

# Research Methodologies in Sport Management

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## Introduction

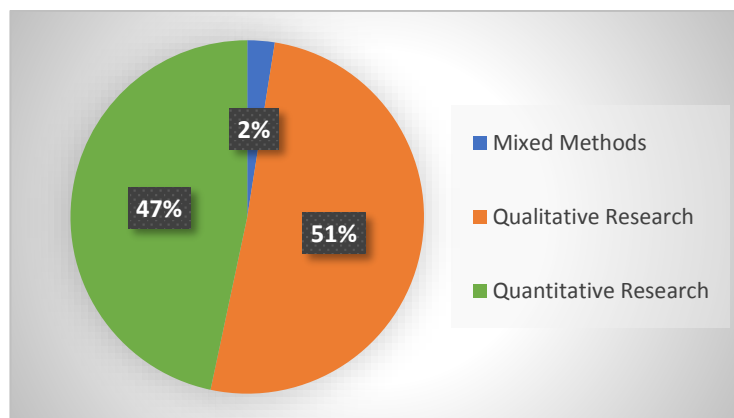
This paper reviewed the ten most popular sport journals concerning their research design. The publications under review were published between March and August 2023, and Table 1 summarises the methodological approaches used in the respective journals:

<b>Journals</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Communication &amp; Sport</b>	1	21 (incl. three editorials)	8	<b>30</b>
<b>European Sport Management Quarterly</b>	3	25 (incl. one editorial)	34	<b>62</b>
<b>International Journal of Sport Finance</b>	-	-	8	<b>8</b>
<b>International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship</b>	1	6 (incl. one editorial)	13	<b>20</b>
<b>International Journal of Sport Communication</b>	-	38 (incl. one editorial, two book reviews, and one media review)	6	<b>44</b>
<b>International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics</b>	-	10 (incl. one book review)	1	<b>11</b>
<b>Journal of Global Sport Management</b>	-	3	2	<b>5</b>

		(incl. one editorial)		
<b>Journal of Sport Economics</b>	-	-	21	<b>21</b>
<b>Journal of Sport Management</b>	1	8 (incl. one editorial and one lecture)	9	<b>18</b>
<b>Sport Management Review</b>	-	11	10	<b>21</b>
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>240</b>

*Table 1: Summary of Methodological Approaches*

Similar to the previous reviews, the employment of qualitative and quantitative research approaches is quite balanced. Nevertheless, qualitative research articles have been more popular in this Sport Management Digest review, as demonstrated in Figure 1:



*Figure 1: Distribution of Methodological Approaches*

When looking at the past five reviews, the percentage of qualitative research has gradually increased, with this and the previous review having more qualitative research papers than quantitative papers.

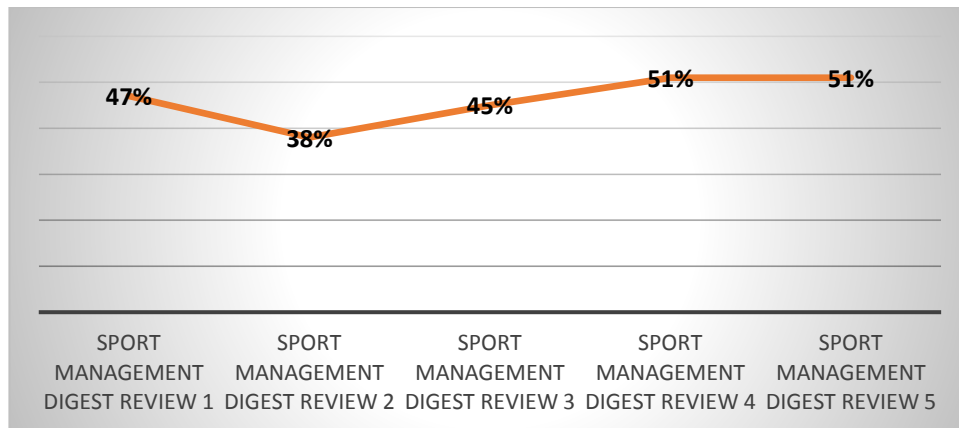


Figure 2: Sport Management Digest Review - Comparison of Qualitative Research (in %)

Continuing the trends identified in previous reviews, a mixed method design was rarely applied. The methodological approaches employed a variety of data collection and analysis techniques, as shown in Table 2:

Quantitative Approaches	Qualitative Approaches
Survey	Case Study
Panel Data	(Semi-Structured) Interviews
Experimental Study	Focus Groups
Content Analysis	(Critical) Commentary
Regression Analysis	Thematic Analysis
Structural Equation Modelling/ Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling	Content Analysis
Ordinary Least Squares	Conceptual Review
Regression Analysis	Textual Analysis
	(Critical) Discourse Analysis
	Systematic Review

Table 2: Overview of Most Common Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The following section selected six papers from the above journals for a more detailed discussion. All reviewed articles focussed on the topic of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and aimed to enhance our insights into its application to a sport context. In addition, an annotated bibliography of six papers has been included at the end of this review.

**Professional Sport and Initial Mental Health Public Disclosure Narratives (Elsay et al., 2023)**

Despite the routine of disclosing reasons for absences from professional sporting career activities to the media (e.g. press statements, media interviews, team websites, social media posts), there is a general absence of disclosure as soon as the reasons relate to mental health concerns. Indeed, players seem to struggle to define, describe, and conceptualise their mental health issues whilst maintaining privacy when undergoing assessment and treatment. Therefore, the authors of this study sought to examine communication strategies by exploring first/initial public mental health disclosure narratives produced by players and sporting organisations across several professional sports via media interviews, press statements, and social media posts.

The authors employed an ethnomethodological approach and conversation analysis (CA) to examine official public statements. They have selected seven professional sport players from different sports, including British football/soccer (Lenny Pidgeley), American football (Everson Griffen; Brandon Brooks; Brandon Marshall), cricket (Marcus Trescothick; Sarah Taylor), and basketball (Imani Boyette). The players shared different diagnoses and the authors' analysis focused on (in)voluntary accounts produced by teams or players themselves during their careers. In more detail, they have analysed the players' narratives to categorise and explain their predicament by focussing on the following guiding questions:

- What was the context of the first known disclosure? Why was the disclosure made now?
- Who performs the disclosure?
- What platform was used to release the information and what form did the disclosure take? (e.g., personal/team social media posts, press statements, press conferences, media interviews, etc.)
- What was the impact and consequences of the disclosure for the player? We encourage readers to view available videos alongside the analysis

The data analysis indicated how some players disclose partial or proxy public announcements (due to a desire to mask issues or delayed help-seeking and assessment). In contrast, others prefer fuller disclosure of the problems experienced, including diagnoses, ongoing treatment, and therapy regimes.

### **Partnerships in collegiate sport clubs: a social exchange perspective (Czekanski et al., 2023)**

Sport clubs are usually quite complex organisations that amateur athletes lead. The amateurs not only play for the club but also run the day-to-day activities and interact with internal and external actors. According to the authors, the actions and responsibilities of club members are well researched. However, little is known about these clubs' relationships with other internal and external actors. Therefore, this study

investigated exchange relationships within collegiate sport clubs (CSCs) by focusing on the following research question: *What are the characteristics and outcomes of the social exchange relationships within CSCs?*

The authors have applied a social constructivist epistemological lens to answer their research question. They employed a qualitative research approach by conducting focus groups with representatives from 29 clubs and interviews with four recreation professional staff at three universities across the United States. For this study, three CSC programs across the US were selected. The researchers then recruited 68 sport club executives representing 29 individual CSCs. The club sizes ranged from 15 to 100 members, with an average membership of approximately 36. Additionally, four recreational sport professional staff across University A (n = 2), University B (n = 1), and University C (n = 1) participated. Staff members represented department director, program director, and program coordinator roles, covering all prominent administrative positions overseeing CSC.

The insights from focus groups and interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis approach and their findings indicated that multiple exchange relationships exist within CSCs. Primary importance was placed on the relationships between the club's executive board and club members, and the club members and the university. Further, they found that each exchange relationship contributes to specific desirable outcomes for the engaged actors that could not be had without the exchange partner.

### **Role Model or Quitter? Social Media's Response to Simone Biles at Tokyo 2020 (Doehler, 2023)**

During the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, Simone Biles withdrew from several gymnastics events mid-competition, citing her mental health issues. As a result, Biles, one of the most successful athletes in the world, faced intense scrutiny from the world's media and the public immediately after her withdrawal. To understand how the public reacted, the authors of this study analysed the Facebook narrative surrounding her withdrawal.

The authors collected a range of Facebook posts from four public Facebook pages: Simone Biles (her official and verified account), Fox News and CNN (American news outlets), and Bleacher Report (an international news outlet that focuses on sport and sport culture). The authors justified their choice of sources given their pages' widespread appeal to sport fans, amassing 63.3 million Facebook followers combined. Twenty-nine posts were sourced across the four pages. All comments were collected from the posts on 1 June 2022 using the Facepager software, an application for automated data retrieval on JSON-based APIs. Ahead of the analysis, the authors

screened the data to exclude comments that 'tagged' another Facebook user but contained no further text, comments not written in English and comments that only included emojis. The final dataset consisted of 87,714 comments: Simone Biles (n = 30,673 across two posts), Fox News (n = 37,476 across eleven posts), CNN (n = 14,856 across eleven posts), and Bleacher Report (n = 4,709 across five posts). The authors analysed the comments by deploying a thematic analysis approach supported by the qualitative software Leximancer.

The study's findings suggested a polarising narrative, with many users supporting Biles and consequently engaging in broader discussions surrounding athlete mental health. Others condemned her action, suggesting she quit on the biggest sporting stage.

### **An intersectional Foucauldian analysis of Canadian national sport organisations' 'equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies and the reinscribing of injustice (Peers et al., 2023)**

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies have become increasingly important in national sports organisations. In Canada, these organisations have increasingly been incentivised to create their own policies within the national inclusive sport mandates framework. Despite this, most people from equity-denied groups continue to experience erasure, denial, and ignorance when engaging within Canada's sporting system, not despite such policies but sometimes because of them. Therefore, this study aimed to review EDI policies across Canadian national sport organisations.

The study's sample consisted of 143 policy documents available online. Nine were national policies, acts, or frameworks (e.g., Canadian Sport Policy 2012) and 134 were organisation-specific policies (e.g., Judo Canada – Gender Equity Policy). The authors deployed a Foucauldian discourse analysis involving analytical tools developed throughout Foucault's various archaeologies and genealogies to analyse the documents. They first identified every equity-related statement within each of the 143 policy documents through Foucault's subject-knowledge-power analytic triangle, which included:

- Analysing the kinds of subjects (e.g., the disabled person) being (re)produced and governed through the statement and its pre/prescriptions.
- Analysing how dominant knowledge (e.g., charity discourse) and knowledge systems (e.g., science) are being leveraged to render the statement and its author intelligible and authoritative
- Theorising the power effects of statements, with particular focus on the ways they served to (il)legitimise existing inequitable systems, (in)action substantive institutional and practice-based changes and dis/qualify particular inclusion and equity claims.

Based on the analysis, the authors created a model explaining common ways EDI policies can reproduce the exclusions they seek to address. Their first theme, Reproducing the Status Quo, included Alleging Inclusivity and Refusing Accountability subthemes. The subthemes of Erasing, Problematising, and Hedging were discussed in their second theme of Reproducing the Excludable Other.

**Sponsorship and social justice: brand positioning on diversity and inclusion in sport marketing during the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship (Beek et al., 2023)**

This study aimed to identify contextual changes in communications, social activism, and perceptions of commercialisation and to what extent these have changed the dynamics in sport sponsorship. In more detail, the authors have investigated the sponsorship and social justice patterns within the context of one major sport event.

In doing so, the authors deployed a single case study by focusing on the UEFA EURO 2020 and the efforts of multinational companies concerning their adaptation of their sponsorship communications to express corporate values on inclusion and diversity during the event. This event was chosen due to its popularity and ability for sponsors to use its platform for global reach. Consequently, the authors investigated the sponsorship activations of the twelve official sponsors by analysing sponsorship expressions on the LED boarding during every tournament match. In addition, data on sponsorship characteristics and brand positioning was collected for every sponsor to define relevant factors to understand the differences in sponsorship communications.

The authors have constructed a dataset with three elements for this study, focussing on (a) the role of sponsorship characteristics on brand positioning, (b) the role of sponsorship on social justice, and (c) sponsorship activations on diversity and inclusion. The characteristics of the sponsors included relevant aspects of their core business and origins that were collected from company websites, such as the geographic origins of the sponsors, the corporate strategy on its diversity and inclusion, and related corporate documents (e.g., reports, press releases) to identify company values. Sponsorship activations were investigated by visual data collection using a multimethod frame and data triangulation for the convergence of multiple sources of evidence. The authors analysed over 90,000 press photos and 51 official match videos that clarified the dynamics of brand positioning, sponsorship characteristics from the perspective of globalisation patterns, and different sponsorship approaches in different geographical, social, and political contexts.

The findings revealed that during UEFA EURO 2020, five official sponsors changed their sponsorship activations. According to the authors, adjustments were made in sponsorship expressions to position the brand on diversity and inclusion.

### **How do elite sport organizations frame diversity and inclusion? A critical race analysis (Gardner et al., 2023)**

This study aimed to investigate how elite sport organisations frame diversity and inclusion. According to the authors, sport organisations frequently present themselves as committed to diversity and inclusion by creating policies, programmes, and other initiatives. Nevertheless, this image of diversity and inclusion is often not reflected in organisational practices, given that white men primarily dominate leadership positions.

For this reason, the authors utilised the principles of critical race theory as a framework to analyse documents produced by the National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Football League (NFL) and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC). In doing so, they employed the qualitative content analysis design of Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA). The ECA approach is interactive, as the foundation for inquiry requires researchers to immerse themselves in the documents so that the perpetual emergence of frames and themes occurs throughout the discovery process. The authors have selected primary documents for this study, which were characterised as diversity-related materials (e.g., statements, policies, programs) on the official NBA, NFL, MLB and USOPC websites. Both the terms “diversity” and “inclusion” were included in the search, as organisations often use these terms interchangeably. In addition, the lead investigator examined each organisation’s official website page-by-page to look for relevant materials, such as diversity and inclusion statements, policies, programs, photos, and other documents. Sixty-six documents were identified for this study’s analysis, constituting approximately 7,500 words of text and 125 images, figures, or illustrations. All documents were loaded into QSR NVivo 12 software for data analysis.

Data analysis consisted of multiple stages following the principles of ECA. In the first stage, the researchers spent one week immersing themselves in each organization’s content, totalling four weeks of analysis. For the second stage, the investigators searched for specific codes and themes related to each frame. The third stage focussed on reviewing the content to identify racialised diversity discourse specifically. The researchers regularly conferred throughout the data analysis process to reconcile diverging interpretations and reach consensus on findings. In their findings, the researchers found that the terms “racism” or “sexism” did not appear once in the organisation’s materials despite the publishing of numerous policies, programs, events, and other initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion. The authors concluded



that if organisations fail to recognise and address the structural causes of inequality, any initiatives they promote are unlikely to foster meaningful progress for social justice.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

1. **Brown-Devlin, N., Brown, K. A., Britt, B. C., & Adamson, A. C. (2023). What inspired that tweet: A comparative analysis of official and stakeholder-enacted crisis responses during the Urban Meyer/Zach Smith scandal. *Communication & Sport*, 11(2), 265-287.**

In this paper, the authors investigated the relationship between stakeholder enacted crisis communication and organisational crisis response. They employed a textual analysis and identified head coach Urban Meyer's reputation repair strategies in his four public statements regarding the Zach Smith scandal. In addition, the authors analysed 10,000 tweets from Ohio-based stakeholders to examine the extent to which stakeholders mirrored through their social media networks. Their results highlighted the behavioural patterns of stakeholders' engagement: *rallying together using the ingratiation and reminder strategies, mirroring some of Meyer's official strategies; and utilizing their strategies to attribute blame to other external parties.*

2. **Chadwick, S. (2022). From utilitarianism and neoclassical sport management to a new geopolitical economy of sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 22(5), 685-704.**

The author contemplated in this study whether it is time to look at sport differently in today's changing world. In more detail, he researched whether scholars should now be thinking about a new geopolitical economy of sports. In order to explore different perspectives, the author developed a commentary based on literature drawn from sport management, geography, politics, and economics. Chadwick concluded that the world, specifically sport in the twenty-first century, is encountering profound changes. Many of these changes will shape human existence for at least the next fifty years. Reasons for that included the global economic and political shifts challenging the established Western order.

3. **O'Boyle, I., Shilbury, D., & Ferkins, L. (2023). Leadership in and out of the sport boardroom: new empirical insights. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(1), 188-206.**

In this paper, the authors explored how intra-board leadership at the national level influences the overall leadership capacity of a federal network. They adopted a qualitative case study method and focussed on a national sport organisation within the Australian nonprofit sport industry. They conducted 12 interviews with the organisation's current and former board members to gain new insights into leadership practice within the governance of not-for-profit sport. Interviews were analysed using

an interpretive process. The authors concluded with several suggestions for future research to increase understanding and refine, test, critique, and elaborate upon the findings of their work.

4. **Karlsson, J., Bäckström, Å., Kilger, M., & Redelius, K. (2023). Looks, Liveliness, and Laughter: Visual Representations in Commercial Sports for Children. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 16(2), 178-186.**

In sports, much attention is directed toward how media represent elite sports and sport stars. However, less attention is directed toward children's sports. The authors of this study explored and analysed visual representations of children on sport businesses' websites. To do so, the authors conducted an interpretative content and discourse analysis with a sample of 697 images of sporting children. Their findings indicated that the ideal customer is a white, physically active, able, and slim boy or girl. The authors concluded that consumer culture seems to reproduce and preserve existing normative frameworks rather than producing alternative norms and ideas about children's sport.

5. **Shulze, J., Marquez, M., & Ruvalcaba, O. (2023). The biopsychosocial factors that impact esports players' well-being: A systematic review. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 8(2), 478-502.**

In this paper, the authors reviewed the biopsychosocial risks of participation in eSports. In doing so, they used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to systematically review the existing literature on risks to the well-being of amateur and professional eSports players. Their literature review surfaced several biopsychosocial risk factors associated with eSports, such as poor nutrition, caffeine supplementation, physiological arousal, injury, pain, stress, maladaptive coping, cognitive fatigue, gaming addiction, mental ill-health, harassment, and racism. These findings were used to inform support staff members and industry professionals in the eSport environment.

6. **Sveinson, K., & Hoerber, L. (2022). Fashion versus comfort: Exploring the gendered marketing messages of sport team licensed merchandise. *Journal of Sport Management*, 37(3), 165-178.**

The authors in this study explored the marketing messages of sport fan merchandise and the resulting implied gendered and fan performances. In doing so, the authors employed a multimodal critical discourse analysis. They analysed the top 20 T-shirts for men and women for five National College Athletic Association institutions on their official e-commerce sites. The authors examined the text descriptions, visual images, and messages perceived when combining text and visuals. They found that the marketing messages of clothing items rely heavily on traditional discourses of femininity and masculinity, placing gender performances as more relevant to fan

performances for women. The study concluded that atypical designs suggest alternative gender and fan performances, but they continue to indicate that gender identity is central to clothing appearance and messaging to consumers.

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