

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



# Digitalization and Sports Sponsorship Strategy: A Review and Research Agenda

<sup>1</sup>Marcela Garza Segovia\* , <sup>2</sup>Chris Kennett 

<sup>1</sup>International School of Commerce and Digital Economy, La Salle – Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, Spain. <sup>2</sup>International School of Commerce and Digital Economy, La Salle – Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, Spain.

Submitted September 30, 2021; Accepted in final form December 21, 2021.

## ABSTRACT

**Background.** The sports industry has been transformed through digitalization processes. One traditional area of sports marketing strategy that has changed significantly is sponsorship. **Objectives.** To reveal how digitalization has impacted sports sponsorship strategies according to the findings of academic articles in leading sports management journals. In light of the dramatic transformation of sports sponsorship in recent times, a new research agenda is proposed. **Methods.** One hundred eighty-nine articles from five high-impact sports journals were systematically selected and classified according to Jin's (2017) categorization. An in-depth analysis of 23 articles related to digital media was performed and compared to Santomier's (2008) literature review to understand the evolving academic discourse on the changing nature of sports sponsorship and propose a research agenda for the near future. **Results.** A research agenda is proposed to understand the new sponsorship dynamics in the digital landscape focused on the analysis made of the three studied categories: Sports and the internet, consumer behavior, and sports marketing strategy. **Conclusion.** The continuous evolution of digital technologies challenges academics and practitioners to keep pace with the impacts of digitalization in sports sponsorship, which requires a new research agenda to raise questions to be answered in future research.

**KEYWORDS:** *Marketing, Digital Technology, Communications Media, Social Media, Internet, Sport.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the digital transformation phenomenon, digitalization is driving organizations to innovate and adopt digital technologies (1, 2). Digitalization can be described as using digital technologies to improve existing business processes, communication, distribution channels, and business relationship management to enhance customer experiences (3). The sports industry is characterized by constant innovation and has been at the forefront in adopting digital technologies and new media in recent years (2, 4).

In the marketing area, digital technologies have been adopted within different marketing

domains such as marketing analytics, mobile marketing, social media marketing, relationship marketing, all of which have impacted sports marketing strategies, including sponsorship (5). Sports sponsorship is one of the fastest-growing marketing strategies (6) and a valuable marketing tool (7). Sponsorship can be defined as a situation in which external organizations 'the sponsor' pay a promoter 'the sponsee' a fee (financial or in-kind) for the right to associate itself and/or its products with an event in exchange for specific marketing benefits (8-11). Designing an optimal

---

\*. Corresponding Author:

Marcela Garza Segovia, Ph.D.

E-mail: [marcela.garza@salle.url.edu](mailto:marcela.garza@salle.url.edu)

sponsorship deal and measuring the effects of sponsorship must be considered for a successful marketing campaign (12).

Digital media has become an essential part of sponsorship deployment, and academics are studying how these technologies impact the sports industry (13). An overview of the most relevant research topics related to sponsorship strategies and digitalization is required to identify how the sports industry uses new digital technologies and contribute to understanding how digital technologies impact sports sponsorship strategies.

Theoretical studies have been undertaken to map sports industry publications in recent years, including bibliometric analyses (14-17), content analysis (18), literature reviews (19), and systematic literature reviews (20-22).

The most relevant state-of-the-art related to sports sponsorship and digitalization was undertaken by Santomier (2008), while more recent publications have focused on sports entrepreneurship (16), sports innovation (15), strategic sponsoring (19), and sports storytelling in social media (21). Kubacki et al. (2018) (20) conducted a review in sports sponsorship focusing on public health. An essential contribution is Jin's (2017) (18) review on marketing and sponsorship which presents in-depth results of the 'knowledge structure of sponsorship research' (p. 363). In this study, the authors will build on Jin's (2017) (18) proposed marketing and sponsorship research topics categories and contrast the information with Santomier's (2008) (22) publication in new media and sponsorship to develop a research agenda (23, 24) aiming to close the gap between academic research and industry practices.

This study aims to analyze the academic discourse on how digitalization has impacted sports marketing and sponsorship strategies and identify a research agenda. The two research questions posed in this review are:

1. According to recent academic research, how has sports sponsorship changed in recent years as part of digitalization processes?
2. What future research lines should academics develop to better understand the fast-changing nature of sponsorship strategies in a digital context?

The authors classify 189 selected articles using the 22 research topic categories proposed by Jin (2017) (18) related to sports marketing and sponsorship as part of the literature review

process. In the second part of this study, the authors analyze the 23 most relevant articles selected. The marketing and sponsorship research topics categories discussed are sports and the internet, consumer behavior, and sports marketing strategy. To propose a new research agenda, seven research lines are identified and compared with Santomier's (2008) (22) literature review.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Research Criteria.** The selection of articles to be reviewed involved six searches on the Scopus and WOS databases made in November 2020 using the following criteria related to the research objectives: Sponsor\* AND Sport\* (n=1.282); "Sport\* marketing" (n=437); Sport\* AND Digital Marketing (n=66); Sport\* AND Technology\* AND Sponsor\* (n=70); Sport\* AND Digital AND Sponsor\* (n=30); Sport\* AND Media AND Sponsor\* (n=283), obtaining a total of 2.168 results. The searches were made by article title, abstract, and keywords, with a year restriction from 2000 to 2020 to get the available documents.

As the focus of this review is on sports sponsorship, the following criteria applied to select the corpus to include in the study was by the journal. For the study, articles in the five highest-ranked management and marketing sports journals according to the Scimago Journal and Country Rank 2020 list were included: Sport Management Review, Journal of Sport Management, European Sport Management Quarterly, Sports Marketing Quarterly, and International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship. A total of 283 articles were identified after eliminating duplicates.

The next step was to identify the different keywords from each article. 41 articles out of the 283 were excluded as they have no keywords in the publication. The authors then chose the most recurrent keywords to select the articles included in the research topic categories' analysis: sport(s) marketing, sponsorship, and sport(s) sponsorship. A total of 139 articles were found. Following the study's objectives, two different lists of keywords were created. The first list included sponsor keywords, as several relevant keywords were identified related to sponsorship activities. The second was a list with all the keywords related to digital media as the study aims to reveal what academics say about how digital media technologies affect sports sponsorship strategies.

With this new keyword criteria, 50 more articles were added to the corpus, giving 189 articles to include in the research topic categories' analysis.

**Research topics categories in sports marketing and sponsorship strategies.** By conducting a content analysis of 282 articles published by the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship between 1999 and 2015, Jin (2017) (18) identified 22 research topics categories related to sports marketing and sponsorship: Sponsorship effects, brand performance, sports event sponsorship, consumer behavior, team/league/venue sponsorship, corporate sponsorship, relationship marketing,

promotion and advertising, corporate image, sports marketing strategy, business performance, fan loyalty, ambush marketing, regulation and laws, commercial sponsorship, celebrity endorsements, sports, and the Internet, service quality, sports broadcasting, alcohol sponsorship, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and art and music events.

The 189 selected articles in our study were classified into the 22 research categories following Jin's (2017) (18) criteria by analyzing the title, keywords, and abstract. The most relevant, frequently occurring categories were: Consumer behavior, sponsorship effects, and sports marketing strategy (Table 1).

**Table 1. Research topics categories found**

Research categories	Frequency	Research categories	Frequency
Consumer behavior	65	Corporate social responsibility (CSR)	11
Sponsorship effects	61	Regulation and laws	10
Sports marketing strategy	56	Team/league/venue sponsorship	10
Brand performance	35	Promotion and advertising	8
Sports and the internet	29	Commercial sponsorship	7
Corporate sponsorship	27	Fan loyalty	7
Sports event sponsorship	24	Alcohol sponsorship	6
Corporate image	21	Celebrity endorsements	6
Business performance	17	Sports broadcasting	6
Relationship marketing	13	Service quality	3
Ambush marketing	11	Art and music events	0

**Table 2. Bibliometric overview of the 23 selected articles**

Source and Authors	Media	Research method
<b>European Sport Management Quarterly (4)</b>		
Naidenova et al. (2016) (25)	Social media	Regression analyses
Kaushik et al. (2020) (26)	Social media	Regression analyses
Lin et al. (2020) (27)	Social media	Experiment
Weimar et al. (2020) (28)	Social media	Regression analyses
<b>International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship (14)</b>		
Santomier (2008) (22)	Multiple media channels	Systematic literature review
Jensen et al. (2015) (29)	Social media	Visual analytics
Kelly et al. (2015) (30)	Television broadcast and social media	Content and frequency analyses
Baena (2016) (31)	Website, social media, and mobile	Survey
Popp et al. (2016) (32)	Social media	Netnography study
Gee et al. (2017) (33)	Television broadcast	Content analyses
Ha et al. (2017) (34)	Smartphones	Survey
Kim et al. (2017) (35)	Website	Survey
Leng (2017) (36)	Short video clips	Control and experimental groups
Popp et al. (2017) (37)	Social media	Regression analyses
Hazari (2018) (38)	Social media	Survey
Jensen et al. (2015) (29)	Television broadcast and second screens	Experiment
LaGree et al. (2019) (39)	Multiple media channels	Experiment
Lu et al. (2020) (40)	Multiple media channels	Regression analyses
<b>Journal of Sport Management (2)</b>		
Breuer and Rumpf (2015) (41)	Television broadcast	Experiment
Delia and Armstrong (2015) (42)	Social media	Content and case study analyses
<b>Sport Management Review (3)</b>		
Stavros et al. (2014) (43)	Social media	Netnography study
Popp and Woratschek (2021) (44)	Social media	Survey
Wakefield and Bennett (2018) (45)	Social media	Survey

After the classification by research categories, the 189 were again analyzed by keywords to compare which categories were related to digital media due to their focus on digital technologies, digital media, or the Internet. The most frequently occurring categories that concur with digital technologies and media are sports and the Internet, consumer behavior, and sports marketing strategy. Twenty three articles out of the 189 were found related to digital technologies and media topics. The 23 articles were selected systematically by choosing only publications that have the word sponsor\* on their keywords, one of the top three keywords found: Sport(s) marketing, sponsorship, and sport(s) sponsorship; and that have at least one keyword related to digital media or digital technologies.

As a final step, the 23 selected articles were studied in depth by analyzing the authors' findings and their fit within the three Jin's (2017) (18) categories: sports and the Internet, consumer behavior, and sports marketing strategy related to digitalization. Table 2 summarizes the 23 articles selected to provide a general bibliometric overview. The literature review summary is shared in the 'Results - Review of sports sponsorship and digitalization research' section, which is divided into the three selected categories. Further, the authors' analysis and research agenda can be found in the 'Discussion and directions for future research section.

## RESULTS

**Review of sports sponsorship and digitalization research.** To answer the first question asked in this study and identify how has sports sponsorship changed in recent years as part of digitalization processes according to recent academic research, the authors provide an in-depth analysis of the 23 selected articles categorizing them into the three most frequently occurring research categories (18) in the sports marketing sponsorship strategies related to new media and technologies: sports and the Internet, consumer behavior, and sports marketing strategy.

**Sports and the Internet.** Multiple forms of media platforms for sports sponsorship communications have been used to engage with customers and fans (22). The review of recent studies shows that new media technologies are continuously evolving, creating different sponsorship opportunities and changing the

marketing mix strategies by allowing customers to access sports content in different platforms.

Recent publications reveal a strong focus on social media in managing sports sponsorship strategies. Several authors study online social media as interactive platforms to engage with sports fans in a digital environment (43, 45), as tools for analyzing fan behavior, sentiment, or interactions to measure sponsorship effectiveness (26, 28, 42, 45), to analyze social media consumption and its relation to consumers purchase intention (27, 32, 38), as tools for engaging brand virtual communities (31, 44), or as platforms for broadcasting sports content (36).

The use of smartphones to increase fan engagement (34) and as second screens while watching a sport televised broadcast have also emerged as research topics (46). The use of second screens such as mobile devices to review statistical information or share content is revealed as a growing trend among sports fans, which sponsors can leverage by increasing their presence in social media (38). Besides smartphones and social media, websites are still used as marketing tools for sports sponsors' communications as a complement to other sponsorship activities (35). Website interactivity and sponsor's fit with the sports organization are key to maximizing sponsorship effectiveness (35).

**Consumer behavior.** Consumer behavior is changing due to the constant development of new technologies and increased connectivity that allows the fans to experience sports events in different ways, such as using a smartphone while watching a sports game broadcast (46); creating and sharing their content on social media when experiencing a sports event (45); or participate in virtual communities (31, 32, 43, 44).

Authors continue to study consumer behavior topics such as the level of identification of brand awareness (46); brand recall and attitude towards the brand (35); brand love (31); brand loyalty (43); brand exposure (39); or purchase intention (38), but this research now focuses on digital environments.

Social media and digital platforms have created multiple opportunities for fan interaction. Social media has become the leading digital communication platform to engage with specific sports fan segments because of the opportunity to express their emotions to a broader community with related interests (43). Both message

articulation and interactivity in social media can generate eWOM (electronic Word of Mouth), create more fan-to-fan interactions (26), and increase brand exposure. Including marketing strategies in ephemeral social media reinforces fans eWOM (45).

Consumer interaction in social media can also be affected by the creation of virtual communities (31). Branded communities in social media effectively deploy sponsorship strategies as members of these communities can interact with each other, co-create with the brand, and generate value to increase engagement (44). Indeed, participating in virtual communities and activating mobile marketing strategies can increase the 'love' for sponsors' brands (31). Sports fans that belong to a community may influence other fans consumer behavior by reinforcing consumption and increasing brand loyalty (43).

**Sports marketing strategy.** Besides being deployed and measured in traditional ways, sports marketing and sponsorship strategies are being executed in new digital platforms. Diverse topics of different marketing strategies were identified. An example is ambush marketing strategies that previously occurred in on-site events have moved to digital environments such as social media platforms. It was found that ambush marketing influences consumer attitudes and purchase intentions on Instagram (27), the authors conclude that purchase intention is higher when participants are not exposed to ambush marketing.

Crisis management on different media channels has become increasingly relevant with the growth of online digital platforms. Fan involvement generates more favorable perceptions, and exposure to media coverage causes negative reputation perceptions, increasing fans' anger (39). From the media reputation perspective, findings reveal that a high level of sponsorship communication intensity, proximity, the CEO commitment, and cause/fit contribute to increasing enterprise sponsors' reputation (40).

Moreover, alcohol sponsorship exposure continues to be a concern on television and social media channels. Findings in the revised literature reveal a need for policy development to regulate alcohol sponsorship strategies on social media (30) and that there is a need to control alcohol sponsorship during televised broadcastings (33).

Digital media and new technologies also bring opportunities to measure ROI and other KPIs in new ways. Studies found, for example, that social media measures are still not statistically significant as predictors of ticket revenue (37). In a different study, Twitter was analyzed as a source of data to help identify if sponsorship deals in football are effective investments, concluding that football sponsorship is not a profitable commercial investment (25).

According to the reviewed literature, some other marketing strategies using digital media as a tool have been studied, such as social media visual analytics to improve sponsors' reach and engagement (29); color and animation in televised sponsorship signage increase brand awareness, but the animation on television can cause visual confusion (41); spectator involvement and the duration of the brand exposure affects sponsors brand recall on videos with short length (36); the use of second screens while watching a sports broadcast influence consumers' brand awareness, value and perceived intrusiveness (46); and website interactivity, fit, and credibility influence consumer attitude toward the sponsors' advertisements (35).

## DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the conversations academics have within three marketing and sponsorship research categories (18) related to digitalization. In each of the three research categories, the main discussion was identified revealing the need to update the understanding of the categories: Sports and the Internet - Technology adoption and management, consumer behavior - fan engagement, interaction, and virtual communities, and for sports marketing strategy - new digital platforms, traditional marketing strategies.

A summary table of the research lines identified within the three research categories analyzed is presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5. Moreover, a comparison has been made with Santomier's (2008) literature review, as the author's article is the starting point for the 23 selected articles in the present literature review (22). A research agenda is proposed for each research category analyzed to answer the second question posed in this study: what future research lines should be developed by academics to better understand the fast-changing nature of sponsorship strategies in a digital context?

**Sports and the Internet - Technology adoption and management.** The analyzed literature in this category can be summarized in three research lines regarding sports and the internet. Table 3 shows the main findings related to this research category and compares Santomier's (2008) literature review (22).

Social media platforms have grown exponentially as marketing channels and are characterized by instant global reach, simplicity, and accessibility (47). In the sports context, social media is highly valued by sponsors (48) to

activate partnerships through digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube mainly.

The literature shows that social media sponsorship strategies need to adapt to the fast-paced evolution of online platforms. Different possibilities to share content or restrict it, such as ephemeral social media (45), continue to emerge (49). There is a wide literature on the use of social media and its impact on sponsorship, but new dynamics such as ephemeral content require ongoing research.

**Table 3. Sports and the internet proposed research lines summary table (18)**

Literature reviewed up to and including 2020		Santomier (2008) literature review
<b>RL1: Strong social media focus in the management of sports sponsorship strategies.</b>	Kaushik et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2020; Weimar et al., 2020; Hazari, 2018; Wakefield and Bennett, 2018; Leng, 2017; Popp et al., 2017; Baena, 2016; Popp and Woratschek, 2016; Delia and Armstrong, 2015; Stavros et al., 2014.	Rise of social media as tools for developing sports sponsorship strategies.
<b>RL2: Use smartphones as a second screen while watching sports broadcasts, review statistical information, and share content on social media.</b>	Jensen et al., 2018; Hazari, 2018; Ha et al., 2017.	Use mobile devices while watching sports broadcasts to send text messages, email, or talk.
<b>RL3: Growth of digital data collection and analytics strategies.</b>	Weimar et al., 2020; Popp et al., 2016; Naidenova et al., 2016; Delia and Armstrong, 2015; Kelly et al., 2015; Jensen et al., 2015; Stavros et al., 2014.	Digital platforms as tools to track consumer behavior.

**Table 4. Consumer behavior proposed research lines summary table (18)**

Literature reviewed up to and including 2020		Santomier (2008) literature review
<b>RL4: Increased value of fan-to-fan and fan-sponsor interactions as co-creators in the digital context.</b>	Kaushik et al., 2020; Weimar et al., 2020; Wakefield and Bennett, 2018; Popp et al., 2016; Stavros et al., 2014.	Consumer role as co-creator to add value to the brands.
<b>RL5: Social media and virtual communities as platforms for fan engagement and as influence on consumer behavior in a global scale.</b>	Baena, 2016; Popp and Woratschek, 2016; Popp et al., 2016; Stavros et al., 2014.	New media technologies used as communication channels with a worldwide reach.

**Table 5. Sports marketing strategy proposed research lines summary table (18)**

Literature reviewed up to and including 2020	
<b>RL6: New tools to measure sponsorship effectiveness, ROI, and KPI's.</b>	Jensen et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Leng, 2017; Popp et al., 2017; Baena, 2016; Naidenova et al., 2016; Breuer and Rumpf, 2015; Delia and Armstrong, 2015; Jensen et al., 2015.
<b>RL7: Media strategies development in reputation management, alcohol sponsorship, and ambush marketing in the digital context.</b>	Lin et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2020; LaGree et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2015.

Sports content is broadcast across an increasingly diverse mix of channels. Television broadcasting is still the dominant channel for watching live sports (50). Still, streaming is becoming increasingly popular, and sports marketers face the challenge of creating innovative advertising opportunities in both linear

(such as television) and non-linear or OTT (Over the Top internet streaming platforms) environments (51). Sports OTT streaming platforms such as DAZN are evolving rapidly. Other digital multimedia platforms such as Amazon Prime and social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook,

Instagram, and more recently Twitch (4, 50) have entered the sports market due to its capacity to offer highly targeted opportunities to engage with audiences and generate new ways to broadcast sports.

Managing the use of second screens while broadcasting sports events is also a challenge that sports marketers are facing as there are different findings such as, on the one hand, it may affect sponsorship investments (46) negatively or, on the other hand, may increase sponsors visualization (38). Future studies could explore the effects of sponsorship activations while using mobiles or other devices as second screens.

Different methodologies and data collection strategies are also being adopted to measure the impacts of sponsorship activities, and social media is dominating sports sponsorship and digital media research related to the sports industry. With the continuous evolution of digital technologies, different data collection methodologies will give sports marketers and researchers new opportunities for analyzing and understanding data. Exploring new data collection methods could be beneficial for both industry and academia.

Beyond the systematic literature review findings, different examples of how the internet and technology have been adopted to achieve a business advantage in the sports industry include investment in smart venues (52); live broadcasting of sports events with OTT streaming platforms (50); eSports (4, 50, 53); augmented, virtual and mixed reality (54-57); online betting (2, 50); use of mobile devices and smartphones (34, 55); blockchain (55); cloud computing and data analytics (58).

To follow the evolution of the adoption and management of digital media, some questions should be answered:

RL1a: How are new sponsorship dynamics generated with the proliferation of social media platforms and services?

RL1b: How can sports marketers leverage new marketing dynamics to deploy sponsorship strategies?

RL2a: How is the use of second screens affecting sponsorship effectiveness?

RL2b: How can sports marketers add value by using second screens during a sports broadcast?

RL3a: Which new or adapted digital data collection methods are employed in the sports industry and academics?

RL3b: How can academics and practitioners use new digital data analysis methods to understand consumer behavior?

RL3c: How do digital analytics impact the management of sports sponsorship strategies?

**Consumer behavior - Fan engagement, interaction, and virtual communities.** Digital technologies are changing the market's behavior (59), and the sports industry faces the fragmentation of consumer attention (55). Content is being consumed differently, and the sports industry is adapting to new media channels to keep up with consumer tendencies (60). Sports consumption has been disrupted, and changes as new channels and digital platforms emerge.

Table 4 synthesizes the authors' findings regarding consumer behavior proposing the following research lines.

Fan engagement has become more critical than ever due to the increase in competition for fans' time and their freedom to interact with sports organizations in the online environment. Digital media has brought opportunities for fan engagement, and social media platforms seem to be the preferred tool to engage fans and develop sponsorship marketing strategies. Co-creation and eWOM have become crucial to generating fan-to-fan interactions. Virtual communities may create an ideal environment to push fans and sports consumers to interact by supporting their teams. With this, sponsors could gain visibility if a planned marketing strategy is correctly used. More research in consumer co-creation is needed to identify the best practices to engage the fans to participate in sponsorship strategies.

Digital media can add value when sponsoring sports events by increasing online exposure on a global scale and reaching specific market segments (61). In the sports marketing context, sponsorship has been an effective marketing strategy because of the opportunity to reach targeted markets and interact with the customers or fans in a healthy environment during a sports event by conducting activation strategies and giving the sponsor opportunities to get the fans. Future research on consumers and fan behavior in virtual communities will enlighten sports marketers and researchers as their conduct is continually evolving with digitalization.

Regarding these proposed research lines, fundamental questions have arisen:

RL4a: How can fan interaction and their active participation as co-creators impact digital sponsorship strategies and brand value?

RL4b: How can fan interaction as co-creators be measured?

RL4c: Which digital sponsorship strategies increase fan interaction?

RL5a: How is fan behavior changing due to participation in virtual communities?

RL5b: To what extent do virtual communities increase fan engagement in digital platforms?

RL5c: How can sports marketers leverage virtual communities to engage fans?

**Sports marketing strategy – New digital platforms, traditional marketing strategies.** The rise of digital platforms has contributed to marketers and sports organizations adopting new sponsorship activation and fan engagement strategies. There is continuity in measuring sponsorship deals effectiveness, brand recall, media crisis management, alcohol sponsorship, ambush marketing strategies, and return on investment (ROI).

Table 5 synthesizes the authors' findings regarding this research category. A comparison with Santomier's (2008) review cannot be made in the proposed research lines as these particular topics were not covered in his study (22).

The analysis of the selected academic articles reveals how traditional marketing strategies are still deployed but in a different landscape due to digitalization. Digital media continue to evolve, and the sports industry responds to broader consumer trends. According to the literature reviewed, there is a strong social media approach in marketing and sponsorship strategies.

Data collection, measuring sponsorship strategies effectiveness, crisis management, alcohol sponsorship, ambush marketing, and measuring ROI or sales KPIs' are marketing strategies were used by sports marketers in the pre-Internet era. Accelerated digitalization has enabled the leveraging of these strategies by facilitating access to data and reaching consumers in a direct and targeted way.

To continue developing future studies that could examine how traditional sponsorship strategies are evolving and changing in the digital landscape, the following questions are posed:

RL6a: Which are the most appropriate tools to measure sponsorship effectiveness in the digital context?

RL7a: To what extent have traditional marketing activities such as reputation

management, alcohol sponsorship management, and ambush marketing strategies changed because of new digital media and what implications does this have for sponsorship management processes?

RL7b: How can sports marketers add value through new digital platforms to better deploy traditional marketing and sponsorship strategies?

## CONCLUSIONS

Evolving digital technologies create opportunities for sports marketers, brands, and other stakeholders to reach sports consumers and fans more directly and in targeted ways. Increasing volumes of data are being generated from diverse digital platforms and analyzed to better understand changing fan behavior, feelings and habits in a non-intrusive way. In theory this allows sports industry actors to create more effective and efficient sponsorship strategies that increase fan bases and consolidate virtual communities, which in turn may lead to future sales for the sports organizations and their associated brands.

When considering the fast-changing digital landscape, a gap exists between the fast-moving developments in digitalization processes in the sports industry and the conversations between scholars in academic publications. There is a clear need for sports researchers and academics to continue studying the effects and uses of digital technologies in different phenomena affecting the sports industry, such as e-sports, the entry of new players such as online streaming platforms, or immersive environments.

Academics in the 23 selected articles analyzed in this study have contributed to the literature in different marketing theories and topics such as brand awareness, brand management, purchase intention, sponsorship recall, or sponsorship effectiveness. Fan engagement, interaction, and consumer behavior are all relevant topics for deploying sport sponsorship strategies that require further research in a constantly changing digital landscape.

## LIMITATIONS

This study has some limitations. Firstly, it is limited to publications from five top sports management and marketing journals considering publications from the year 2000 until late 2020. For the analysis, 23 articles were considered, which may give a general overview of the conversation academics are having regarding the impact of digitalization in sponsorship strategies.



Still, a more significant sample from recent publications may be required.

Secondly, the 23 selected articles were analyzed only by three categories from the marketing and sponsorship research topics list proposed by Jin (2017), limiting the information shared from each article (18).

Another limitation is that other journals besides specialized sports journals were not considered for the study. For example, adding high-impact marketing and advertisement, management, communication, innovation, and/or technology journals may complement the results from a different perspective, enriching sports academics' conversation.

### APPLICABLE REMARKS

- The proposed research agenda aims to shed light on the next steps for future research regarding sponsorship strategies in the digital environment.

### REFERENCES

1. Nylén D, Holmström J. Digital innovation strategy: A framework for diagnosing and improving digital product and service innovation. *Business Horizons*. 2015;**58**(1):57-67. doi: [10.1016/j.bushor.2014.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.09.001)
2. Ratten V. Sport innovation management: towards a research agenda. *Innovation*. 2016;**18**(3):238-250. doi: [10.1080/14479338.2016.1244471](https://doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2016.1244471)
3. Verhoef PC, Broekhuizen T, Bart Y, Bhattacharya A, Qi Dong J, Fabian N, et al. Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*. 2019;**122**:889-901. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.022](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.022)
4. Nielsen Sports. Top 5 Global Sports Industry Trends 2018 2020 [updated 2021; cited 2021 19 January]. Available from: <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/top-5-commercial-trends-in-sports-2018.pdf>.
5. Graesch JP, Hensel-Börner S, Henseler J. Information technology and marketing: an important partnership for decades. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*. 2021;**121**(1):123-157. doi: [10.1108/imds-08-2020-0510](https://doi.org/10.1108/imds-08-2020-0510)
6. Abeza G, Pegoraro A, Naraine ML, Séguin B, O N, Reilly NA. Activating a global sport sponsorship with social media: an analysis of TOP sponsors, Twitter, and the 2014 Olympic Games. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*. 2014;**15**(3/4):184. doi: [10.1504/ijsmm.2014.072010](https://doi.org/10.1504/ijsmm.2014.072010)
7. Biscaia R, Correia A, Rosado AF, Ross SD, Maroco J. Sport Sponsorship: The Relationship Between Team Loyalty, Sponsorship Awareness, Attitude Toward the Sponsor, and Purchase Intentions. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2013;**27**(4):288-302. doi: [10.1123/jsm.27.4.288](https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.27.4.288)
8. Beech J, Chadwick S. *The Business of Sport Management*: Pearson Education Limited; 2004.
9. Goldblatt J. *Special Events: Creating and Sustaining a New World for Celebration*. 7th ed: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; 2014.
10. Masterman G, Wood E. *Innovative Marketing Communications: Strategies for the events industry*: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann; 2007.
11. Mazodier M, Corsi AM, Quester PG. Advertisement Typicality: A Longitudinal Experiment. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 2018;**58**(3):268-281. doi: [10.2501/jar-2017-031](https://doi.org/10.2501/jar-2017-031)
12. Kotler P, Keller KL. *Marketing Management*. 14th ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.; 2012.

- Both academics and practitioners can use it to continue understanding how digitalization affects marketing strategies, the new technologies that are being adopted in sports, and how the consumers and sports fans are changing their behavior as digital technologies evolve.

### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

*Study concept and design*: Marcela Garza Segovia, Chris Kennett. *Acquisition of data*: Marcela Garza Segovia. *Analysis and interpretation of data*: Marcela Garza Segovia, Chris Kennett. *Drafting the manuscript*: Marcela Garza Segovia. *Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content*: Chris Kennett. *Statistical analysis*: N/A. *Administrative, technical, and material support*: N/A. *Study supervision*: Chris Kennett.

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

13. Keshkar S, Lawrence I, Dodds M, Morris E, Mahoney T, Heisey K, et al. The Role of Culture in Sports Sponsorship: an Update. *Annals of Applied Sport Science*. 2019;7(1):57-81. doi: [10.29252/aassjournal.7.1.57](https://doi.org/10.29252/aassjournal.7.1.57)
14. Ciomaga B. Sport management: a bibliometric study on central themes and trends. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2013;13(5):557-578. doi: [10.1080/16184742.2013.838283](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.838283)
15. Ferreira J, Fernandes C, Ratten V, Miragaia D. *Sports Innovation: A Bibliometric Study*. Sport Entrepreneurship and Public Policy: Springer; 2020.
16. Huertas González-Serrano M, Jones P, Llanos-Contrera O. An overview of sport entrepreneurship field: a bibliometric analysis of the articles published in the Web of Science. *Sport in Society*. 2019;23(2):296-314. doi: [10.1080/17430437.2019.1607307](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1607307)
17. Shilbury D. A bibliometric analysis of four sport management journals. *Sport Management Review*. 2021;14(4):434-452. doi: [10.1016/j.smr.2010.11.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2010.11.005)
18. Jin C-H. Retrospection and state of sports marketing and sponsorship research in IJSM from 1999 to 2015. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2017;18(4):363-379. doi: [10.1108/ijsms-04-2016-0002](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-04-2016-0002)
19. Demir R, Söderman S. Strategic sponsoring in professional sport: a review and conceptualization. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2015;15(3):271-300. doi: [10.1080/16184742.2015.1042000](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2015.1042000)
20. Kubacki K, Hurley E, Rundle-Thiele SR. A systematic review of sports sponsorship for public health and social marketing. *Journal of Social Marketing*. 2017;8(1):24-39. doi: [10.1108/jsocm-01-2017-0001](https://doi.org/10.1108/jsocm-01-2017-0001)
21. Laurell C, Soderman S. Sport in business studies: a state-of-the-art literature review. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*. 2018;8(5):529-546. doi: [10.1108/sbm-09-2017-0042](https://doi.org/10.1108/sbm-09-2017-0042)
22. Santomier J. New media, branding and global sports sponsorship. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2008;10(1):9-22. doi: [10.1108/ijsms-10-01-2008-b005](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-10-01-2008-b005)
23. Hao AW, Paul J, Trott S, Guo C, Wu H-H. Two decades of research on nation branding: a review and future research agenda. *International Marketing Review*. 2019;38(1):46-69. doi: [10.1108/imr-01-2019-0028](https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-01-2019-0028)
24. Hofacker CF, Belanche D. Eight social media challenges for marketing managers. *Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC*. 2016;20(2):73-80. doi: [10.1016/j.sjme.2016.07.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sjme.2016.07.003)
25. Naidenova I, Parshakov P, Chmykhov A. Does football sponsorship improve company performance? *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2016;16(2):129-147. doi: [10.1080/16184742.2015.1124900](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2015.1124900)
26. Kaushik K, Mishra A, Dey S. 'The tweeting sponsor': effect of a sponsor's SNS message articulation/interactivity on consumers' online response. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2020;1-24. doi: [10.1080/16184742.2020.1776748](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1776748)
27. Lin Y-H, Chen C-Y, Chou Y-L, Yeh C-J. Effect of ambush marketing on attitude and purchase intention in the social media context: misidentification and identification. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2020;1-20. doi: [10.1080/16184742.2020.1843514](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1843514)
28. Weimar D, Holthoff LC, Biscaia R. When sponsorship causes anger: understanding negative fan reactions to postings on sports clubs' online social media channels. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2020;1-23. doi: [10.1080/16184742.2020.1786593](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1786593)
29. Jensen RW, Limbu YB, Spong Y. Visual Analytics of Twitter Conversations about Corporate Sponsors of FC Barcelona and Juventus at the 2015 UEFA Final. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2015;16(4):3-9. doi: [10.1108/ijsms-16-04-2015-b002](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-16-04-2015-b002)
30. Kelly S, Ireland M, Alpert F, Mangan J. Young consumers' exposure to alcohol sponsorship in sport. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2015;16(2):2-21. doi: [10.1108/ijsms-16-02-2015-b002](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-16-02-2015-b002)
31. Baena V. Online and mobile marketing strategies as drivers of brand love in sports teams. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2016;17(3):202-218. doi: [10.1108/ijsms-08-2016-015](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-08-2016-015)
32. Popp B, Germelmann CC, Jung B. We love to hate them! Social media-based anti-brand communities in professional football. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2016;17(4):349-367. doi: [10.1108/ijsms-11-2016-018](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-11-2016-018)
33. Gee S, Sam MP, Jackson SJ. Content analyses of alcohol-related images during television broadcasts of major sports events in New Zealand. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2017;18(3):230-245. doi: [10.1108/ijsms-08-2017-094](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijsms-08-2017-094)

34. Ha J-P, Kang SJ, Kim Y. Sport fans in a “smart sport” (SS) age: drivers of smartphone use for sport consumption. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2017;**18**(3):281-297. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-08-2017-093](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-08-2017-093)
35. Kim D, Walker M, Heo J, Koo G-Y. Sport league website: an effective marketing communication tool for corporate sponsors. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2017;**18**(3):314-327. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-08-2017-097](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-08-2017-097)
36. Leng HK. Sponsor recall in sports events of short duration: empirical evidence from swimming competitions. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2017;**18**(2):138-148. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-05-2017-091](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-05-2017-091)
37. Popp N, McEvoy C, Watanabe N. Do college athletics marketers convert social media growth into ticket sales? *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2017;**18**(2):212-227. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-05-2017-090](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-05-2017-090)
38. Hazari S. Investigating social media consumption, sports enthusiasm, and gender on sponsorship outcomes in the context of Rio Olympics. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2018;**19**(4):396-414. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-01-2017-0007](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-01-2017-0007)
39. LaGree D, Wilbur D, Cameron GT. A strategic approach to sports crisis management. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2019;**20**(3):407-429. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-05-2018-0045](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-05-2018-0045)
40. Lu S, Zhu W, Wei J. The relationships of communication intensity, CEO commitment, cause fit and media reputation: evidence from Chinese marathon title sponsors. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2020;**22**(2):220-239. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-11-2019-0130](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-11-2019-0130)
41. Breuer C, Rumpf C. The Impact of Color and Animation on Sports Viewers’ Attention to Televised Sponsorship Signage. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2015;**29**(2):170-183. doi: [10.1123/jsm.2013-0280](https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2013-0280)
42. Delia EB, Armstrong CG. #Sponsoring the #FrenchOpen: An Examination of Social Media Buzz and Sentiment. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2015;**29**(2):184-199. doi: [10.1123/jsm.2013-0257](https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2013-0257)
43. Stavros C, Meng MD, Westberg K, Farrelly F. Understanding fan motivation for interacting on social media. *Sport Management Review*. 2021;**17**(4):455-469. doi: [10.1016/j.smr.2013.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2013.11.004)
44. Popp B, Woratschek H. Introducing branded communities in sport for building strong brand relations in social media. *Sport Management Review*. 2021;**19**(2):183-197. doi: [10.1016/j.smr.2015.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2015.06.001)
45. Wakefield LT, Bennett G. Sports fan experience: Electronic word-of-mouth in ephemeral social media. *Sport Management Review*. 2021;**21**(2):147-159. doi: [10.1016/j.smr.2017.06.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2017.06.003)
46. A. Jensen J, Walsh P, Cobbs J. The moderating effect of identification on return on investment from sponsor brand integration. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2018;**19**(1):41-57. doi: [10.1108/ijmsms-10-2016-0077](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmsms-10-2016-0077)
47. Brison NT, Byon KK, Baker TA. To tweet or not to tweet: the effects of social media endorsements on unfamiliar sport brands and athlete endorsers. *Innovation*. 2016;**18**(3):309-326. doi: [10.1080/14479338.2016.1237304](https://doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2016.1237304)
48. Santomier JP, Hogan PI, Kunz R. The 2012 London Olympics: innovations in ICT and social media marketing. *Innovation*. 2016;**18**(3):251-269. doi: [10.1080/14479338.2016.1237305](https://doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2016.1237305)
49. Belanche D, Cenjor I, Pérez-Rueda A. Instagram Stories versus Facebook Wall: an advertising effectiveness analysis. *Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC*. 2019;**23**(1):69-94. doi: [10.1108/sjme-09-2018-0042](https://doi.org/10.1108/sjme-09-2018-0042)
50. Nielsen Sports. Year in Sports Media Report U.S. 2017 2018 [updated 2021; cited 2021]. Available from: <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/year-in-sports-media-2017.pdf>.
51. López-González H, Stavros C, Smith ACT. Broadcasting sport: Analogue markets and digital rights. *International Communication Gazette*. 2017;**79**(2):175-189. doi: [10.1177/1748048517694969](https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048517694969)
52. Deloitte. Upping your game: How data can help drive sports sponsorship and fan engagement 2017 [updated 2021; cited 2021 21 January]. Available from: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/consumer-business/us-cb-sports-data-sponsorship-fan-engagement.pdf>.
53. Gawrysiak J, Burton R, Jenny S, Williams D. Using Esports Efficiently to Enhance and Extend Brand Perceptions – A Literature Review. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research*. 2020;**86**(1):1-14. doi: [10.2478/pcssr-2020-0008](https://doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2020-0008)

54. Deloitte. The future of sports broadcasting: Enhancing digital fan engagement 2019 [updated 2022; cited 2021 21 January]. Available from: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/us-enhancing-digital-fan-engagement.pdf>.
55. GSIC: Global Sports Innovation Center Next-Generation Fan Engagement: The coming together of content, commerce, code & the consumer 2021 [updated 2022; cited 2021 22 January]. Available from: [https://sport-gsic.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Whitepaper-4\\_-Fan-Engagement.pdf](https://sport-gsic.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Whitepaper-4_-Fan-Engagement.pdf).
56. Hebbel-Seeger A. The relationship between real sports and digital adaptation in e-sport gaming. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*. 2012;13(2):43-54. doi: 10.1108/ijmsms-13-02-2012-b005
57. Rynarzewska AI. Virtual reality: a new channel in sport consumption. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*. 2018;12(4):472-488. doi: 10.1108/jrim-02-2018-0028
58. Lee P, Calugar-Pop C. predictions for UK Technology, Media and Telecommunications 2021 [updated 2022; cited 2021 21 January]. Available from: <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/tmt-predictions.html>.
59. Kannan PK, Li HA. Digital marketing: A framework, review and research agenda. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. 2017;34(1):22-45. doi: 10.1016/j.ijresmar.2016.11.006
60. Nielsen Sports. Unified Measurement - Defining a new sponsorship currency 2017 [updated 2022; cited 2021 19 January]. Available from: <https://www.nielsen.com/eu/en/insights/report/2017/unified-measurement-defining-a-new-sponsorship-currency/#>.
61. Koronios K, Dimitropoulos P, Travlos A, Douvis I, Ratten V. Online technologies and sports: A new era for sponsorship. *The Journal of High Technology Management Research*. 2020;31(1):100373. doi: 10.1016/j.hitech.2020.100373