

# “Why Can’t We Be Friends”? An Examination of Academic and Industry Alignment in Sport Sponsorship

Ryan W. Dastrup<sup>a</sup>, Todd C. Koesters<sup>b</sup>, Stephen L. Shapiro<sup>c</sup>, Sung-Bae Roger Park<sup>d\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Ph.D. Candidate, University of South Carolina, Close-Hipp # 789, Columbia, SC 29201

<sup>b</sup>J.D., M.S.A., University of South Carolina, Close-Hipp #789, Columbia, SC 29201

<sup>c</sup>Ph.D., University of South Carolina, Close-Hipp # 766, Columbia, SC 29201

<sup>d</sup>Ph.D., Hanyang University, Olympic Gym #302, Seoul, Korea

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to produce an analysis of content published in both academic literature and industry related publications that specifically examines the theme of sport sponsorship. Scholars suggest a gap between academia and industry, yet it is undetermined how published articles about sponsorship are aligned and why certain topics may overlap in interest where others are independent topics. While a number of other studies have examined content in academic publications, no study has yet been applied comparing industry publications. Our intention is to compare the published academic articles and what is written in industry publications to better understand the content that is being discussed across the various channels, and to see if there is a gap between industry and academia. Findings show academics focused on certain categories while industry focused on others. Within some categories there was a clear distinction in how differently they discussed certain topics. However, some categories did demonstrate balance.

Key words: sponsorship, sport sponsorship, sponsorship review, content analysis, sport industry, sportsbiz

## Introduction

The relationship between academic scholarship and its use within the sport industry is an important topic within the discipline. One of the biggest concerns for sport management is the relevance of academic research to industry professionals (Bowers et al., 2014; Irwin & Ryan, 2013; Mahoney & Pitts, 1998). Within the area of sport marketing, scholarly journals are a major source

of information to the academy and offer new knowledge or test existing theories (Peetz & Reams, 2011). However, the impact these theoretical advancements have on sport marketing professionals is not clear. While a number of sport organizations and scholars have encouraged collaboration between the academy and sport industry professionals (King, 2013; North American Society for Sport Management, 2013; Sutton 2012), Fink (2013) acknowledged a disconnect and proffered a solution between those who study sport management and those who work in the industry stating, “professors must step outside their university confines

more often if they hope to bridge the gap with industry.” (King, 2013)

One area that has received a lot of academic and industry attention within the context of sport marketing is sponsorship. Sponsorship has been defined as “a series of exchanges between brands, sponsored properties, and consumers for contracted time periods, driven by brands’ use of sponsored properties’ communication assets, to influence consumer thoughts, feelings, and actions toward multiple, dynamic marketing objectives for brands and properties” (Wakefield et al., 2020, p. 323).

Sponsorship research provides direct practical application and is an area of high interest. Scholarly reviews on sponsorship (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Johnston & Spais, 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Wakefield et al., 2020; Walliser, 2003), have investigated the evolution of sponsorship research and provided new opportunities for further investigations. These reviews highlight the multitude of scholarship on the topic of sponsorship. Additionally, there are 353 articles related to sponsorship published in *Sports Business Journal* between 2017 and April 2022. Thus, there is no question both academia and industry see sponsorship as a topic of importance to the field. Yet, it is unknown whether topics of conversation around sponsorship are in alignment or are relevant across these sectors of the market.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to extend our knowledge of existing content on sponsorship by examining both the academic scholarship and industry publications on this important topic. Scholars suggest a gap between academia and industry, yet it is undetermined how published articles in sponsorship are aligned and why certain topics may overlap in interest where others are independent topics. It has been argued sponsorship research is siloed across disciplines, is disconnected (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020), and lacks a comprehensive rigorous summary (Wakefield et al., 2020).

While various scholars (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020;

Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Johnston & Spais, 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Wakefield et al., 2020; Walliser, 2003) have provided in-depth reviews of the academic sponsorship research, the current study extends this work by examining the scholarly sponsorship literature and published industry articles and identifying themes and alignment between the two sectors. Our intention is to compare the published academic articles and what is written in industry publications to better understand the content that is being discussed across the various channels, and to see if there is a gap between industry and academia. Industry publications are those that are not peer reviewed, but content providers that offer relevant sports news and important sport topics.

## Literature Review

Within the academic literature, there have been four broad reviews of sport sponsorship content from academic journals. This review will examine each review chronologically and provide additional context on each of the authors’ findings and conclusions, as well as analyze any overlapping themes among the authors and the evolution of the literature. The first review was performed by Cornwell and Maignan (1998). At that time, sponsorship was widely used among practitioners, but attracted very little interest by academia. Thus, the objective of their paper was to gain an informed understanding of the current state of the management and benefits of sponsorship. By conducting their review, the authors wanted to promote the legitimization of sponsorship in the United States among academia. Performing a worldwide systematic sponsorship review, 80 articles were found between 1983 and 1996. Only articles published in English, French, or German were included in the review, and the authors did not include any regulatory government studies.

The results of the research showed five different research streams: nature of sponsorship (20.51%), managerial aspects of sponsorship (33.33%), measurement of sponsorship effects (24.36%), strategic

use of sponsorship (6.41%), and legal and ethical considerations in sponsorship (15.38%).

Given the relative newness of research on sponsorship, the authors said that it was not surprising the literature spent time describing the development of sponsorship or defining its main characteristics in relation to other promotional communications. Within their study several questions were raised surrounding the difference between sponsorship and other communication tools, as well as sponsorship objectives and measurement on consumer and community groups.

Based on the authors’ review, they identified four gaps. First, there was no classification scheme that distinguished sponsorship from other communication and promotional techniques. Second, the understanding of the relationship between the objectives and the achieved results from sponsorship was poor. Third, no measures on the impact of sponsorship among the consumers and public had been established or defined. Finally, theories and conceptual foundations for scholarly inquiry were absent.

In 2003, Walliser extended and updated the research findings of Cornwell and Maignan (1998). Walliser (2003) felt it important to include international studies on sponsorship, as the topic was being researched more heavily in areas outside of North America. Therefore, sources including conference proceedings and journals with a more European focus were included in the review. To be consistent, the same article selection criteria was adopted to a large extent and English, French, and German language studies over the same period were included. Then, articles from 1996 to 2001 were examined to analyze the evolution of sponsorship research, including adherence to Cornwell and Maignan’s (1998) suggestions, and gaps that needed to be addressed. After accounting for the previous 80 articles, 153 additional articles were examined: 66 articles were published between 1985 and 1996 while 87 articles were published between 1996 and 2001.

Initially, the author used the same five research streams from Cornwell and Maignan (1998), but

removed legal and ethical considerations due to the large number of studies identified in other streams. Therefore, this study included: nature of sponsorship (16.34%), managerial aspects of sponsorship (20.92%), measurement of sponsorship effects (54.25%), and strategic use of sponsorship (8.50%). Walliser (2003) provided the number of articles in each research stream for both reviews, detailing the number of articles in the 2003 study that appeared after 1995.

As a whole, the literature on sponsorship was in a growth stage. The nature of sponsorship appeared to have reached maturity at that time and was declining. The area that received the most attention was measurement of sponsorship. In particular, there were many studies about awareness and image transfer. Through in-depth examination, the review provides notable cross-cultural differences in how sponsorship is defined by the academy as the definition varies from country to country and from researcher to researcher. However, there is much agreement from “corporate philanthropy, patronage, corporate giving and product placement” (Walliser, 2013, p. 18).

Some of Cornwell & Maignan’s (1998) suggestions for the direction of the research have been addressed. However, the “research is still too focused on consumer goods and services companies” and marginal advances have occurred in an organizations functional affiliation with sponsorship, personnel requirements, and in budgeting. Performed by Johnston and Spais (2015), the third study was a content analysis examining key themes and concepts in the abstracts of peer-reviewed marketing and advertising journals published between 1980 and 2012. They identified 841 articles written by over 1,000 authors and published in over 150 academic journals. The purpose of their review focused on the semantic relationships among sponsorship-specific content and themes. Not only did the authors extend the timeframe of studies, they widened the type of academic journals.

Supported by computer-assisted text analysis (CATA), the authors were able to visualize the semantic

foundations of sponsorship-linked research over four distinct time periods: 1980-1989 [22 articles, 16 journals], 1990-1999 [149 articles, 48 journals], 2000-2009 [435 articles, 96 journals], 2010-2012 [235 articles, 61 journals]. Corresponding to the time periods, four foundational pillars that supported the advancement and development of sponsorship research were identified: intellectual, strategic, behavioral, and relational. The authors called the timeframe of the 1980s the Intellectual Foundations. Published content from this period focused on the function and managerial focus of sponsorship and was consistent with previous research conducted by Cornwell & Maignan (1998) and Walliser (2003). The 1990s are considered the strategic foundations time span. During this period there was a focus on the strategic role sponsorship plays and brand image (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999).

The 2000s are known as the behavioral foundations and focused on better understanding consumer responses to product purchase (Madrigal, 2001), sponsor identification bias and brand image congruence. The authors also found new concepts such as products, consumers, analysis and results. The 2010s are known as relational foundations, with the most prominent concepts being: professional, team, relationship, social and value. There are still several distinct research themes found in the academic literature such as: business to business (B2B), corporate social responsibility (CSR), and measurement and impact on shareholder wealth. Most recently, Cornwell and Kwon (2020) completed a review of 409 sponsorship-linked marketing studies from the period between 1996 and 2017. The purpose of this study was to first, introduce the topic and map current research within the sponsorship process. Second, provide theoretically grounded questions to prompt under-researched topics.

The first broad analysis of this study grouped the publications into three (3) areas: reviews and trends in sponsorship (6.36%, 26 articles), management and strategy in the sponsorship process (24.69%, 101 articles), and measurement and effectiveness related to

target audience response (68.95%, 282 articles). The model consists of six (6) columns that represent a generalized sponsoring process including: initial decision, target audiences, objectives, engagement, measurement and evaluation, and subsequent decisions.

The authors propose a number of research areas to focus. For example, minimal research on sponsorship asset pricing, deal characteristics, contract price setting, and the examination of price negotiation. Also, research on sponsorship pricing is limited, and “no study has tried to understand how geographic ecosystem boundaries limit the number and nature of available relationships” (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020, p. 612). Furthermore, the academic literature is replete with the measurement outcomes recall and recognition (Wakefield et al., 2007), attitudes, brand image and brand equity, purchase intention (Bachleda et al. 2016), and behavior (Zaharia & Kaburakis, 2016), but sponsorship researchers “have not forged new measures focused on sponsorship” (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020, p. 617). Additionally, there lacks organizational models-level models for evaluation of return on investment (ROI), return on objectives (ROO), or return on purpose (ROP). The authors state, “in no other areas is there a larger gap between academic inquiry and business need” (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020, p. 618).

In terms of objectives, target audiences, and engagement, consumer audiences have been the focal point of research often to the exclusion of other audiences for sponsorships. Due to a failure to consider the sponsorship process as a whole, the authors conclude that there remains ‘a shortage of research that examines marketing management of the sponsorship process.’ These findings show a shortage in sponsorship management and a surplus in audience response. A table of the sponsorship scoping reviews is provided in Table 1.

Although not a scoping review of the literature, but to better understand the conceptual framework of sponsorship, Wakefield et al. (2020) describe a comprehensive sponsorship model that highlights the sequence of antecedents, mediators, and consequences

**Table 1.** *Trends of Sponsorship Studies*

Study	Cornwell & Maignan (1998)	Walliser (2003)	Johnston & Spais (2015)	Cornwell & Kwon (2020)	Current Study
Years covered	1983-1996	1974-2001	1980-2012	1996-2017	2014-2022
Number of articles	80	233	841	409	584
Topics discussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified five (5) research streams</li> <li>• Nature of sponsorship</li> <li>• Managerial aspects of sponsorship</li> <li>• Measurement of sponsorship effects</li> <li>• Strategic use of sponsorship</li> <li>• Legal and ethical considerations in sponsorship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researched pre-1996 articles not included in Cornwell &amp; Maignan</li> <li>• Extended review from 1996-2001</li> <li>• Focus shifted from measuring exposure to measuring intermediate results of sponsorship such as awareness and image</li> <li>• Impact of sponsorship and on awareness and image transfer received the most academic attention</li> <li>• Definition of sponsorship has reached maturity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examining sponsorship article abstracts the Authors focus on the semantic relationships among concepts using computer assisted text analysis</li> <li>• Four (4) descriptive foundational pillars of sponsorship research are identified (intellectual, strategic, behavioral, relational)</li> <li>• 1980’s - television, important, business, benefits, advertising</li> <li>• 1990’s - objectives, ambush, support, major, corporate</li> <li>• 2000’s – products, financial, media, role, market</li> <li>• 2010-2012 – professional, team, relationships, social, value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear surpluses and shortages in sponsorship-linked marketing research</li> <li>• Over-investment of articles related to strategy and management issues, objectives, target audiences, and engagement</li> <li>• Pricing and sponsor-sponsee decision making, leverage, activation, relationship renewal, termination and change is under-researched</li> <li>• Measurement of outcomes is still problematic (recall, recognition, attitude, purchase intent)</li> <li>• Six (6) broad categories (decision making, target audiences, objectives, measurement, context, external forces)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industry Focused</li> <li>• eSports</li> <li>• Jersey Sponsorship</li> <li>• Gambling</li> <li>• Activation</li> <li>• Digital and Social</li> <li>• Naming Rights</li> <li>• Academic Focused</li> <li>• Identification</li> <li>• Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</li> <li>• Measurement</li> <li>• Ambush Marketing</li> <li>• Balanced</li> <li>• Termination</li> <li>• Endorsement</li> <li>• Women’s Sports</li> <li>• Rivalry</li> </ul>

for sponsorship. Wakefield et al. (2020) goes beyond the sponsorship reviews by exploring the wide range of mechanisms at work within the sponsorship ecosystem. The authors focus on a consumer-centric model of sponsorship effects that considers the consequences of interactions among brands, properties and consumers. The goal is to synthesize the source

factors and interactions identified in previous research as affecting sponsorship outcomes to make sense of what has been found and to provide paths towards new future research. Their review is comprehensive in terms of relevant constructs, not necessarily towards all relevant citations (Wakefield et al., 2020, p. 325).

Sponsorship can be a complex model with many

sponsorship-linked components that involves stakeholders, brands, consumers, and properties. The authors conceptualize a three-step model that involves antecedents (brand, property, and consumers), mediators (consumer thoughts, feelings, and actions), and potential consequences of sponsorships (consumers and brands). The authors propose 10 new research streams to consider: brand-property factors, consumer-brand factors, consumer-property factors, property characteristics, brand characteristics, consumer characteristics, mediators for brand sponsorship, consequences of brand sponsorship, consumer-focused outcomes, brand-focused outcomes. The systematic review of the sponsorship literature has shown how the theoretical and conceptual foundations of sponsorship has evolved. It has provided new definitions and research trends in the sponsorship field. As sponsorship research continues to accelerate, discrepancies still exist among discussed topics between industry and practice.

### Academy and Industry Disconnect

Most scholarly journals offer authors the chance to provide new theoretical frameworks or exhaustive literature reviews as a way to discuss critical topics in the industry. Academic research can be used to not only develop and support theory while adding to the vast amount of scholarly literature, it can also help solve industry problems. Sutton (2012) suggested sport scholars have more training in research methods and statistics than most sport industry professionals and will meaningfully contribute to solving sport industry problems. However, industry is not utilizing the academic research. To highlight this phenomenon the original purpose of *Sport Marketing Quarterly* (SMQ) was to be the journal of choice for the academy to create and disseminate academic contributions and for practitioners where they could apply the knowledge to the sport industry. However, when asked specifically about bridging the gap between theory and practice “the gap exists and unfortunately, we (SMQ) are not

addressing it” (Lough, 2011, p. 204).

Ottesen and Gronhaug (2004) provide direction to address the two main reasons they perceive for the lack of utilization. They state, “in order to enhance the usefulness of academic marketing knowledge to practitioners, we need to understand what types of information they perceive as useful as well as factors that might impair the transfer of research information from academia to practice” (Ottesen & Gronhaug, 2004, p. 526). As sponsorship research continues to accelerate, we found discrepancies still exist among discussed topics between industry and practice. To address the first concern, the current review is taking a novel approach by including industry articles and comparing them theoretically to academic articles. No review paper until now has examined how sponsorship is being discussed not only in academia but among industry publications. Additionally, this study will provide further detail on the second point which found: sport management research is often taken the wrong way by industry leaders (Zaharia & Kaburakis, 2016), different agendas and priorities of the two groups regarding research findings (Welsh et al., 2008), and research findings from sport management journals may not even reach industry professionals (King, 2013; Newman, 2014; Stotlar & Braa, 2012; Ziegler, 2007).

## Methods

### Research Design

In order to provide a comprehensive review of the literature across both academia and industry, content analysis was used to identify the topics discussed in the articles for each sector.

To gain a better understanding of research, one may examine the body of literature it produces. One approach used to further analyze literature is through content analysis (Pedersen & Pitts, 2001). Content analysis has been described as a process and analysis of written, verbal, or visual communication (Cole,

1988). This process includes a collective review of specific material or content that is bucketed into smaller number of categories or themes with the ultimate goal to “provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). Content analysis is useful in identifying patterns, themes, biases, and other meanings (Berg, 2007), and has been used to provide further analysis within sport management journals (i.e., *European Journal of Sport Management*, *Journal of Sport Management*, *Journal of Sport Economics*, *Sport Marketing Quarterly*). As well as sports related literature: online marketing (Brown, 2003), sport celebrities in advertising (Stone et al., 2003), and description requirements (Bae & Miller, 2011). This examination included a review of academic journals and industry articles from January 2017 to April 2022 and attempted to build upon the methods used in the first four reviews discussed previously (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Johnston & Spais, 2015; Walliser, 2003).

A database search was conducted using Business Source Complete and Web of Science Core Collection, formerly known as ISI Web of Knowledge. Some of the databases used by Cornwell and Maignan (1998) are no longer available. In addition, a manual search of each weekly Sports Business Journal, and the Sports Business Daily was conducted for the same time frame. This study also included other relevant industry publications that were related to sponsorship and sport such as Forbes and Marketing Week. However, excluded from this search were conference presentations, research notes, and book reviews, similar to other previous studies. To try and replicate previous scoping reviews as much as possible, when conducting both the academic and industry reviews, “sponsorship”, “sport sponsorship”, and “partnership(s)” were the keywords used to perform the general searches. Upon review of the abstracts, articles that were solely an announcement or not related to sport sponsorship from a business perspective were removed. Furthermore, because this review is examining trends, one category

“Scandal” was removed as it was related to a singular event. In this case, the event was the 2014 FIFA World Cup corruption scandal and a total of 18 articles were removed.

Analyzing the articles was accomplished by aggregating all of the content categories. Each article was generalized and grouped by the following fields: Academia vs Industry, Item type, Publication year, Author, Title, Category, Subcategory, Publication title, Abstract, Date, Journal abbreviation, Manual tags, Automatic tags. All the articles were reviewed and organized by a group of four (4) coders to ensure all content was related to the topic. The coders all have relevant academic professional accolades, and two (2) in particular have heavy sport industry experience, followed a line-by-line coding procedure with each article being analyzed (i.e., words in the title, abstract, and or listed as a keyword) and then coded appropriately based on the content of the article. To capture research topics, the coders referred to the main subjects in sponsorship. The analysis started with very detailed classification and were then grouped into more broad categories. If any of the articles covered multiple topics on sponsorship, it was coded into multiple topic categories. The full text of articles were also examined when the title or abstract could not clearly identify a category. The criteria to help the trustworthiness was set from the beginning of the project where the researchers clearly defined the validation terms (Tucker et al., 2011) and followed verification and authenticity as outlined by Crewswell (2013). Full text were obtained by library search engines, or the journals directly. A total of 584 articles were identified with 231 in academic journals and 353 in industry publications.

## Results

Analyzing the articles was a three-step process. Step One was to identify categories based on topics and the percentage each topic makes of the whole. Step Two was to examine academic and industry articles

**Table 2.** *Categories and Descriptions*

Category	Description
Activation	Marketing tactics used to promote or engage a sponsorship
Ambush Marketing	Non-sponsoring organizations attempt to introduce and associate their product or brand name to an event with official sponsors
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Sustainability and environmental topics
Digital and Social	The use of digital and social media technology to support sponsorship
Endorsement	Corporate spokesperson promoting a brand or service
eSports	Competitive video game playing
Gambling	A bet or wager offering a chance to win money or another desired outcome
Identification	The recognition and purchase intent towards sponsorship
Shirt Sponsorship	Corporate branding on team jerseys
Measurement	Evaluation of sponsorship effectiveness
Naming Rights	The legal right to name a facility or event
Rivalry	Relationship between opposing teams and their supporters
Termination	The ending or release of a sponsorship agreement
Women's Sports	Commercial opportunities through women sports teams

individually to determine the number of articles and percentage of the total relative to itself. Step Three of the process was then to compare the difference of the percentages between industry and academia for each of the categories.

For Step One, each article was first placed into one category according to its main topic. Upon completion of this process, 15 categories were identified. Because this review is examining trends, one category "Scandal" was removed as it was related to a singular event. In this case, the event was the 2014 FIFA World Cup corruption scandal. The remaining 14 topics are listed alphabetically in Table 2. with a brief description.

Following the categorical placing of articles, the total number of articles within each category was calculated and divided by the total number of articles to determine the percentage each topic contributed to the total. Table 3. shows the most written about categories in rank order with Identification as the most written about topic, accounting for 23.18% of all articles. Followed by Activation at 19.74%, Digital & Social at 14.59%, and Measurement at 12.66%. Rounding out the top 5 was the category of Gambling which accounted for 10.30% of all articles written.

**Table 3.** *Rank of Categories for All Articles*

Rank	Category	Combined	% of All Articles
	Total	584	100.00%
1	Identification	108	23.18%
2	Activation	92	19.74%
3	Digital & Social	68	14.59%
4	Measurement	59	12.66%
5	Gambling	48	10.30%
6	eSports	45	9.66%
Tie 7/ 8	Endorsement	41	8.80%
Tie 7/ 8	Jersey Sponsorship	41	8.80%
9	Naming Rights	25	5.36%
10	CSR	17	3.65%
11	Ambush Marketing	16	3.43%
Tie 12/13/14	Rivalry	8	1.72%
Tie 12/13/14	Termination	8	1.72%
Tie 12/13/14	Women's Sports	8	1.72%

Step Two was to examine academic and industry articles individually to determine the number of articles and percentage of the total relative to itself. As noted in Table 4., when comparing the rankings for both

audience types, Activation and Digital & Social were in the top five for both groups; however, Activation comprised 18.41% of all industry articles while only comprising 11.69% of academic articles. Digital & Social comprised 14.16% of the industry total while only comprising 7.79% of the academic total. Both categories were ranked higher in industry than academia. Activation was ranked first in the industry and third in the academic literature, while Digital & Social was ranked second in the industry and fourth in academia. Within the bottom five, Women’s Sports and Termination appeared in both groups. Women’s Sports ranked tenth in industry, comprising 2.27% of all industry articles and fourteenth in academia which had zero articles on the topic. Comparatively, Termination ranked eleventh in both industry (1.42%)

and academia (1.3%). The two categories in the top five in industry that appeared in the bottom five of academia were eSports and Jersey Sponsorship. eSports comprised 12.46% of all industry articles while only comprising 0.43% of academic articles. Likewise, Jersey Sponsorship comprised 11.33% of all industry articles while only comprising 0.43% of academic articles. Conversely, Identification was ranked first in academia comprising 39.39% of all academic articles, but was ninth in industry comprising only 4.82% of industry articles.

Finally, Step Three of the process, because the number of academic articles (N=231) was not equal to the number of industry articles (N=353), was to compare the difference of the percentages between industry and academia for each of the categories. The comparison

**Table 4.** Rank of category for each sector

Industry				Academia			
Rank	Category	Number	% of All Industry Articles	Rank	Category	Number	% of All Academic Articles
	Total	353	100%		Total	231	100%
1	Activation	65	18.41%	1	Identification	91	39.39%
2	Digital & Social	50	14.16%	2	Measurement	30	12.99%
3	eSports	44	12.46%	3	Activation	27	11.69%
4	Gambling	43	12.18%	4	Digital & Social	18	7.79%
5	Jersey Sponsorship	40	11.33%	5	Endorsement	16	6.93%
6	Measurement	29	8.22%	6	CSR	15	6.49%
7	Endorsement	25	7.08%	7	Ambush Marketing	12	5.19%
8	Naming Rights	21	5.95%	8	Rivalry	8	3.46%
9	Identification	17	4.82%	9	Gambling	5	2.16%
10	Women's Sports	8	2.27%	10	Naming Rights	4	1.73%
11	Termination	5	1.42%	11	Termination	3	1.30%
12	Ambush Marketing	4	1.13%	Tie 12/13	eSports	1	0.43%
13	CSR	2	0.57%	Tie 12/13	Jersey Sponsorship	1	0.43%
14	Rivalry	0	0%	14	Women's Sports	0	0%

was made using the percentage that each topic was discussed within industry articles versus the percent that each topic was discussed within academic articles. For each category, the degree of positive difference indicated the amount that the topic was identified more in industry versus academia. On the other hand, the degree of negative difference is the amount that the topic was discussed more in academia versus industry. Then, the categories were divided into three groups: industry heavy, academic heavy, and balanced.

Categories considered balanced were those that had less than a four percent difference, whether positive or negative, between the percentage of articles that discussed the topic within the industry and the percentage of articles that discussed the topic within

academia. Table 5 displays the difference of the percentages between industry and academia for each of the categories and whether the categories are industry heavy, academic heavy, and balanced. Table 5. displays the difference of the percentages between industry and academia for each of the categories.

The industry heavy categories are those which had the most positive differences greater than four percent, which included eSports (12.03%), Jersey Sponsorship (10.90%), Gambling (10.02%), Activation (6.73%), and Digital & Social (6.37%), and Naming Rights (4.22%). The academic heavy categories, which had negative differences greater than negative four percent in order from largest amount of difference to least were: Identification (-34.58%), Corporate Social Responsibility

**Table 5.** *Category article numbers and percentages in academia and industry*

Category	Number			Percent		
	Industry	Academia	Total	Industry	Academia	Difference
Total	353	231	584			
Industry Heavy						
eSports	44	1	45	12.46%	0.43%	12.03%
Jersey Sponsorship	40	1	41	11.33%	0.43%	10.90%
Gambling	43	5	48	12.18%	2.16%	10.02%
Activation	65	27	92	18.41%	11.69%	6.73%
Digital & Social	50	18	68	14.16%	7.79%	6.37%
Naming Rights	21	4	25	5.95%	1.73%	4.22%
Academic Heavy						
Identification	17	91	108	4.82%	39.39%	-34.57%
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	2	15	17	0.57%	6.49%	-5.92%
Measurement	29	30	59	8.22%	12.99%	-4.77%
Ambush Marketing	4	12	16	1.13%	5.19%	-4.06%
Balanced						
Termination	5	3	8	1.42%	1.30%	0.12%
Endorsement	25	16	41	7.08%	6.93%	0.15%
Women's Sports	8	0	8	2.27%	0.00%	2.27%
Rivalry	0	8	8	0.00%	3.46%	-3.46%

(CSR) (-5.93%), Measurement (-4.77%), and Ambush Marketing (-4.06%). In order of the least to most amount of difference in percentages, the balanced categories were: Termination (0.12%), Endorsement (0.15%), Women’s Sports (2.27%), and Rivalry (-3.46%).

## Discussion

The results from this study shows topical gaps do exist between the academy and the industry. Of the 14 themes discovered, only seven, or 50%, showed a percentage point differential of five points or less, and therefore, could be classified as balanced for the purpose of this study. However, in two of the seven cases, “rivalry” and “women’s sports,” showed a result of zero. For example, 3.27% of all academic sponsorship articles were thematically classified as “rivalry” whereas none of the industry sponsorship articles were classified as such. Conversely, 2.11% of all industry sponsorship articles were thematically classified as “women’s sports” while none of the academic sponsorship articles were classified as that thematic. Excluding then those two themes from the balanced category, only 5 of the 14, or 35.7%, can be considered balanced while 28.5% of the thematic were academic focused, and 35.7% were industry focused.

Analyzing research trends in a specific discipline can improve and provide greater knowledge, in this case about sport sponsorship. This review compared the amount of academic and industry articles that discussed various sponsorship and found a misalignment of academic research with industry needs. Academics focused on certain categories while industry focused on others. Within some categories there was a clear distinction in how differently they discussed certain topics. However, some categories did demonstrate balance. The following section will discuss these relationships, suggest methods to improve alignment, and provide direction for future research. The industry focused categories were eSports, Jersey Sponsorship,

Gambling, Activation, Digital & Social, and Naming Rights. The reasons these topics are industry focused is because they are current and newsworthy topics of discussion.

There is a discrepancy between academia and industry when it comes to publishing content. So what if gaps do exist? Some would argue that when it comes to article publication, the academy and industry have different purposes or priorities. The priority for industry is simply news production. The primary responsibility of industry professionals is to have news in order to make immediate decisions. One example of this would be the Sports Business Journal (SBJ). This outlet is a guide for sport industry professionals as it provides great reporting, authoritative voices and expert opinions. The content is updated constantly, and it covers every aspect of the sport industry. “We provide our high-end readers – consisting of team owners; top TV network, league and marketing executives; attorneys; corporate sponsors and other Fortune 500 companies – with the essential information they need to perform their jobs effectively. We provide not only the substance of today’s news, but also the spin, while original features from our experienced staff provide in-depth analysis of the industry’s latest trends” (Sports Business Journal, n.d.).

Contrary to industry publications, the role of the academy is to pursue more theory-based research than applied research. One way to showcase and disseminate scholarly work is by submitting work in peer-reviewed publications. Publishing in top-tier journals is important and essential in the academy. Not only does it play a role in the sharing of ideas, but it also influences the career advancement of individual scholars (Baruch & Hall, 2004) and is necessary for tenure and promotion (Glick et al., 2007). Knowledge contribution and career advancement are the main reasons to publish and validate research trends yet there is a time lag in completing rigorous studies that are submitted for peer review.

One reason these topics may not be discussed as frequently in academia is because of the review cycle

for publication and some of these topics are somewhat new. During this review, the top sports leagues in North America have been making decisions to begin or expand jersey sponsorship deals. Additionally, midway through this review timeline (May 14, 2018), the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) which has opened a door for each state to legalize sports betting. Both eSports and digital and social media although still in their infancy, are becoming more accepted and prominent in academic literature and we expect to see more on these topics in the near future.

Though there are tools like Google Scholar that can help one gain access to conference papers and versions of academic articles before they are actually published, a major barrier is that unless one has a current affiliation with a university library, it is extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to have or be given access to academic journals. It is also costly for anyone outside of academia to access content. This is a huge loss to both industry and academia as these barriers don't allow opportunities for growth and innovation.

One way for the academy to provide details on upcoming articles beyond the review cycle, may be to write a white paper or post more content in popular sport journals, or other publications that are not peer reviewed. Writing a white paper can allow scholars to remain thought leaders and experts in their field, while attracting attention to upcoming journal publications. This should be considered as an effective platform to provide relevant communication between industry and academy. It may even open doors allowing for further collaboration on ideas and topics of interest. Additionally, doing some kind of public relations across social media to promote one's research may expand audience coverage.

In contrast, the academic focused categories were Identification, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Measurement, and Ambush Marketing. These topics are related to the psychology of consumer behavior and require the rigor and time to develop methodologies.

The analysis of research shows the most frequently studied topic was Identification, which is quite robust with more than 40% of articles related to this topic.

The ongoing debate about sport management as a research field consists of papers from academic journals including Zeigler (1987, 2007), Slack (1991, 1996, 1998) Boucher (1998), Pitts (2001), Frisby (2005), Amis and Silk (2005), Chalip (2006), Thibault (2009), Hums (2010), Ciomaga (2013), Newman (2014), and Stewart (2014). Stotlar (2004) argued their view on this debate and said "Those who propose theory without a connection to practice are as misguided as practitioners who disregard relevant theory" (Stotlar, 2004, p. 63). It is obvious sport management theories or concepts are important and allow a more in-depth discussion towards certain phenomena, but specifically in this paper we are calling for more intentional engagement using theoretical frameworks to help align topics among industry and academia.

The finding that these topics are heavily discussed in academic research is consistent with Cornwell and Kwon's (2020) systematic review of the sponsorship literature which found, "publications considering consumers (236) dominated all other topics (173)" (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020, p. 609). When speaking of the reason for the frequency of these articles, they mentioned Kim et al. (2015) meta-analytic review of the literature about the factors influencing sponsorship effectiveness which found fit to be consistent in its ability to impact sponsorship outcomes. Cornwell and Kwon (2020) state, "It has less to do with the profundity of fit (which has not been challenged by the use of control variables, e.g., length of relationship, overlapping values, in most studies), and more to do with the attractiveness of this empirical regularity in producing statistical significance" (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020, p. 608).

Those topics with a similar amount of interest in both industry and academia were Termination, Endorsement, Women's Sports, and Rivalry. Other than Endorsement, these categories may be considered balanced because

they are not being discussed very often by both industry and academia. In fact, Rivalry has not been discussed by the industry while Women’s Sports did not appear in this review of the academic literature.

This review builds upon and confirms the research by Cornwell and Kwon (2020). It expands their research by including industry articles and comparing them to the academic literature. The current review confirms their suggestion that there is a “surplus of articles related to consumer behavior” as indicated by the academic focused topics being about the psychology of consumer behavior. Further, the current review’s findings that each of the categories considered industry focused were focused on a strategy or medium for engaging the consumer with the sponsorship which supports Cornwell and Kwon’s (2020) suggestion that there is a “shortage of articles discussing the management process”.

### Future Direction for Research and Practice

Understanding the pressing concerns of industry professionals will lead to better engagement between researchers and industry and may broaden research topics or needs, as well as the discovery of future direction in the field. This study examined sponsorship and associated keywords by including industry articles in order to capture more knowledge, direction, and understanding of the literature. The results provided more insight into and highlighted the clear differences in the interests of academia and industry. Further they confirmed Cornwell and Kwon’s (2020) findings of the surplus and shortages in their meta-analytic review of the sponsorship literature.

A limited number of firms utilize universities for their information and knowledge (Laursen & Salter, 2004; Welsh et al., 2008). To better align future research, it would be beneficial for the academy and practitioners to engage with each other to share ideas and encourage collaboration. One problem among collaboration is the difference in agendas or priorities regarding research findings (Welsh et al., 2008). But, understanding the

real concerns of industry professionals will lead to better engagement between researchers and industry and may broaden research topics or needs. One way to foster engaging relationships may be to have industry advisory boards, consisting of industry and faculty members. This could help maintain effective communication channels between both parties to find new research topics. Danylichuk and Boucher (2003) indicate research channels / partnerships with sports business professionals represented one of the most effective ways to advance the discipline. Because of their responsibility for rigorous research, the academy should facilitate the collaboration process to meet the needs of industry.

Attending industry conferences and presenting findings is another way to help show industry professionals how academia can help support them. MIT Sloan Conference had literally thousands of industry professionals gathered to hear how statistical models and quantitative approaches are being applied to their problems. In a way, the growth of this conference, and other similar conferences, is a demonstration of change pertaining to the value of statistics in the eyes of those in the industry, which used to be confined solely to academia. The academy should be leading and showcasing their expertise at these conferences as a way to encourage industry professionals to seek their guidance.

Regarding the sport management academy and the sports industry, there is still a gap of industry-university research linkages (Chalip, 2006; Costa, 2005; Irwin & Ryan, 2013; Parks, 1992; Stotlar & Braa, 2012). To truly close the gap between academia and industry, Pedersen and Pitts (2001) state journal articles in the sport management academy should not only provide up to date theoretical constructs, but also include practical implications. Similarly, Barker (2018) states it is important to go beyond developing complex solutions that do not have real world or practical relevance. Because many industry professionals may not have experience in understanding research and its significance, it may be appropriate for white papers or

other articles to clearly spell out how research can be applied to industry professionals. Sutton (2012) mentioned the scholars have more research and statistical training than most sport industry professionals and will meaningfully contribute to helping solve their problems. This is a way for the academy to align themselves with these organizations and to offer their services. In addition, it is important for research to account for new or emerging themes. This can only happen when both parties are in constant contact and willing to support each other.

Future studies may include additional sport related topics that should be included to accurately reflect the depth of academic contributions. As new topics emerge, these topics should continue to be investigated and written about by the academy. Once research topics of industry professionals are selected and written in a practical manner using language that is understood by industry, research should be presented at venues which would ensure greater dissemination among industry professionals. For example, research may be included in industry read publications in addition to academic journals, holding industry related events on campus, and working with academic research centers. Kumar (2017) supports research institutes as a way to “enable interaction between faculty, scholars, students and industry to enhance research opportunities, academic excellence, real-world, problem solving, and knowledge creation and dissemination” (Kumar, 2017, p. 454). Additionally, as an incentive for strong collaboration, academic departments may develop a reward system to coordinate research collaborations between both parties.

### Limitations and Future Research

In order to gather a more complete picture of what is discussed between industry and academia, it may be worthwhile to look at other topics to see if there is a similar difference between discussed topics among industry and practitioners. Also, while this research was developed within the U.S, it might not be applicable

to other countries. Researchers could test these findings in other countries to see if these findings are similar. Additionally, the content analysis, which is mostly dependent on the frequency of individual words that have been selected by the author(s) may be a limitation. In other words, especially in the industrial report data, it cannot be sure that appeared words might have not been captured solely by industry professionals’ interest. Future research should explore a more in-depth content analysis on topics in sponsorships. In this paper for example, measurement is discussed in both the academia and industry, but using content analysis one could see how this topic is being discussed among both groups.

### References

- Amis, J., & Silk, M. (2005). Promoting critical and innovative approaches to the study of sport management. *Journal of Sport Management*, **19**(4), 355-366. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.19.4.355>
- Bae, S., & Miller, J. (2011). A content analysis of sales and marketing job description requirements in the sport business industry: What should students be prepared for? *International Journal of Sport Management*, **12**, 379-392.
- Barker, A. (2018). An academic’s observations from a sabbatical at Google. *Communications of the ACM*, **61**(9), 31-33.
- Baruch, Y., & Hall, D. T. (2004). The academic career: A model for future careers in other sectors? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, **64**, 241-262.
- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods* (6th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Boucher, R. L. (1998). Toward achieving a focal point for sport management: A binocular perspective. *Journal of Sport Management*, **12**(1), 76-85. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.12.1.76>
- Bowers, M. T., Green, B. C., & Seifried, C. S. (2014). “Let the marketplace be the judge”: The founders reflect on the origins and trajectory of NASSM.

- Journal of Sport Management*, **28**, 565-587.  
doi:10.1123/jsm.2012-0335
- Brown, M. T. (2003). An analysis on online marketing in the sport industry: User activity, communication objectives, and perceived benefits. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, **12**, 48-55.
- Chalip, L. (2006). Toward a distinctive sport management discipline. *Journal of Sport Management*, **20**(1), 1-21.
- Ciomaga, B. (2013). Sport management: A bibliometric study on central themes and trends. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, **13**(5), 557-578.  
https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.838283
- Cole, F. L. (1988). Content analysis: Process and application. *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, **2**, 53-57.  
https://doi.org/10.1097/00002800-198800210-00025
- Cornwell, T. B., & Kwon, Y. (2020). Sponsorship-linked marketing: Research surpluses and shortages. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, **48**, 607-629. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00654-w
- Cornwell, T. B., & Maignan, I. (1998). An international review of sponsorship research. *Journal of Advertising*, **27**(1), 1-21.
- Costa, C. A. (2005). The status and future of sport management: A Delphi study. *Journal of Sport Management*, **19**, 117-142.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Danylchuk, K. E., & Boucher, R. (2003). The future of sport management as an academic discipline. *International Journal of Sport Management*, **4**, 281-300.
- Downe-Wamboldt, B. (1992). Content analysis: Method, applications, and issues. *Health Care for Women International*, **13**, 314. https://doi.org/10.1080/07399339209516006
- Fink, J. S. (2013). Theory development in sport management: My experience and other considerations. *Sport Management Review*, **16**(1), 17-21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2011.12.005
- Frisby, W. (2005). The good, the bad, and the ugly: Critical sport management research. *Journal of Sport Management*, **19**(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.19.1.1
- Glick, W. H., Miller, C. C., & Cardinal, L. B. (2007). Making a life in the field of organization science. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, **28**, 817-835.
- Gwinner, K. P., & Eaton, J. (1999). Building brand image through event sponsorship: The role of image transfer. *Journal of Advertising*, **28**(4), 47-57.
- Hums, M. A. (2010). The conscience and commerce of sport management: One teacher’s perspective. *Journal of Sport Management*, **24**(1), 1-9.  
https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.24.1.1
- Irwin, R. L., & Ryan, T. D. (2013). Get real: Using engagement with practice to advance theory transfer and production. *Sport Management Review*, **16**, 12-16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2011.12.007
- Johnston, M. A., & Spais, G. S. (2015). Conceptual foundations of sponsorship research. *Journal of Promotion Management*, **21**(3), 296-312.
- Kim, Y. K., Lee, H. W., Magnusen, M. J., & Kim, M. (2015). Factors influencing sponsorship effectiveness: A meta-analytic review and research synthesis. *Journal of Sport Management*, **29**(4), 408-425.
- King, B. (2013). *Can academic research help sports industry?* Sports Business Journal. Retrieved from https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Journal/Issues/2013/08/12/In-Depth/Sports-business-professors.aspx?hl=Can+academic+research+help+sports+industry&sc=0
- Kumar, V. (2017). The role of university research centers in promoting research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, **45**(4), 438-458. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0496-3
- Laursen, K., & Salter, A. (2004). Searching high and low: What types of firms use universities as a source of innovation? *Research Policy*, **33**, 1201-1215. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2004.07

- .004
- Lough, N. (2011). Past editors' retrospective: Twenty years of sport marketing quarterly. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, **20**, 203-208.
- Madrigal, R. (2000). The influence of social alliances with sports teams on intentions to purchase corporate sponsors' products. *Journal of Advertising*, **29**(4), 13-24.
- Mahony, D. F., & Pitts, B. G. (1998). Research outlets in sport marketing: The need for increased specialization. *Journal of Sport Management*, **12**(4), 259-272.
- Newman, J. I. (2014). Sport without management. *Journal of Sport Management*, **28**, 603-615. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2012-0159>
- North American Society for Sport Management (2013). *Constitution of the North American Society for Sport Management*. Retrieved from <https://www.nassm.com/sites/default/files/NASSM%20Constitution%20June%202014.pdf>
- Ottesen, G. G., & Gronhaug, K. (2004). Exploring the dynamics of market orientation in turbulent environments: A case study. *European Journal of Marketing*, **38**(8), 956-73.
- Parks, J. B. (1992). Scholarship: The other "bottom line" in sport management. *Journal of Sport Management*, **6**(3), 220-229.
- Pedersen, P., & Pitts, B. (2001). Investigating the body of knowledge in sport management: A content analysis of the Sport Marketing Quarterly. *The Chronicle of Physical Education in Higher Education*, **12**(3), 8-9, 22-23.
- Petz, T. B., & Reams, L. (2011). A content analysis of Sport Marketing Quarterly: 1992-2011. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, **20**, 209-218.
- Pitts, B. G. (2001). Sport management at the millennium: A defining moment. *Journal of Sport Management*, **15**(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.15.1.1>
- Slack, T. (1991). Sport management: Some thoughts on future directions. *Journal of Sport Management*, **5**(2), 95-99. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.5.2.95>
- Slack, T. (1996). From the locker room to the board room: Changing the domain of sport management. *Journal of Sport Management*, **10**(1), 97-105. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.10.1.97>
- Slack, T. (1998). Is there anything unique about sport management? *European Journal for Sport Management*, **5**, 21-29.
- Sports Business Journal (n.d.). <https://sportsmarketingnetwork.com/memberdiscounts/sportsbusinessdaily.shtml>
- Stewart, B. (2014). "Sport without management": A response. *Journal of Sport Management*, **28**(6), 616-620. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2014-0256>
- Stone, G., Joseph, M., & Jones, M. (2003). An exploratory study on the use of sports celebrities in advertising: A content analysis. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, **10**, 35-42.
- Stotlar, D. K. (2004). Sponsorship evaluation: Moving from theory to practice. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, **13**(1), 61-64.
- Stotlar, D. K., & Braa, L. L. (2012). Theory versus practice: A balancing act. In A. Gillentine, R. Baker, & J. Cuneen (Eds.), *Critical essays in sport management: Exploring and achieving a paradigm shift* (pp. 71-83). Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway.
- Sutton, W. A. (2012). Academia and the sports industry: An autoethnography, pracademics, and a collaborative model. In A. Gillentine, R. Baker, & J. Cuneen (Eds.), *Critical essays in sport management: Exploring and achieving a paradigm shift* (pp. 115-124). Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway.
- Thibault, L. (2009). Globalization of sport: An inconvenient truth. *Journal of Sport Management*, **23**(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.23.1.1>
- Tucker, P., van Zandvoort, M. M., Burke, S. M., & Irwin, J. D. (2011). The influence of parents and the home environment on preschoolers' physical activity behaviours: A qualitative investigation of childcare providers' perspectives. *BMC Public Health*, **11**,

- Article 168.
- Wakefield, K. L., Becker-Olsen, K. L., & Cornwell, T. B. (2007). I spy a sponsor: The effects of sponsorship level, prominence, relatedness, and cueing on recall accuracy. In K. M. Ekstrom & H. Brembeck (Eds.), *European advances in consumer research* (Vol. 7, pp. 136-140). Goteborg, Sweden: Association for Consumer Research.
- Wakefield, L., Wakefield, K., & Keller, K. L. (2020). Understanding sponsorship: A consumer-centric model of sponsorship effects. *Journal of Advertising*, **49**(3), 320-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1751011>
- Walliser, B. (2003). An international review of sponsorship research: Extension and update. *International Journal of Advertising*, **22**(1), 5-40.
- Welsh, R., Glenna, L., Lacy, W., & Biscotti, D. (2008). Close enough but not too far: Assessing the effects of university-industry research relationships and the rise of academic capitalism. *Research Policy*, **37**, 1854-1864. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2008.07.010>
- Zaharia, N., & Kaburakis, A. (2016). Bridging the gap: U.S. sport managers on barriers to industry-academia research collaboration. *Journal of Sport Management*, **30**(3), 248-264.
- Zeigler, E. F. (1987). Sport management: Past, present, future. *Journal of Sport Management*, **1**(1), 4-24. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.1.1.4>
- Zeigler, E. F. (2007). Sport management must show social concern as it develops tenable theory. *Journal of Sport Management*, **21**, 297-318.