

# Sport Communication

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## Introduction

The sport management research community has published over 45 sport communication (and related) articles in the field's various journals since the third issue of SMD (October 2022 to February 2023). Over this period, a few sport communication research works have been published in journals such as Journal of Sport Management, Sport Management Review, European Sport Management Quarterly, International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, Journal of Global Sport Management, and others. Particularly, the two communication journals namely, Communication and Sport, and International Journal of Sport Communication have published 30 and 5 research articles respectively over the period of this fourth issue. The research works covered a total of eight broadly classified but inter-related topic areas. These include: media content creation, race and sport, sport and mediatization, sport fan-ship, media portrayal, sport and politics, sport media and doping, and occupation and the work environment. The specific topic areas that the field's scholars researched under each theme are listed below:

- *Media content creation*: social media sources in online articles on sport, uncivil discourse in sports blog comment sections, sports newsrooms versus in-house media reporting in news and match coverage, the effect of gender in reporting on the NFL, and the effect of statistics on enjoyment and perceived credibility in sports media.
- *Race and sport media*: student-athletes' perceptions of the athletic department's role in social media, racial justice, and the Black Lives Matter movement, race and the Representational Politics of Streetball, Americans support to black athletes who kneel during the national anthem, athlete activism effect on brand

image, the performance of identity in prize fighting promotion, exploring discourses about race/ethnicity in a Spanish TV Football Program, and socially conscious marketing during sporting events.

- *Sport and mediatization* (Communication & Sport had a special issue on this topic and some of the studies include): the mediatization of professional tennis from the 1980s to the early 2010s, mediatization and self-organized leisure sports from a Finnish perspective, mediatization of the Olympic Games in Croatia and Slovenia, mediatization and public reception in the preparation stage of the Beijing 2022 winter Olympics, German grassroots sports clubs use of digital media to overcome communication challenges during Covid-19, intensified mediatization in the case of video assistant referee in a small-nation context, and video assistant referee at the 2018 World Cup.
- *Sport fanship*: sports fan categorization, sports fanship changes across the lifespan, dimensions of sense of membership in a sport fan community, and fan opposition to sports team relocation.
- *Media portrayal*: print media framing of the Olympic Games, media discourse of the South Korean Olympic ice hockey team and its naturalized athletes, and audience responses to media portrayals of professional athletes and intimate partner violence.
- *Sport and politics*: military-related remembrance rhetoric in UK sport, paralympic broadcasting in sub-Saharan Africa, the National Basketball Association, China, and attribution of responsibility, Twitter users' reaction to Donald Trump and Megan Rapinoe, and companies' social media portrayals of their funding of sport for development in indigenous communities in Canada and Australia.
- *Sport media and doping*: news framing of doping suspicion during the Tour de France, and Chinese public perception of Sun Yang's 8-year doping sanction.

- *Occupation and the work environment*: occupational stress among American high school football officials, and college student-athlete dissent.

### **Advances in sport communication research**

As can be recalled, articles covered in the first issue of the sport communication section of SMD focused on topic areas such as media representation of disability, mental illness, and women in sport; and media coverage and consumption of sport (TV and social media). The second issue articles focused on 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. In a related manner, the third issue articles focused on topic areas such as gender representation in media coverage, race and sport media, the profession of sport journalism, media coverage of concussion, mega/major-events and media coverage, forms of communications in sport, social media use in sport, and social psychology and sport media. As reported in the first three Sport Communication issues of SMD, articles on topic areas of race and sport media and sport and politics continued to be published (over the period of time this fourth issue) and have built on the previous studies under a different research context and focus. For this digest the topic of media content creation, and race and sport media have been selected. Over the period of October 2022 to February 2023, a total of 12 articles presented their findings related media content creation (5 articles), and race and sport media (7).

In relation to media content creation, five articles have been published in *International Journal of Sport Communication* (2 articles) and *Communication and Sport* (3 articles) over the period of October 2022 to February 2023, representing the work of 7 authors from 7 different universities (namely, German Sport University Cologne,

University of Delaware, University of the Sunshine Coast, California State University Fullerton, University of Colorado Boulder, and Nanyan Technological University Singapore, Texas Christian University). Out of these five studies, only one used a qualitative method (namely, a qualitative content analysis), the other four studies employed a quantitative method (namely, a quantitative content analysis (two studies), and experiment study (two studies)). Only one of the quantitative studies used theoretical and conceptual frameworks, which are social identity theory and the concept of stereotyping. In relation to race and sport media, seven articles have been published in International Journal of Sport Communication (1 article) and Communication and Sport (6 articles) over the period of October 2022 to February 2023. Due to the limited space allocated for this section of SMD, four from the seven articles have been selected and included in this segment of the section. These four studies represented the work of 8 authors from 6 different universities (namely, University of Maryland, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, Southern Methodist University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, Georgia State University). Two of the studies employed textual analysis and the other two adopted a survey method.

## **Conclusions**

The representations of streetball in mainstream media depicted it as illustrative of the perceived pathological and inferior nature of Blackness; romanticized and divorced from the structural contexts of its production; and materially and symbolically exploited by corporate commercial entities. (b) It is learned that the sympathetic statements quickly made against racism incidents by sports leagues did not call into question the racial capitalism that drives the crises. (c) It is reported that activism type (risky/ fighting social injustice/ vs. safe/ fighting gender inequality/) did not significantly affect fans' perception of athlete brand image. However, perceived athlete attractiveness decreased

when the athlete engaged in risky activism. Regarding student-athletes' perceptions of their athletic departments' involvement in promoting racial justice on social media, it is reported that Black student-athletes are significantly more likely to believe that it is the athletic department's role to address racial justice than their non-Black counterparts.

### **Annotated bibliography**

*Oelrichs, I. (2022). Just Copy and Paste? Usage and Patterns of Social Media Sources in Online Articles on Sport. International Journal of Sport Communication, 15(4), 325-335.*

This researcher (from German Sport University Cologne) investigated how social media is used as a source in sports reporting, in particular the researchers examined the relevance of social media as a source for online sports reporting, the context in which social media references are used in online sports reporting, and the aspects that determine the importance of social media sources. To accomplish the study's objective, the author conducted a quantitative content analysis of 3,150 online articles of three German sports news outlets, namely bild.de, sport1.de, and kicker.de. According to the author, the study found out that social media as a source is a firm component in journalistic reporting, where 16.1% of all articles contained social media as a source. In regard to the context in which social media references are used in sports reporting, the results reveal that in soccer, other team sports, and winter sports in Germany, the usage of social media as a source was significantly lower than the average usage in 16.1% of the articles. As the author noted, this might be because these sports may have a PR department in Germany with an established working relationship with the journalists.

*Bingaman, J. (2022). Incivility and Washington's NFL Franchise: Exploring Uncivil Discourse in Sports Blog Comment Sections. International Journal of Sport Communication, 15(4), 355-365.*

This author (from the University of Delaware) explored the prevalence of uncivil discourse surrounding the Washington NFL team's removal of offensive Native American imagery and later rebranding as the Washington Commanders. Specifically, the author examined online incivility in sports blog comment sections, contextual elements that facilitate incivility, and (c) the role of online forums in perpetuating racism and negative stereotypes toward Native Americans. Having these objectives and pointing out that Native American imagery in sport is a contentious one that has drawn opposing reactions, the author noted that the polarization of the (supporting and opposing) beliefs has led to hostile debates and discussions between the opposing perspectives. These discussions and debates, according to the author, have been carried out both on mediated mediums as well as face-to-face communication. Hence, to accomplish the study's objectives, the author employed a quantitative content analysis of the comment sections of news stories on a sports blog (namely, [sportslogos.net](https://www.sportslogos.net)) between 2014 and 2022. The author stated that incivility can manifest in five different ways: as name-calling (i.e., disparaging remarks directed to a person or group), aspersion (i.e., disparaging remarks directed to an idea, plan, policy, or behavior), lying (i.e., commenting that an idea, plan, policy, or behavior was deceitful), vulgarity (i.e., the use of obscenity or profanity), and pejorative for speech (i.e., disparaging remarks about how an individual communicates). According to the author, roughly one quarter of all comments featured an element of uncivil discourse, with derogatory slurs toward Native Americans being particularly common. This has led the author to claim that incivility was a prominent feature of news comment sections associated with the Washington rebrand from 2014 to 2022.

*English, P. (2022). Sports newsrooms versus in-house media: Cheerleading and critical reporting in news and match coverage. Communication & Sport, 10(5), 854-871.*

Based on the premise that there is a change in the field of sports journalism that resulted from the growth of in-house media provided by sports organizations, this author (from the University of the Sunshine Coast) argues that there is a contest over boundaries between in-house media and sport journalism. According to the author, one side is based on journalistic values of truth and independence, and the other has corporate objectives of promotion, brand awareness and bias. The author examined the traditional divide through the content published by in-house media in comparison with traditional sports journalism newsrooms. and whether it is more aligned with journalism or public relations. To accomplish the study's objectives, the author used six newspaper websites and five national sports organization websites in Australia in 2020, and conducted a qualitative analysis of 466 text-based coverages of both news and match reporting. The author has also claimed to have focused predominantly on the elements of critical reporting and cheerleading. The author reported that the mediatization of sport involving in-house media has impacted the boundaries of sports media and sports journalism fields. While the author agrees that the growth of sports media has provided benefits to both journalistic and in-house publications, the absence of sustained critical reporting, the tendency for more cheerleading and the omitting of public interest information by the in-house media indicate major differences between the content produced by sports and news organizations, and the approaches of journalism and public relations.

*Brisbane, G. J., Ferrucci, P., & Tandoc, E. (2023). Side-by-side sports reporters: A between-subjects experiment of the effect of gender in reporting on the NFL. Communication & Sport, 11(1), 115-134.*

These three authors from three different universities (California State University Fullerton, University of Colorado Boulder, and Nanyang Technological University Singapore) examined how television audiences perceive women in television sports media, specifically how audiences in the United States are perceiving gender differences of sports reporters covering a hyper-masculine sport (namely, National Football League (NFL)) through the lenses of both social identity theory and the concept of stereotyping. The researchers conducted a between-subjects experimental study of the effect of gender in reporting on the NFL. For this purpose, they employed two (one female and one male) current and veteran sports reporters. The survey participants (N = 491 United States residents recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk Service) have been randomly assigned (male-fact (n = 126), male-opinion (n = 123), female-fact (n = 125) or female-opinion (n = 117) condition) and asked to watch a recorded video either of the male or female giving a fact or an opinion report. The recorded videos of each reporter have been the same two "stand-ups" with identical backdrops. After watching the videos, the survey participants were asked questions to measure their perception of the reporter's knowledge and credibility. The study was specifically interested in whether people rate female sportscasters as less credible and knowledgeable than male sportscasters when reporting on a hyper-masculine sport both in terms of fact-based and opinion-based reporting. In contrast to a few prior research findings, according to the authors, that viewers do not think of male and female sports journalists in the same way, where male sports journalists more credible, the study's results demonstrated that sports audiences may have begun to accept women in their roles as sports journalists.



*Hahn, D. (2023). The effect of statistics on enjoyment and perceived credibility in sports media. Communication & Sport, 11(1), 53-71.*

Noting that statistics has become a common storytelling tool in sports media, this author (from Texas Christian University) contend that little is known about why some sports consumers care about these statistics despite being common trend in sport media. The author also claimed there is a need for investigating how or if perceived credibility and consumer enjoyment may vary by different levels of sport fanship. Based on these claims, the author examined the effects of statistics in sports media, on consumer enjoyment and perceived credibility while accounting for different levels of fanship/ sports audiences. To accomplish the study's stated objective, a mixed factorial design experiment study was conducted examining the effects of statistics in Instagram posts from a major sporting event. A sample of 168 participants (from a Power Five conference school) viewed four Instagram posts from the 2018 NCAA basketball tournament. Each participant was randomly assigned (4x4x2 design) to a condition where they viewed posts from a single source (i.e., ESPN, Fox Sports, CBS Sports, NBC Sports) while responding to questionnaire items for each post that varied presence and placement of statistics (i.e., no statistics, statistics in caption, statistics in image, or statistics in both caption and image). Participants later categorized as sports fans or nonfans (high or low fanship respectively). The findings showed that statistics enhance enjoyment and improve perceived credibility. The findings also suggested that media source and placement of statistics influences both enjoyment and credibility. As the author noted, numbers are used to contextualize winners and losers, and are central to the stories told.

*Wallace, B. (2022). Commodifying Black Expressivity: Race and the Representational Politics of Streetball. Communication & Sport, 10(6), 1053-1069.*

In this article, the author (from the University of Maryland) demonstrated how representations of streetball in mainstream media are underpinned by harmful racial logics that circulate throughout even purportedly innocuous forms of popular culture in the “colorblind” neoliberal moment. According to the author, the popular media depict streetball as a subtle illustration of the regressive cultural dichotomy that positions Black bodies and their corollary cultural forms as inferior to those coded as White. To demonstrate the argument, the author conducted a textual analysis of three media representations of streetball, namely the television show AND1 Mixtape Tour, the video game series NBA Street, and the film Uncle Drew. The article noted that textual analysis serves as an appropriate methodological approach to examine and understand how commercial media mobilizes language, visuals, symbols, and technology to produce meaning and shape popular perceptions of Blackness. The author demonstrated that streetball is depicted as illustrative of the perceived pathological and inferior nature of Blackness; romanticized and divorced from the structural contexts of its production; and materially and symbolically exploited by corporate commercial entities.

*de Oca, J. M., Mason, S., & Ahn, S. (2022). Consuming for the greater good: “Woke” commercials in sports media. Communication & Sport, 10(6), 1165-1187.*

Following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and many other African Americans tens of thousands of people took to the streets protesting state violence in Black and other communities of color. In professional sports, as this author (from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs) noted, teams in the NBA quickly made sympathetic statements against racism, the Commissioner of the NFL (Roger Goodell) tweeted a sympathetic statement about the death of George Floyd, and

NASCAR banned Confederate flags from its events and properties. For the author, such politically progressive statements do not challenge the operation of racial capitalism but enhance the brand image of the leagues in a moment of political crisis and mass mobilization against systemic racism, which (the author) referred to as “woke”. As the author noted, such a statement is called “woke” because these organizations are aware of the continuing racial injustice in the country and releasing the statement show their moral values, however their actions do not alter the causes that trigger the crises. As the author added, advertising corporate values and politics in marketing is referred to as socially conscious marketing. Hence, to show that socially conscious marketing appropriates dissent against neoliberal capitalism in order to legitimate capitalism and resist systemic change during a moment of crisis, this author employed discourse analysis of marketing literature on socially conscious marketing and textual analysis of socially conscious marketing commercials shown during sporting events. To identify the data sources, the author used YouTube employing key words to search for commercials. Once the author identified 67 commercials, the number of commercials were reduced to 26, as the article focused on those that have been broadcasted between 2014 and 2019 during mega-sporting events such as the NFL Super Bowl, NFL season opener, prior to the World Cup, Olympics, and Special Olympics. As stated, the data analysis showed that the woke statements by sports leagues resulted from years of theorizing and producing socially conscious marketing commercials by marketing professionals, and they never call into question the racial capitalism that drives the crises.

*Brown, S. M., Brison, N. T., Bennett, G., & Brown, K. M. (2022). Do Fans Care About the Activist Athlete? A Closer Look at Athlete Activism Effect on Brand Image. International Journal of Sport Communication, 15(4), 336-344.*

These four authors from three different universities (Southern Methodist University, Texas A&M University, and Texas Tech University) explored whether an activist athlete's brand image is affected by attitudes toward athlete activism, activism message, activism communication style, or fan identification level. To accomplish the study's objective, the authors employed a 2 × 2 experimental design of activism type (safe vs. risky) and activism effort (high vs. low). According to the authors, risky activism is related to fighting social injustice toward people of color, and safe activism is against gender inequality. Relatedly, kneeling during the national anthem or founding an organization is high effort, whereas low effort is posting on social media or wearing a t-shirt. The study used a survey based experimental approach with participants (N = 487, residence of the United States) recruited from M-Turk. As the study's findings showed, activism type did not significantly affect fans' perception of athlete brand image. However, perceived athlete attractiveness decreased when the athlete engaged in risky activism. In addition, results revealed that individuals' attitudes toward athlete activism significantly influenced their perception of an activist athlete's brand image. As reported, in spite of the fact that most of the study's participants support athlete activism, the results also showed that individuals who did not support athlete activism, regardless of athlete identification level, reported lower scores for their favorite athlete's brand image, demonstrating a potential cause for concern for an activist athlete.

*Bunch, N., & Cianfrone, B. A. (2022). "Posting More than Just a Black Square": National Collegiate Athletic Association Student-Athletes' Perceptions of the Athletic Department's Role in Social Media, Racial Justice, and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Communication & Sport, 10(6), 1023-1052.*

These two researchers from Georgia State University assessed college student-athletes' perceptions of their athletic departments' involvement in promoting racial

justice and the Black Lives Matter movement on social media. As the authors noted, while social media staff are tasked with communicating issues of social injustices, they provided little insight into how it impacts their athletes. Hence, to understand the perspectives of athletes and to inform best practices for the social media staff, this study surveyed 273 NCAA student-athletes from 40 universities using 41-question online survey in 2020. The survey explored four factors: affective responses to the posts, perceived conflict, the role of the athletic department in using social media to discuss the topic, and the perceived qualifications of the athletic department to post about the topic. On a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), the authors used 15 items to measure student-athlete perceptions (5 items for affective reaction, 4 for perceived conflict, 3 for athletic department role, and 3 for lack of qualification). The findings showed that Black student-athletes were significantly more likely to believe that it was the athletic department's role to address racial justice than their non-Black counterparts, with no significant differences in the other three factors. The classification of the student-athletes' reactions revealed three emergent themes: a) social activism communication strategy, where alongside authenticity and communicate informative actions, student-athletes highlighted their desire for athletic departments to have a commitment to allyship and social media activism, (b) strategies to develop race conscious culture (although found less often than the first theme), where student-athletes noted that conducting an organizational audit and promoting discussion among student-athletes/team members could improve the inclusivity of the environment, and (c) challenges to social media activism, where student-athletes identified two primary challenges with their athletic department's social media activism efforts. While some in favor of the activism expressed concern of performative actions by athletic departments, others opposed their athletic department's involvement in social media activism on the topic of race and the BLM.

