

Sport Communication

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Introduction

The sport management research community has published over 34 sport communication (and related) articles in the field's various journals since the first issue of SMD. During this period, sport communication research has been published in journals such as the *European Sport Management Quarterly* (1), *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* (1), and in two of the field's communication-focused journals, *Communication & Sport* (22 articles) and *International Journal of Sport Communication* (10 articles). The research covers a total of nine different, but inter-related topic areas, such as women sport and sport media, mental health and sport media, mega-events and media coverage, race and sport media, forms of communications in sport, COVID-19 and sport through media, sport and politics, the profession of sport journalism, and sporting success and coping with tragedy. The specific topic areas under each theme are listed below:

- *Women sport and sport media*: self-representation of women's sport fandom on Instagram, espnW (website) and presentation of female athletes, bias in sport journalism in women's tennis, media framing of women ice hockey Olympic team, the meanings attached to women's use of performance and image enhancing drugs, Olympic broadcasters framing of gender on Instagram, and male and female athletes' representation on men's magazine covers.
- *Mental health and sport media*: Kevin Love in NBA, and DeMar DeRozan and Royce White in NBA.

- *Mega-events and media coverage* (the Olympics and FIFA World Cup): TV and the 2018 Winter Games, 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, and usage of social TV (a second screen) during the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.
- *Race and sport media*: racial inequality in college sport leadership, sport media and racial bias towards athlete transgressors, cyber racism toward Black athletes, sports talk radio hosts discussion of racism, Colin Kaepernick and the measures taken by the National Football League, and national anthem protests and indigenous rugby league players in Australia.
- *Forms of communications in sport*: in-game communication (players and referee judgments), small group communication (deaf college basketball players), and nonverbal communication (coach's nonverbal communication and coach-athlete relationship).
- *COVID-19 and sport through media*: fan interest towards smaller leagues around COVID-19 lockdown through social media, and sportswriters' content production during COVID-19.
- *Sport and politics*: sport in the age of Trump, and the politicization of the 2018 FIFA World Cup.
- *Profession of sport journalism*: local TV sports departments in digital landscape.
- *Sporting success and coping with tragedy*: Houston Astros' first World Series win and Hurricane Harvey.

In the first issue, the sport communication section of SMD focused on media representation of disability, mental illness, and women in sport; and media coverage and consumption of sport (TV and social media). Since that time, studies on these topic

areas continued to be published (the first three themes listed above), and extended the findings of the previous studies covered in Issue I.

Advances in spot management communications

For this current issue, new and different topic areas have been selected. These topic areas are (also listed above): *race and sport media* (6 articles), and *forms of communications in sport* (3 articles). The nine articles on these three research topics have been published in *Communication and Sport* (6 articles) and *International Journal of Sport Communication* (4 articles), representing the work of 21 authors from 17 different universities, and are summarized in this issue. The nine studies under consideration did research in different contexts of sport such as professional sport (e.g., NFL, Rugby), college sport (Division II, Division III, Power 5), and high school sport. The studies used various methodological approaches, including: a quantitative study using a survey method, experimental method, quasi-experimental method, and secondary statistical data; and a qualitative study employing a semi-structured interview, and content analysis of online data (e.g., message board, news reports). The authors used different theories and conceptual frameworks such as – for race and sport studies - Bonilla-Silva's concept of color-blind racism, critical race theory, and institutional theory; and, for forms of communication studies - social judgment theory and cultural identity theory.

Six of the nine articles considered in this section focused on race and sport. These studies were done by 17 authors from three different countries: UK, Australia and predominantly from USA. The authors uncovered six new insights: (a) while radio hosts lecture their audiences about racism, they fail to challenge institutional racism, (b) while

some fans express support for athletes' activism, the majority of the athletes' fans comments on message boards have been racially charged, (c) counterintuitively, minority athletes accused of criminal allegations are perceived more positively than their White counterparts, (d) professional players' symbolic action has a profound power to regenerate issues of social justice such as regarding a national anthem that ignored the historical and contemporary significance of its people, (e) the importance of developing consistent and comprehensive communication strategies by sport organizations to maximize a positive synergy between an organization's different approaches to crisis communication, which otherwise would be counterproductive as the approaches may create skepticism about the organization's genuine commitment, and (f) including DEI statements do not necessarily reflect that a given institution is determined to improve the representation of non-White individuals within its organization. It is worth noticing that these studies may have a different geographic focus but investigated similar research topics. For instance, in the study conducted in Australia, which centered on the First Nations rugby players remaining determinedly silent when the anthem was sung, is similar to a study that focused on an American footballer Colin Kaepernick who protested regarding violence against African Americans by kneeling during the American anthem.

The three studies that reported on different forms of communication uncovered insightful findings. The central focus of the three studies were: nonverbal communication (coach's nonverbal communication and coach-athlete relationship), in-game communication (players, race, and referee judgments), and small group communication (deaf college basketball players). These studies were done by four researchers from two different countries (USA and Japan). The authors reported three

new insights: (1) data from seven seasons revealed that Division II referees called more penalties against historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in comparison with their counterparts, predominantly white institutions (PWI), (2) deaf basketball players are perceived to share messages of acceptance with one another, and resolve conflict in a positive manner, and, (3) female athletes may be more influenced by nonverbal communication in terms of perceived communication ability and coaching evaluation than male athletes. Negative nonverbal communication is directly associated with high school athletes, which may be due to the insufficient development of achievement motivation.

Annotated bibliography

Spearman, L. (2021). Low Hanging Fruit: How Sports Talk Radio Hosts Discuss Racism. *Communication & Sport*, 9(6), 934-953.

With the exponential growth of talk radio in the United States, the above researcher from St. John's University (USA) indicated that sports talk radio hosts discuss obvious acts of racism by team owners, media members, and radio callers (the low hanging fruit). However, while the airwaves can either reproduce or contest existing ideologies, the author contends that the hosts rarely interrogate institutional racism. With that argument, the researcher examined how sports talk radio hosts discuss racism on their airwaves. To accomplish the research objective, guided by Bonilla-Silva's concept of color-blind racism, the author employed an interpretive qualitative research approach using a semi-structured interview with 15 sports talk radio hosts over the phone. The author indicated that the interview guide was constructed based the literature on colorblind racism and media studies. The author reported three emergent themes from their data. These are: we can smell it (i.e., easily identifiable racist

discourse within a caller's argument), race is not always about race (i.e., a topic becoming a talking point because of their incidental relation with Black athletes), and Black/White binary (i.e., discussion of racism being presented as White oppression and Black resistance). Having uncovered the themes, the author argued that the hosts lecture their audiences about racism, but fail to challenge institutional racism.

Oshiro, K. F., Weems, A. J., & Singer, J. N. (2021). Cyber Racism Toward Black Athletes: A Critical Race Analysis of TexAgs.com Online Brand Community. *Communication & Sport*, 9(6), 911-933.

Having pointed out that Black athletes have long used sport as a platform to voice social injustices, these researchers from Texas A&M University and Western Carolina University investigated cyber racism against Black male athletes. The researchers drew from critical race theory and examined Internet message board posts of users in the online brand community (TexAgs.com). According to the authors, TexAgs is an independently owned media platform that focused on the fandom of Texas A&M University athletics and has over 10,000 subscribers. Users commented on the message board about the activism of Black professional American football players who played in the National Football League and have been former athletes at the university associated with the TexAgs platform. Employing a content analysis approach, the authors examined comments about athlete activists. They reported that while a few users expressed support for the athletes, the majority of the comments were racially charged comments about the athletes' activism. The three emergent themes are: good/true Aggie vs. bad Aggie dichotomy (i.e., those who refrained from challenging the status quo were viewed in a more favorable light as good/true Aggie – a Texas A&M team); dumb/misguided sheep (i.e., considered as those who lack the understanding or

the explanation for their involvement), and thug (i.e., associating them with the racialized term, “thug”).

Brown, K. A., Dickhaus, J., Harrison, R., & Rush, S. (2021). Explaining the “racial contradiction”: An experimental examination of the impact of sports media use and response strategy on racial bias towards athlete transgressors. *Communication & Sport*, 9(5), 833-855.

Four researchers (from The University of Alabama, Bradley University, and Jefferson State Community College) investigated if the level of exposure to sport news differently influences the perception of athletes who commit a crime based on the race of the athlete. The authors employed an experimental research design of 464 participants to study the perception of athletes accused of criminal allegations. Specifically, the authors focused on the research participants’ consumption level of sport news, the athlete’s race, and the response strategy of the athletes to criminal allegations; and how these impact the perception of athletes. The study showed that the level of sport news consumption (low or high) impacts the perception of Black or White athletes. While high sport news consumers perceived Black athletes more positively than White athletes, the low sport news consumers did not differentiate between the two races. Similarly, while the White athlete’s use of denial has been accepted more than that of the Black athlete among low sport news consumers, a Black athlete’s use of denial was more accepted than that of the White athlete among high sport news consumers. According to the authors, their findings support the “racial contradiction” reflected in previous research, which reported that minority athletes accused of criminal allegations are perceived more positively than their White counterparts.

Cleland, J., Parry, K., & Adair, D. (2020). Fair go? Indigenous rugby league players and the racial exclusion of the Australian national anthem. *Communication and Sport*. 10(1), 74–96

Three authors from the University of South Australia (AU), University of Technology Sydney (AU), and University of Winchester (UK) explored the implications of a social justice issue that had drawn wide attention, namely the national anthem protests by Indigenous rugby league players in Australia. Guided by a critical race theory, the researchers examined data from a total of 74 online media reports. The reports included mainly players and rugby league officials' perspective and prominent journalists and politicians' responses to the protests. Using a textual analysis approach, the authors examined the reports to uncover the role of Aboriginal voices in influencing symbols of identity, representation, and nationality. The authors reported that the symbolic actions of First Nations rugby players in remaining silent when the anthem was sung was instrumental in renewing public discourse about the national anthem (associated with the lyrics), which, according to the authors, take no notice of the historical and contemporary significance of Indigenous communities to Australia.

Asada, A., Inoue, Y., & Chang, Y. (2021). The Effects of Athlete Activism on League Credibility, Event Legacy, and Event Involvement: A Crisis Communication Perspective. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 14(4), 507-529.

Three researchers from Texas Tech University (USA), Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), and University of Florida (USA) investigated public mixed reactions to Colin Kaepernick's kneeling and the measures taken by the National Football League to handle the situation. Beginning in August 2006, Colin Kaepernick, an American football

player, initially sat on the bench and then knelt during the playing of the national anthem to voice his concern about violence against African Americans. His action, #TakeAKnee movement, spread to other professional, college, and high school teams in the country. The controversy over the movement created a serious reputational crisis for the league and its brand image. The authors conducted a survey after the league took measures to cope with the controversy and right before its mega-event, Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis. Survey data was collected from 698 residents of the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan area from January to February of 2018. The authors found a positive relationship between attitudes toward the movement and attitudes toward the league's responses, which in turn influenced league credibility. However, attitudes toward the movement had a direct negative relationship with league credibility, when people received the league's messages stating that it was actively working with its players to promote social equality and justice. In doing so, for some, the league was free riding and directing the burden of carrying the criticism to the protesting players.

Rockhill, C. A., Howe, J. E., & Agyemang, K. J. (2021). Statements Versus Reality: How Multiple Stakeholders Perpetuate Racial Inequality in Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 14(3), 398-427.

Three researchers from Northern State University and The Ohio State University studied how athletic departments and their affiliated universities work in unison or isolation to create racially diverse environments. Specifically, the authors employed a content analysis approach to examine the mission, vision, and diversity, equity, and inclusion statements of Power 5 athletic departments and their academic institutions. The authors questioned why there is a lack of racial diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics, and merged critical race theory with

institutional theory to evaluate how the two stakeholders managed DEI. The authors investigated if the academic institutions and athletic departments have a mission, vision, and inclusive DEI language and statements. They asked if the two institution types achieve a reality when creating racial DEI environments through leadership positions, and identified institutions that aligned their statements to reality. The leadership group, according to the study, refers to the university president, athletic director, and head coaches of three sports (football head coach, men's basketball head coach, and women's basketball head coach). The study found 12 of the 65 P5 universities abstained from including aspects of DEI within any statements, both from the athletic department and institution. In addition, the authors found that 79% of schools with DEI mentioned from both the institution and athletic department fail to meet the threshold for achieving racial DEI. According to the authors, their study indicates that DEI statements do not reflect that the institutions are determined to improve the representation of non-White individuals within their organization.

Shimazaki, T., Taniguchi, H., & Kikkawa, M. (2021). Gender-and Age-Group Differences in the Effect of Perceived Nonverbal Communication on Communication Ability and Coaching Evaluation in Japanese Student Athletes. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 14(3), 379-397.

Three researchers from Japan's Sophia University and Tokai University investigated the impact of perceived nonverbal communication on coaching evaluation and overall communication among different genders and age groups. The authors interpreting nonverbal communication (NC) in its simplest form as communication without words including expressive body movement, such as physical appearance, posture, gesture, body position, touching, and facial expression. They acknowledged

that nonverbal communication is a complex mechanism that reflects both the unconscious and intentional level. Similarly, the researchers interpreted coaching evaluation as comprised of four competencies such as increasing motivation, making game strategies, developing skills, and building character. With this working definition of coaching evaluation, the authors used data from a survey of 233 individual and team sport athletes from five high schools and seven university teams in Japan. The NC scale for coaches was composed of four factors with 20 items indicating negative NC and four factors with 22 items referring to positive NC. The perceived frequency of negative and positive nonverbal expression from coaches were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = infrequently to 5 = frequently). They found that female athletes may be more influenced by NC in terms of perceived communication ability and coaching evaluation than male athletes. Negative NC is directly associated with high school athletes, which may be due to the insufficient development of achievement motivation. Positive NC is associated with communication ability regardless of demographic characteristics.

Dix, A. (2021). Referee Judgments of Communication in the Field of Play: A Study on Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Division II College Football. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1(aop), 1-20.

This researcher from Middle Tennessee State University studied referee judgments toward in-game communicative behaviors of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) student athletes, and whether communicative behaviors are excessively penalized. As the author indicated, previous literature has found that referees socially judge the communicative behaviors of HBCU student athletes differently than the communicative behaviors of student athletes from predominantly

White institutions. Guided by social judgment theory (which looks at how a message receiver evaluates a communicated message), the author conducted a quantitative study based on a secondary data source of "NCAA Statistics." The study assessed penalties given to Division II football players from HBCUs and predominantly white institution (PWI) over seven seasons, and reported that Division II referees called more total penalty yards per game, more total penalties per game, more total penalties per season, and more total penalty yards per season against HBCUs in comparison with their PWI counterparts from the 2013 through to the 2020 season. While this is an interesting finding and the operationalization of 'referee judgment' could have been refined further. In sum, the researchers claimed that their finding implies referees have disproportionately punished the in-game communicative behaviors of HBCUs relative to PWIs.

Dix, A. (2021). Their Hands Communicate and Their Eyes Listen: Perceptions of Small Group Messages Amongst Deaf College Basketball Players. *Communication & Sport*, 9(6), 972-987.

This author, who also conducted the above study on in-game communication, explored outsiders' perception of small group messages amongst deaf college basketball players, who communicate via American Sign Language (ASL). Guided by cultural identity theory, the author used 96 hearing participants who were enrolled at a university in the United States to address the research objective. A modified version of the scale for effective communication in team sports (SECTS-2) of Sullivan and Short (2011) was adopted. The study looked at four procedures: identification of a photograph, a pre-test using the photographs, a distraction exercise, and a post-test using labeled photographs indicating that the players in this photograph communicate

via ASL and were basketball players for a private university for the deaf. The findings uncovered that deaf basketball players were perceived as sharing messages of acceptance with one another, and perceived to resolve conflict in a positive manner and to have less likely engaged in negative conflict while communicating with each other.