word, there is I thin line between that and the more negatively associated term gamblification. Adam, Roethke & Benlian (2021) consider gamblification as a gamification-related phenomenon that is under-investigated, and they define it as use of gambling design elements. They highlight and describe the difference between the two terms as:

*“gamblification and gamification usually share the same settings (e.g., a user interacts with a digital platform) and goals (e.g., user engagement) but work with different means to attain the goals: Whereas gamification adapts the digital platform through the levers of game design elements (e.g., Uber introducing badges, which have no to little value outside the Uber ecosystem), gamblification uses the levers of gambling design elements (e.g., Starbucks utilizing an augmented reality lottery, providing users the prospect to win cash-equivalent rewards)”*

Fantasy Premier League, the example I used for gamification, might by others be used as an example for gamblification. Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths (2018) deep dive into the gamblification of English football, and fantasy gaming as an example. However, they point out that they use a wide definition of the term, but that fantasy gaming serves as an expansion of the remit of sports gambling.

Those concepts and phenomenon are related to the digital side of sport marketing. Another side of digital marketing in sports, and in general, is social media marketing. Social media marketing is defined by Weinberg (2009) as a process that gives individuals the possibility to promote various products or services through social channels online, that would not have been possible through traditional marketing channels. Another definition on social media marketing has been given by Mangold and Faulds (2009), and the define it as:

*“a hybrid element of the promotion mix because it combines characteristics of traditional IMC tools (companies talking to customers) with a highly magnified form of word-of- mouth (customers talking to one another) whereby marketing managers cannot control the content and frequency of such information.”*

Social media opens a door for interactions, and sport teams have built up very impressive numbers of followers on their various social media channels. Facebook, Instagram, and

Twitter are the most well-known social medias and those who have the most active users. (Gadiraju, 2016). Some football teams have more than a hundred million followers on their accounts, and sport personalities attract millions of followers as well. With big numbers like that, it also lies a big marketing potential there to be exploited, which also leads to the social media phenomenon becoming a topic of interest for academia, and it will not be surprising if social media marketing is the topic of some of the papers included in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship.

## **3.0 Methodology**

After spending some time elaborating on some previous content analyses of other journals, both sports-related and non-sports-related journals, this chapter offers an explanation and tries to describe my approach to the analysis of the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship and the methodology framework that have been chosen for this thesis.

“Content analysis is a highly flexible research method that has been widely used in library and information science (LIS) studies with varying research goals and objectives. The research method is applied in qualitative, quantitative, and sometimes mixed modes of research frameworks and employs a wide range of analytical techniques to generate findings and put them into context.” (White and Marsh, 2006)

The chapter will be split into three sub-chapters where I explain different sections of what falls under methodology. Firstly, how the data that proceed to be used in the analysis was collected is explained. Secondly, the first part of the analysis is explained, the descriptive analysis and breakdown of the journal investigated. Lastly, how the text-mining software Leximancer, and how that has been used as an analysis-tool, is explained.

### **3.1 Data collection**

For this thesis, I collected abstracts from research papers published in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship between the years 2016 until 2021. That makes up a total of 113 papers from 6 years. The abstracts were obtained with the great help of my supervisor for this thesis and through the website of the publisher. Abstracts are lexically dense and focus on the core issues presented in articles (Cretchley, Gallois, and Rooney, 2010).

## 3.2 Descriptive statistics

In the first part of the analysis, I provide some descriptive overview regarding general information about the papers in the journal and the authors of it. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize and present data. They are the numerical and graphical techniques used to organize, present, and analyze data. Descriptive statistics is an important first step to an analysis and is often presented before doing other comparisons and tests. (Fisher & Marshall, 2009; Kaur, Stoltzfus & Yellapu, 2018; Nick 2007).

In my research I use descriptive statistics as a first step to get an overview of what is included in the journal in terms of general information that is easy comparable to other either existing content analyses of other journals or content analyses conducted in the future can easily compare the descriptive summary to the descriptive summary of this analysis. Walzeel, Robertson & Anagnostopoulos (2018) use descriptive analysis as an initial analysis before they shift to a deeper focus in their analysis of literature about CSR in the context of professional team sports organizations.

Each and every one of the papers collected for the analysis was gone through systematically, one by one. The data extracted from the papers in this part of the analysis did not tap too deep into the research papers, but rather looked at things from a viewpoint closer to the surface. Multiple indicators that were looked at.

The first indicator was whether it was written by one author or multiple authors. This is to get an understanding and overview of what is most common in this particular journal when it comes to the number of authors per paper. Another indicator regarding the authors is the gender of the authors. Tracking this will give insight to the balance between male or female authors contributing to the journal.

The last indicator that is related to the authors is the country of the institution which they represent. For papers with multiple authors, all nationalities of the institutions are counted. If an author is representing more than one institution in the published paper, only the first institution is counted.

The next indicator moves to the content of the paper and its research, and whether it is an empirical or non-empirical research paper. This has been done in other similar content analyses (Oddy & Bason, 2017; Anagnostopoulos & Bason, 2015) and provides valuable information about the distribution between the two sorts of research. If a study employs fragments of both empirical and non-empirical methods, it is counted as empirical. Only explicitly and exclusively non-empirical papers are counted.

Other indicators related to the research and not the authors are about which sport is the sport of the study, if any. Only studies with only one sport are counted, while research on multiple sports-events, multiple sports, etc. is categorized as “unspecified”.

The next indicator is looking at whether the paper is on the marketing side of the journal or the sponsorship side. This makes sense because the name of the journal, “Sports Marketing and Sponsorship”. The two categories are “explicitly sponsorship” and “other”. The categorization of this category as well employs a “strict” line. Only studies that explicitly and exclusively focus on sponsorship are counted.

Next, the theoretical approach and the theories that the authors draw on and inform of in the abstracts are systematically listed. Moving on, the methodology employed in the study is mapped. Each paper is listed as either qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods.

### **3.3 Leximancer**

The last part of my study is an analysis where the text-mining software Leximancer was used to provide information about the papers of the journal. According to Smith and Humphreys (2006), Leximancer is implemented as a commercial-quality program which is easily used and has been evaluated for stability, reproducibility, and correlative validity. (Anagnostopoulos & Bason 2015).

“Leximancer is highly consistent in the way it classifies text and identifies the relationships between concepts; the same result is produced no matter how many times a data set is coded and recoded.” (Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

Leximancer employs proximity values for text mining and artificial learning (Smith & Humphreys, 2006) to automatically identify and map themes and concepts in textual data.



(Cretchley et al., 2010). The software uses the words of the documents it is being “fed” and develops themes and concepts based on uses word frequency and co-occurrence data. The themes are illustrated on the visual output as colored circles, while concepts are words that occur often in the texts and the concepts are grouped into the themes based a number of statistical-based algorithms that develops concepts from the text data. (Anagnostopoulos & Bason 2015; Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

Concepts in Leximancer are words that often go together in sentences and the text. For example, a concept building may contain the keywords mill, warrant, tower, collapsed, etc. The software weight the words according to how often they appear in the sentences containing the concept, versus how often they appear elsewhere. (Leximancer User Guide, Release 5.0, 2021)

“Aside from detecting the overall presence of a concept in the text, the concept definitions are also used to determine the frequency of co-occurrence between concepts. This co-occurrence measure is what is used to generate the concept map.”  
(Leximancer User Guide, Release 5.0, 2021)

The concepts are clustered into themes, that look like colored circles on the concept map. Concepts that often appear together in the text are placed close to each other on the map. Themes are named after the most prominent word of that theme.

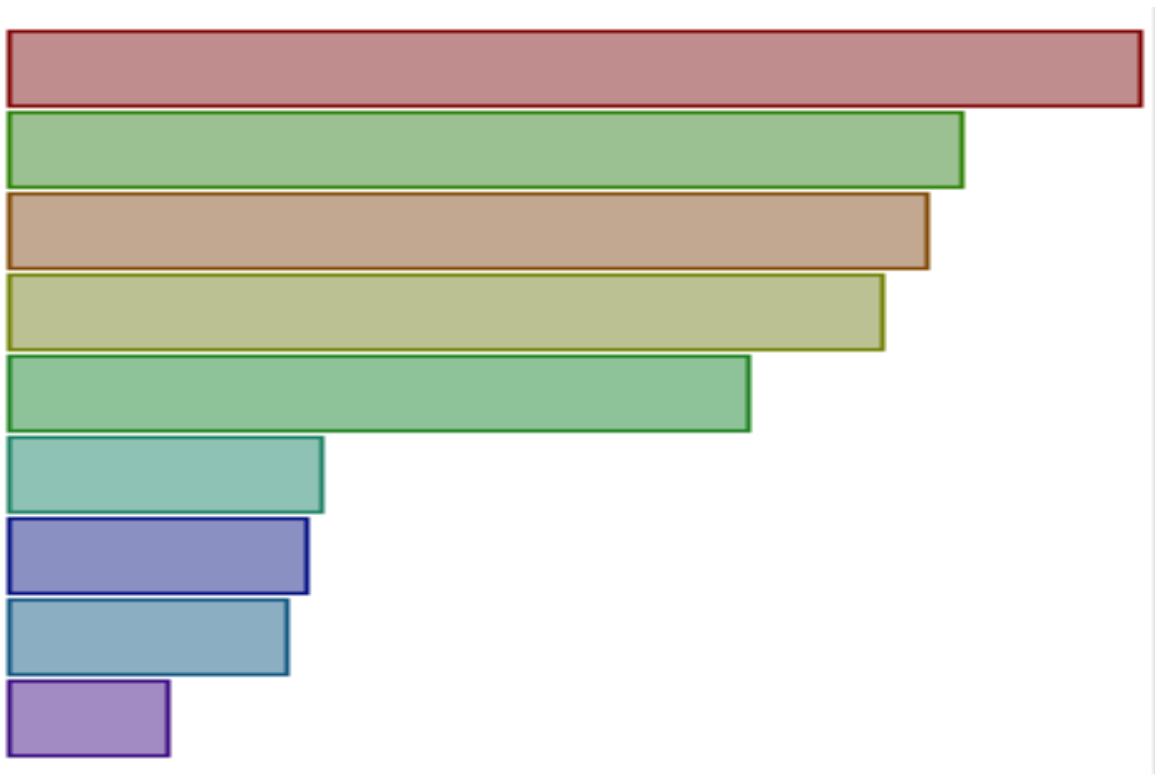
For this analysis, all abstracts from the papers researched in the descriptive analysis was uploaded to Leximancer and processed using the text-mining software. Leximancer developes a visual concept map based on the dataset provided. To help with the accuracy and relevance of the study, a number of words that often are seen in texts (but that doesn't add any meaning) were excluded.

The list of “stop words” consists of some typical words in English texts, like “but”, “not”, “and” and etc... These words are by default added to the stop-list, and I've also added words like “findings”, “results”, “analysis”, “sport” and “research” to keep the concepts generated relevant.

The software generate concepts than again goes to generate themes that are represented as colored circles with concepts (words) inside it. The size of the colored circle is not relevant in terms of how prominent the theme is. The theme's prominence is demonstrated by the color of the circle, with the red circle being the most prominent theme. (Anagnostopoulos & Bason 2015).

«The themes are heat-mapped to indicate importance. This means that the 'hottest' or most im- portant theme appears in red, and the next hottest in orange, and so on according to the colour wheel.» (Leximancer User Guide, Release 5.0, 2021)

The colors ranked from most prominent to least prominent look like this:



*Figure 1: Color of most prominent circles (from most to least)*

The concepts inside each theme are demonstrated by dots. The larger the dot the more prominent the concept. The software places the concepts that often appear together in the abstract close to each other's on the map. (Anagnostopoulos & Bason 2015).

## 4.0 Findings & Results

Moving on to the presentation of the findings and result of these two analyses, we see that there is insightful information to be extracted from both the descriptive and more general side of the journal content analysis, as well as the more in-depth analysis ran through Leximancer. We will start off with the descriptive statistics.

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

The first thing we see from the descriptive analysis is the number of papers published in IJSMS per year. In total over the 6 years examined, 136 papers were published in the journal. The years 2016-2019 were somewhat “consistent” ranging from 20 articles per year to 27 articles per year, with an average of 22,8 articles per year. To compare with, Hyman and Steiner’s analysis from 1997 of the Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship had an average of 23,6 articles per year. 2020 of IJSMS was unusual, with only 9 papers published, while 2021 was unusual the “other way”, because of 36 papers being published that year. In the total timeframe examined, the average numbers of articles published was 22,7. So although 2020- & 21 were unusual from the previous years, the total average wasn’t changed by a lot.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Articles Published</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
2016	20	14,7
2017	24	17,6
2018	27	19,9
2019	20	14,7
2020	9	6,6
2021	36	26,5
<b>Total:</b>	136	≈100

*Figure 2: Number of articles published per year.*

Whether this stands out from other journals or not is unknown. Journals comes in many “shapes and sizes”, and this will vary a lot from journal to journal. For example, Anagnostopoulos & Bason’s analysis Choregia examined 88 papers from 2005 to 2014. This makes up for an average of 8,8 articles per years, which is a lot different from the number of IJSMS.

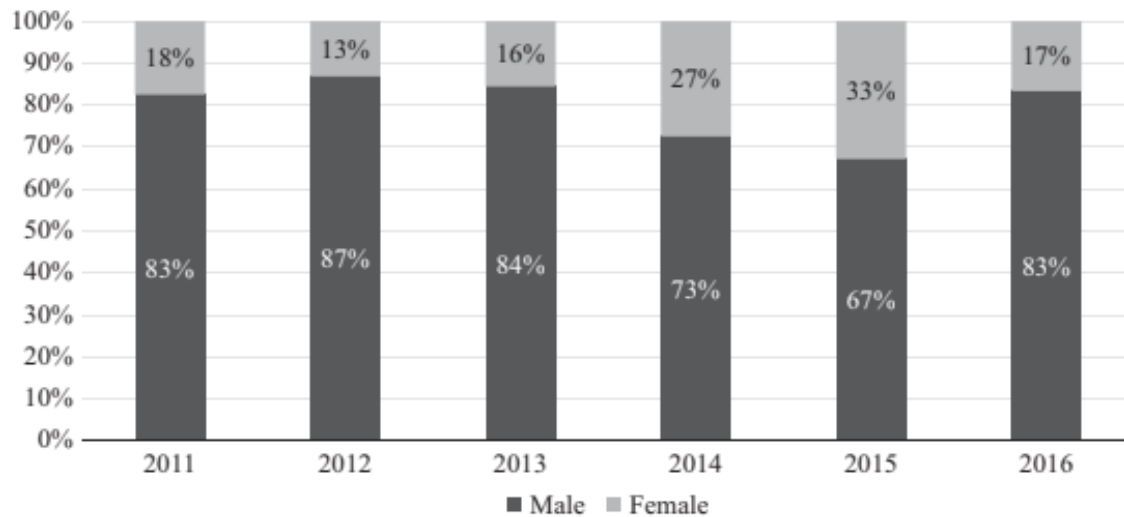
#### 4.1.1 Authorship statistics

Next up, statistics about the demographics of the authors was investigated. The first variable was the gender balance, and there was found a clear imbalance favoring male authors. In total, 404 author-appearances contributed to the journal over the last six years. Out of them, only 77 were female/women. Making up less than a fifth of the author-appearances. Male authors appeared 81% of the time.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
2016	51	9	60
2017	62	9	71
2018	70	10	80
2019	52	13	65
2020	22	4	26
2021	70	32	102
<b>Total:</b>	327	77	404

*Figure 3: Gender balance of authors per year.*

Similar gender balance was found by Oddy & Bason (2017) in their content analysis of *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*. They consistently found that male authors appeared more often than women, and four out of the six years they investigated, women held a share of less than twenty percent.



Source: (Oddy & Bason, 2017) - *gender balance in Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*.

Both this analysis and the one of Oddy and Bason find that 4 out of 6 years, women held a share of less than 20%. This is certainly interesting data to be looked at and follow up on in the future. Whether this is a reoccurring thing throughout journals is not something we conclude upon in this thesis. Nor if this is the trend of sports-related journals or purely just a coincidence. Nonetheless an interesting observation worthy of a closer look.

Moving on, the descriptive analysis covered the number of papers that were written by only one author compared to multiple authors, and there is a clear overweight of papers being written by multiple authors. 88% of the papers are written by multiple authors, while only 12% are written by one single author. This number is a bit less than what Hyman & Steiner found in 1997, where 25% of the papers was written by a single author.

Year	Single authorship	Multiple authorship
2016	3	17
2017	4	20
2018	4	23
2019	1	19
2020	1	8
2021	3	33
<b>Total:</b>	16	120

Figure 4: Number of articles written by a single author or multiple authors per year.

#### 4.1.2 Country statistics

Moving on to looking at the countries that are represented in the papers of the journal, there is no doubt USA is the most frequent country to be represented. They are represented more than four times as often as second “placed” China and South Korea. This information is very interesting compared with Chang-Hyun Jin’s content analysis from 2017 of IJSMS from 1999 to 2015.

Country	Frequency		Country	Frequency	
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
USA	267	43.4	Japan	4	0.7
UK	62	10.1	Malaysia	4	0.7
Australia	53	8.6	Italy	3	0.5
Canada	50	8.1	Belgium	2	0.4
Korea	38	6.2	India	2	0.4
New Zealand	22	3.6	Ireland	2	0.4
Germany	20	3.3	Russia	2	0.4
Taiwan	12	2.0	Singapore	2	0.4
The Netherlands	10	1.6	South Africa	2	0.4
France	8	1.3	Sweden	2	0.4
Greece	8	1.3	Turkey	2	0.4
Norway	8	1.3	Austria	1	0.2
Portugal	8	1.3	Mexico	1	0.2
Spain	8	1.3	Switzerland	1	0.2
Brazil	4	0.7	Tunisia	1	0.2
China	4	0.7			

*Source: (Jin, 2017) - Country appearances of the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship from 1999-2015*

From 1999 to 2015, USA appeared 267 times making up 43,4% of all country’s appearances. From 2016 to 2021, USA is still the major contributor, but their percentage tally has dropped to 36,4% of all appearances. In the rest of the top five, only one remain in this research from the previous one. South Korea with 8% from 2016 – 2021, an increase from 6,2% before 2016. China appeared the same number of times as South Korea, while Germany with 6,4% and Spain with 4,5% followed in fourth and fifth. The “biggest drops” from 1999-2015 to 2016-2021 were UK, who has gone from being a clear second to now being featured only 2,2%. Australia and Canada both also dropped out of the top ten, with Australia now being featured 1,7% and Canada 3%.

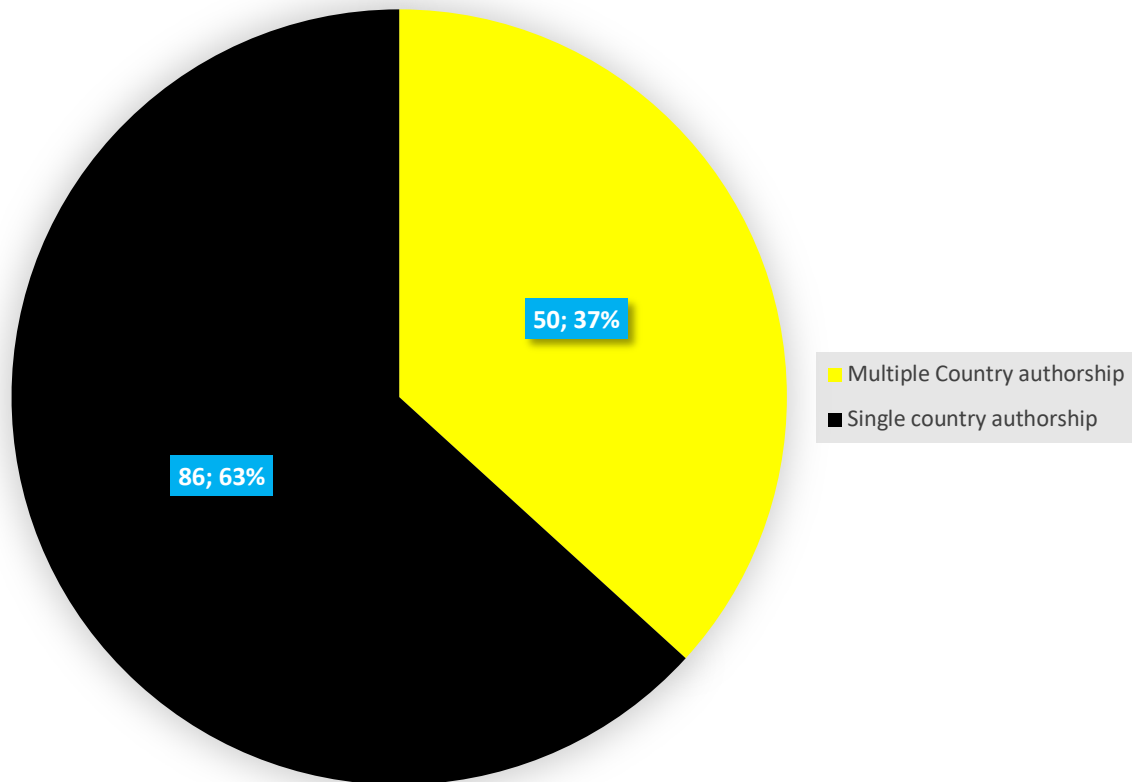
Country	Appearances	Percentage (%)
USA	147	36,4
China	33	8,2

South Korea	33	8,2
Germany	26	6,4
Spain	18	4,5
Canada	12	3
Malaysia	11	2,7
Brazil	9	2,2
UK	9	2,2
Greece	8	2
Iran	7	1,7
Australia	7	1,7
New Zealand	6	1,5
Singapore	6	1,5
Egypt	5	1,2
Taiwan	5	1,2
Pakistan	5	1,2
Austria	5	1,2
The Netherlands	5	1,2
Turkey	5	1,2
Norway	5	1,2
Sweden	4	1
Mexico	4	1
Portugal	4	1
Japan	4	1
Serbia	4	1
Israel	4	1
India	3	0,7
Belgium	3	0,7
France	3	0,7
Romania	2	0,5
Chile	1	0,2
Italy	1	0,2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>≈100</b>

*Figure 5: Number of country appearances of the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*

During the six years analyzed, 33 countries appeared in IJSMS. This is number is two more than what appeared in the 17 years of IJSMS prior to 2016. 12 years less, but 2 countries more. This might be interesting to keep an eye on moving forward, to see if the trend continues.

In terms of international contributions of IJSMS and the balance of countries featuring, I looked at the number of papers that were written by authors representing only one country versus papers that were written by authors represented by more than one country.



*Figure 6: Multiple vs Single country authorship.*

Out of the 136 papers analyzed, 63% fall under the category “single country authorship” while 37% have a multiple country authorship, where researchers representing institutions from different countries have collaborated in a research project.

#### **4.1.3 Research statistics**

Moving on to the research statistics of the descriptive analysis, findings of what type of methodology used, empirical versus non-empirical, what sport is most frequently the topic of the research, how often sponsorship is explicitly the focus and the theoretical approach of the research will be presented.

First up, there was found that quantitative methodology was the most used method of IJSMS from 2016 to 2021. Quantitative methods were used in most papers of all six years analyzed.



Quantitative methods very used in more than 50% of the papers each years, and in all years combined 64% percent of all the papers. This is pretty close to the findings from 1999-2015, where Jin (2017) found that 69% of all research was quantitative.

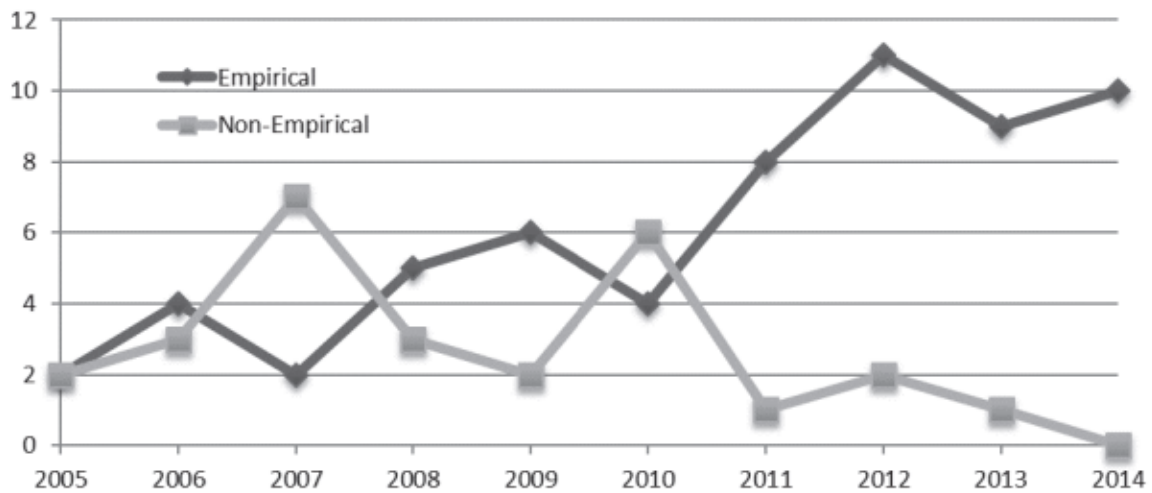
<b>Year</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Mixed Methods</b>
2016	13	3	4
2017	13	7	4
2018	16	6	5
2019	15	3	2
2020	7	1	1
2021	23	10	3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>

*Figure 7: Methodology used year by year*

Qualitative methods were used in 22% percent of the papers, a drop from prior research which found that it was used 31%. Mixed methods were used in 14% from 2016-2021, but here we have nothing to compare it with, as Jin did not track mixed methods in the research from 1999-2015. This might also raise the question if these numbers are comparable, as mixed methods was not considered in one study but included in the other. However, it's clear that most papers and research of IJSMS relies on quantitative methodology.

The majority of papers are also relying on empirical data rather than non-empirical. Empirical data was gathered and used in 93% of all the papers from 2016 to 2021, meaning only 7% of the papers were studies based on non-empirical data. The number obviously very imbalanced, but compared to other studies, it might not come as a big surprise.

Anagnostopoulos & Bason (2015) found that from 2011 and onwards, there was a huge decrease in non-empirical works published in *Choregia*, a Greek sports management journal, and a major overweight of empirical studies. Phelan, Ferreira and Salvador (2002) also found that the gap between empirical and non-empirical works expanded over the years in his research of the *Strategic Management Journal*. There might be different reasons to this of course, but the pattern is there, and it will be interesting to see how it proceeds to develop over the coming years.



*Empirical and non-empirical works in Choregia. Source: (Anagnostopoulos & Bason, 2015)*

Anagnostopoulos & Bason (2015) suggests that the reason of their sudden drop of non-empirical studies might be correlated to the fact that there was a sudden drop of Greece authors from 2011 in Choregia, and that Greek authors have an even split between empirical and non-empirical works. For reference, during the six years from 2016-2021 in IJSMS, only 2% of the authors were representing Greek institutions.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Empirical</b>	<b>Non-empirical</b>
2016	19	1
2017	23	1
2018	25	2
2019	18	2
2020	9	0
2021	33	3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>9</b>

*Figure 8: Empirical versus non-empirical research*

As the table shows, there are only a few numbers of non-empirical works per year, and in one case no numbers. There are no previous studies of the IJSMS that look at the balance between empirical and non-empirical, but there is clear that in recent times, non-empirical works are drifting away from the journal.

The next parameter that is examined is which sport that is most frequently used in the papers of the journal and its research. To what might not be a big surprise football (European football) Is the most popular sport in research over the time examined. 24 of the papers focus explicitly on football, while baseball is the second most researched sport in this sample.

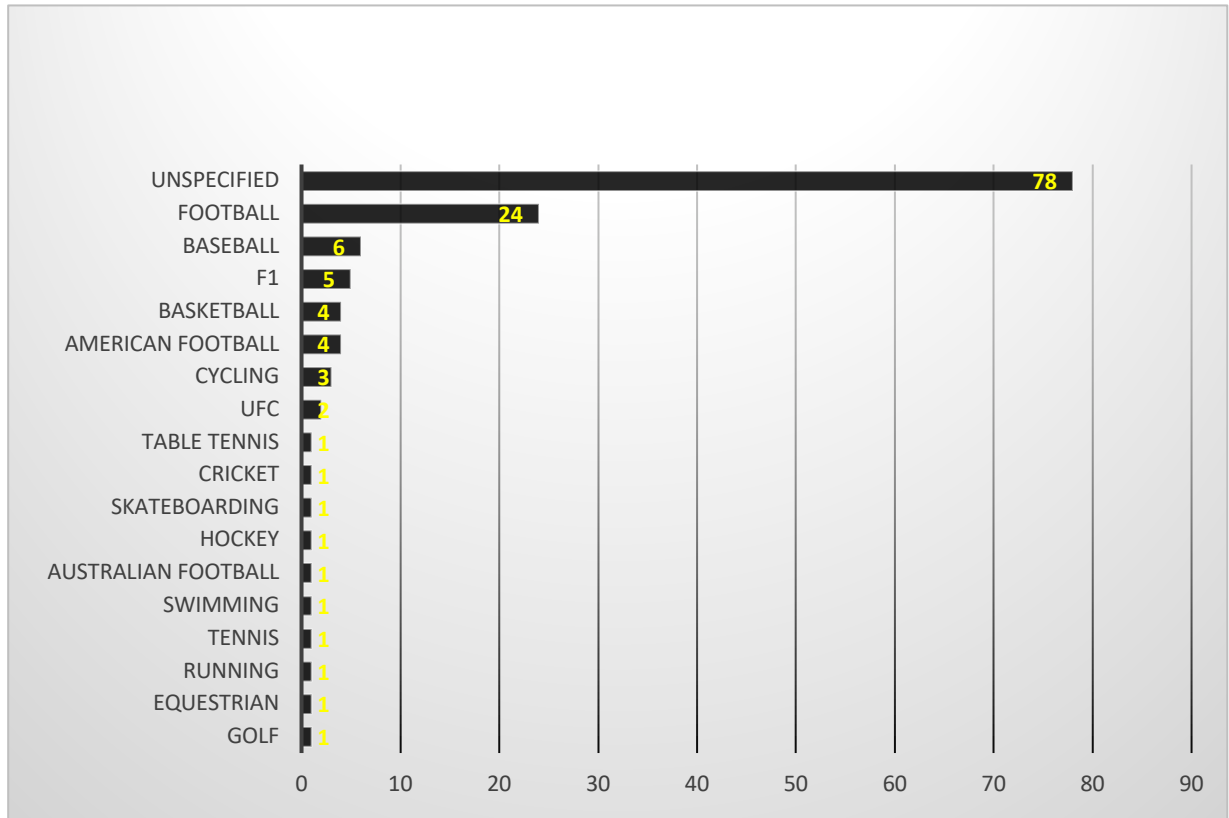


Figure 9: Most frequent sport researched

Football is also the most common sport of the IJSMS from 1999-2015, and it also the most common sport in the analysis that Oddy and Bason (2017) did on “Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal”. The fact that football is the most common sport in Sport journals should not be a big surprised, based on its standing and popularity on the world scale.

By the name of the journal: International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship, it can be interesting to see how big of a share of the papers that explicitly focused on sponsorship. The findings show that almost one fifth of the papers have an explicit focus on sponsorship research. 24 papers (18%) are made up by papers doing research on sponsorship, and while that might seem like a small amount, keep in mind that there is a strict line that was set of what is sponsorship research and what falls under the category “other”.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Explicitly sponsorship focus</b>	<b>Other</b>
2016	1	19
2017	3	21
2018	6	21
2019	4	16
2020	2	7
2021	8	28
<b>Total:</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>112</b>

*Figure 10: Share of explicitly sponsorship-focused papers*

Only papers that explicitly, with no exception or no inclusion of other topics, focus on sponsorship are considered. This does not necessarily mean that sponsorship isn't a topic in the rest of the 82% of the papers. In fact, they might very well be, but in a setting that is also focused on for example marketing, advertising, or a combination.

Jin (2017) find that sponsorship effects is a specific topic of almost 50 % of the papers of the journal from 1999-2015, which is a lot higher number than found in this research. This might come down to the definition and guidelines that is sat is not exactly similar from one content analysis to the other.

The last descriptive statistics that were found during the analysis, looked at the theoretical approach of the papers. What theories that authors draw on when doing their research. In the literature review, I mentioned s few theories, and some of them might appear here. Many of the papers do draw on do not inform about what theoretical approach they have in the abstract, and therefore the category "unspecified" is by far the largest with 55%, but this does not mean that those papers do not use any theories at all, but that they did not actively inform about it in the abstract. The second largest category is "multitheroetical" with 17% of the papers using more than one theory for their studies. However, to what extent they draw on more than one theory is not covered. The number just indicates how many of the papers mentioned more than one theory in their abstract. Aside from those two categories, social identity theory, social exchange theory and congruency theory are the most frequent used theories.

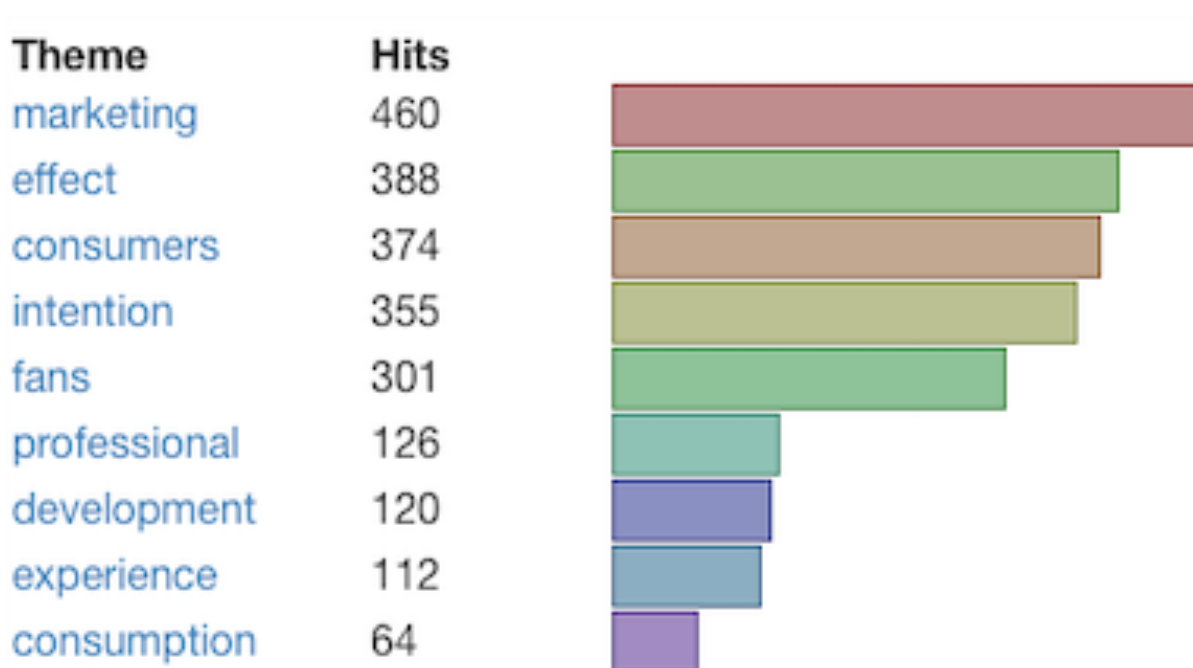
<b>Theoretical Approach</b>	<b>Number of Studies</b>
Unspecified	75
Multitheoretical	23
Social identity theory	5
Social Exchange theory	4
Congruency theory	3
Theory of reasoned action	2
Stakeholder theory	2
Signaling theory	2
Meaning transfer	2
Value Orientation Theory	1
Socioemotional selectivity theory	1
S-O-R theory	1
Revealed preference theory	1
Resource-based view	1
Optimal distinctiveness theory	1
Leisure constraints theory	1
Legitimacy theory	1
Item response theory	1
Investment model proposes	1
Flow theory	1
Fear Appeal theory	1
Economic demand theory	1
Configuration theory	1
Cause-related marketing theory	1
Brand identity theory	1
Situational Crisis Communications Theory	1
Appraisal theory	1

*Figure 11: Theoretical approach*

## 4.2 Leximancer analysis

Now we move on to the Leximancer analysis where all the abstracts are processed by the text-mining tool that concepts and themes based on statistical algorithms. First up, all the abstracts from all the six years analyzed were included on the analysis.

First off, Leximancer identified and generated nine themes from this analysis. The nine themes are: Marketing, effect, consumers, intention, fans, professional, development, experience, and consumption.



*Figure 12: Themes generated by Leximancer of all abstracts of IJSMS from 2016-2021*

Starting from the top, the most prominent theme is “marketing”, which might not come as a surprise when the journal’s name consists of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship. The fact that “marketing” is the top theme, points out the large focus on the marketing aspect of the journal. The concepts that the theme is built up from other than marketing are brand, sponsorship, provides, implications, strategies, management, important, literature, understanding and involvement.

Brand and sponsorship are certainly two concepts that are expected given the nature of the journal, and concepts like strategies, management, understanding and involvement might suggest that the authors are keeping an eye on these factors in marketing-related research.

The second most prominent theme generated by Leximancer is “effect”, suggesting that there is a effect-minded focus in many of the papers. This might not be too surprising as it is an academic journal. The theme is made up by the concepts: social, sponsor, related, different, media, advertising, and information. Many of these concepts seem natural to be associated with effect in some kind of way. It might suggest that many of the authors focus on the effect that for example sponsors have, or that other things have on sponsors.

The third theme is consumers, shifting away the focus from marketing and effect-related concepts to the consumer side of things. The theme is made up by these concepts: impact, using, influence, factors, perceived, behavior, perceptions, revealed, and future. The concepts certainly indicate a focus on consumer behavior, impact and influence related to the consumers, and interestingly the word “future” is a concept, maybe showing a focus from the authors to look at the future of the consumers in the studies in this journal.

The fourth theme is called “intention”, which might cause someone to think of purchase intention, which might make sense given that this is a marketing-heavy sports journal. The other words that make this theme are event, positive, significant, quality, product, image, negative, performance, and service. The words positive and negative might indicate that the papers in IJSMS look at factors related to intentions whether they are positive and negative. The other concepts quality, product, performance, service might also suggest that the paper look at how quality of products, performance and service might impact the intentions.

The fifth and last theme I will go into deep detail in is called “fans”. Obviously related to fans of sports, this theme indicates that fans and fans-related areas in sports are a rather prominent focus area of the research and studies conducted in IJSMS from 2016-2021. The theme is made up of the words: team, relationship, model, structural, identification, football, online, and based. Interestingly, the concept “football” is here, indicating that the studies that are done often look at football fans. Another concept is “team”, might suggesting that the studies often examine fans of a certain team rather than fans of sport.

The other four themes developed by Leximancer are “professional”, “development”, “experience” and “consumption”. These four themes are all very small in terms of hits (as shown in figure 12), but still large enough to be identified by Leximancer as themes of the abstracts of the papers in IJSMS from 2016-2021. These theme highlights areas and elements of the research that IJSMS focused on from 2016-2021.

“Professional” being a theme identified by Leximancer shows that IJSMS has focused research on professional sports, while “amateur” is neither a concept nor a theme. “Development” as a theme is an indicator that there has been a focus on development in the research. Behind it, the concepts “local” and “theory” within the theme “Development” indicate that theories are applied to research about developing countries and local regions. “Experience” covers research about spectators’ experience, and on an international level. The last and smallest theme is “consumption”. The theme is made up by only one concept being “public” indicating that the theme is about public consumption.

Moving on to the full map of themes and concepts clustered and grouped into a map, we can see which themes and concepts that are connected to each other. As explained, on the concept map, the concepts are placed close to each other based on how often they appear together in the text. This way, we can look at which themes that are connected, as the themes are made up by the concepts.

As stated, the most prominent theme of the concept map is “Marketing” illustrated by the red colored circle. This theme is connected by proximity on the map with the themes “effect” and “professional”. Both “marketing” and “effect” makes sense, as it can be suggested that the research in IJSMS that focus on marketing look at the effect marketing has. The fact that it is linked to the theme “professional” however, might suggest that marketing in professional sports where a large chunk of marketing-related research in IJSMS during the years analyzed.

The themes “marketing” is directly connected to “effect” through the concepts “brand” and “sponsorship” (from the theme “marketing”) and “sponsor” (from the theme “effect”), while it’s connected to “professional” through the concept “understanding”.





intention towards use the product (go to games, etc...) making them all rather closely clustered in the concept map.

“Intention” on its hand, is heavily connected to experience through the concept “quality”, “product”, “intention”, “experience” and “spectators”. It is also connected to consumption, which should not be surprising as it is connected to “consumers”. Interestingly, “Consumers” and “consumption” are not connected. Next, the theme “fans” is connected with two other themes excluding its connection to “consumers”. It's connected barely with both “development”, through the concept “local”, and connected to the theme “professional” by a just a small overlap. Furthermore, it can be seen a connection with the themes “development” and “professional”.

## 5.0 Discussion

Now that the findings are presented in both words, figures, tables, and concept maps, it is time to discuss what we see, and connect it to the literature reviewed and the research focus and topic of this thesis. The discussion part is divided into two parts, first the descriptive part will be discussed, and the Leximancer part will be discussed before moving on to the concluding remarks.

The purpose of the study was to map out “*Who has, and what has, been published in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship the last six years?*” with the help of three specific questions: “*What are the demographical and geographical trends of authorship in IJSMS?*”, “*What have been the general trends of research approach in IJSMS?*” & “*What are the key concepts and themes of the content published in IJSMS?*”.

### 5.1 Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis of this research gave a lot of answers to the research focus of who has been publishing in IJSMS the last 6 years. Specifically, the first two of the follow-up questions to the general research question “*Who has, and what has, been published in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship the last six years?*” can be answered during this part.

First of all, the descriptive analysis finds that the gender balance of who has published papers in the journal for the past six years is very imbalanced. As show in figure 3, male authorship dominates in every year researched, and in total 81% of the authors are male. This highlights an obvious field of which IJSMS can look into to increase female authorship in their journal, although the problem is not limited to their journal. The findings of Oddy & Bason’s (2017) study demonstrated similar gender balance, and it would be unfair to the journals if they were the only one to blame for this imbalance. Anyways, it’s a clear imbalance that should and could be investigated further.

Previous studies conducted by Jin (2017) on IJSMS found a that USA is by far the most frequently appearing country when it comes to the nationality of the institutions, with appearing 43.4% of the time. My study though, find that USA is still the most appeared country in the journal, but its prominence has decreased a little. Now, USA appears 36.4%

of the time. Other changes that can be seen in figure 5 is that UK have dropped from 2<sup>nd</sup> most prominent country to having seven countries appearing more often than UK. China, South Korea, Germany and Spain round out the top 5, and it's interesting that only USA and Korea remain in the top five, while China has made a big leap from appearing 0,7% of the time from 1999-2015, to now appearing 8,2% of the time since 2016.

Moving on to the balance in methodology used in the studies of IJSMS, it is a very clear overweight of quantitative studies, with 64% of all papers applying a quantitative method, as seen in figure 7. Qualitative methods were used 22% of the time, meaning mixed methods were used 14% of the time. These numbers are not too different from what can be found in other studies. From 1999-2015, Jin (2017) found that 69% of the studies were quantitative, while 31% were qualitative. Jin did not include mixed methods in his study. Except that mixed methodology was not a part of the future research, there is still similarities between the overweight of quantitative studies.

Another benchmark where there is a great imbalance, is between empirical and non-empirical studies. From 2016-2021, 93% of all papers included empirical work, while only 7% were non-empirical. This is obviously a great imbalance, but that is limited to only IJSMS. Back in 2002, Phelan, Ferreira and Salvador found an increasing gap between empirical and non-empirical works, while Anagnostopoulos & Bason (2015) found that from 2011 and onwards, there was a huge decrease in non-empirical works in their study. There might be different reasons to this, but there seems to be a trend where researchers conduct more empirical research than non-empirical.

Figure 9 covers the sports that are most often studied in IJSMS. Not surprisingly, football (soccer) is the most studied sport of IJSMS from 2016 to 2021. Football was also the most studied sport of IJSMS from 1999-2015, as found by Jin (2017), meaning that the trend of football being the most researched sport is still going. Football was also the most studied sport of the journal *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, as found by Oddy and Bason's in 2017. This shows, to no surprise, that football is the most popular sport amongst researchers among more than one journal.

Given the full name of the journal being «International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship», it was of interest to investigate how many of the papers that explicitly focused

on sponsorship. The study finds that only 18% of the papers have an explicit focus on sponsorship. This doesn't mean that sponsorship is not a part of the other 82% percent, as sponsorship and marketing often appeared together in the papers and often are researched together.

The last of the descriptive analysis looked at the theories that the papers in IJSMS draw on. Aside from the studies that either had a multitheoretical approach, or unspecified approach, social identity theory, social exchange theory and congruency theory was featured most often. They were featured a lot more than what is shown in figure 11, but not necessarily specified in the abstract of the paper. "Social identity theory" and "social exchange theory" were also drawn on in Walzel, Robertson and Anagnostopoulos review of CSR in professional team sports organizations from (2018). Jin (2017) did not include any data on this of his analysis of IJSMS from 1999-2015, so its hard to say whether or not these theories have been used a lot over the years in studies published in IJSMS.

## **5.2 Leximancer analysis**

The Leximancer part of the analysis is a crucial part of the analysis, as it really gives insight to the actual text of the published papers of IJSMS. It also adds value to some of the descriptive findings, and really helps us understand and give answer to "*What are the key concepts and themes of the content published in IJSMS?*" which was one of the follow-up questions to the research question.

Firstly, I want to point out the only sport that Leximancer identifies as a concept of the abstracts is "football" which is a concept in the theme named "fans". The fact that football is being identified as a concept, and no other sport being that, makes sense based on the findings as shown in figure 9. In that figure, footballs vast dominance in terms of sports researched is visualized. Football is by far the most specified sport, and therefore it is not surprising to see it being the only sport in the concept map.

The concept map does identify "marketing" as the most prominent theme of all, which links up with the descriptive statistic that suggested sponsorship exclusive papers are inferior to marketing papers. It also makes sense based on the name of the journal. The theme also includes the concept "sponsorship" kind of eliminating the thought of the papers focus too rarely on sponsorship. The fact that sponsorship is that rarely the exclusive research topic

might be because of the nature of sport sponsorship, and its natural synergy co-occurrence with other theoretical aspects that often are seen in advertising, marketing, and consumer research which might explain why there are not too many that have an explicit focus on sponsorship.

The theme marketing was connected with dots as strategies and implications, suggesting that research looked at marketing strategies and studied them, as well as the implications the marketing research brings in various ways, and the effect it has. “Effect” was identified as a separate theme but connected to “marketing”, eventifying that the effect of marketing has been a focus point in the studies published in IJSSMS from 2016-2021.

The four themes that were very closely connected to each other in the concept map was “consumers”, “fans”, “intention” and “experience”. These four themes, helped with the concepts they are made up by, give an insight and indication to the large focus that the journal has on the purchase intention of fans, the way their experience on events impact their intention to buy or repurchase the product, which can be many different things, but since the theme “fans” is linked, it might suggest that a significant part of the authors research have been on the fans and how different marketing strategies or consumer theories apply to them.

“Professional” has been identified as a theme by Leximancer, which might indicate that IJSSMS authors have focus on professional sports in their studies. This is interesting, as the same was found by Anagnostopoulos & Bason (2015) where “professional” was identified as by Leximancer, but nothing about amateur or semi-professional sports. This is the exact case in this Leximancer study as well, might pointing out a potential trend in research where the focus mainly on professional sports, overlooking the amateur and grassroot sports. This to me is worth to point out, as there are many events, human resources, marketing plans and sponsorship investments & involvements in non-professional sports as well.

Another interesting remark to the theme “professional” is that it is connected to the concept “clubs”, suggesting that there are professional clubs being researched the most, and that non-team sports might not be that much of a focus. However, that might not be accurate, as of course, non-team sports might have athletes in a club competing separately but under the name of a team.

Jin (2017) conducted content analysis of the IJSMS from 1999-2015 that this paper has used, referred to and compared with when possible. Jin did not use Leximancer in his analysis, however he conducted a different analysis where words were ranked based on the title, abstracts, and keywords of all papers from 1999-2015 in IJSMS. The most frequent word he found was “sports”, but that was excluded in my study, the first ranked word of his study was “sponsorship”. This was a bit surprising, as the most prominent word of this study was marketing. This shows a development of which marketing is more frequently in the text of the abstracts.

Moving on with the list, there are a lot of similar words that can be found in both Jin’s list and the concept map of this study. “Marketing”, “brand”, “fan”, “team” “effect”, and “consumer” are all keywords in the top ten from 1999-2015 that also appear on the concept map developed by Leximancer. Although there are similar words that appear in both studies, there are some words that are lacking in the most recent one. “Olympic”, “celebrity”, “ambush”, “corporate”, “advertising”, “attendance” are examples of keywords from previous years that are not identified as keywords or concepts by Leximancer.

“Professional is a word on the list of keywords from 1999-2015, indicating that the research then, similar to the research now, are more focused on professional sports rather than non-professional and amateur sports. These findings indicate that this is not just a trend that has been identified in recent years but has been the case since the inception of the journal. There are also many other similarities of words and concepts down the list, indicating that although there has been some change to the keywords, there is a consistent fundament in the journal that recurs and trends year in and year out.

## 6.0 Conclusion

This study tried to identify trends and habits of different kinds in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship. The research looked at both descriptive statistics about the authors demographics and the type of research conducted, as well as identifying semantic structures and trends via the text-mining tool Leximancer. With that, the following research question and follow-up questions were raised:

*Who has, and what has, been published in the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship the last six years?*

*RQ1: What are the demographical and geographical trends of authorship in IJSMS*

*RQ2: What have been the general trends of research approach in IJSMS?*

*RQ3: What are the key concepts and themes of the content published in IJSMS?*

### 6.1 Implications and Future research

To answer the first follow-up question, the descriptive statistics found a clear overweight in male authors, and also compared to other and previous studies, this seems to be the case in more than just the sample of this research. This might be an implication that measures could be made to generate more female authorship. Where the reason for the male dominance is, might also be an interesting issue to take a look at. It is also clear that institutions from USA contribute the most in this journal, and has done since its inception, but there is a drop in the percentage if you compare the previous six years with the analysis from 1999-2015.

The study observed that the vast majority of papers conducted quantitative studies on empirical data. That observation was in line with other studies as well, and might show an opportunity to do more qualitative studies in the field of sports marketing and sponsorship.

The findings that football is the most researched sport of all is not really news, but there has been a trend and still is. The same with professional sports being identified as a concept of Leximancer, but nothing about amateur sports. This is something I would like to point out. The findings might imply that there is an undiscovered world of research, and it might be interesting to see more research on amateur and grassroots sports.

The concepts and themes that were generated by Leximancer did correlate with the top 40 keywords for Jin's (2017) research of IJSMS from 1999-2015. Some words were changed



out with new ones, but the general focus area of the journal seems to have been rather consistent throughout the years. Marketing was the most prominent theme and concept in this sample, indication that there could be more focus on the sponsorship side of things.

## **6.2 Limitations**

As with any research, this one has some limitations. There will always be raised new potential parameters/variables that could have been studied in the descriptive analysis. For this study, the parameters/variables were decided on, and once the data gathering started, I never looked back. For the parameters/variables there was a subjective decision, or on the ones where a line had to be drawn, I tried to keep an as strict philosophy as possible, to eliminate the chance of human error. The limitation that this approach brings, is that for other research with similar studies conducted by different people, you can never really be sure if exactly the same guidelines and considerations have been done.

Another limitation is that this research is about the abstracts of the papers, and not the whole and full text. Although an abstract will inform and give enough data to generate an idea and understanding of the research, it still excludes the full paper. This is absolutely something the reader should keep in mind when digesting the findings of this study.

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