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Mapping behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research: a review and future research agenda

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a scientific and extensive review of behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research. Also, it informs directions for further studies that help in progressing sports marketing research. 362 articles were extracted using the Scopus database, and an extensive review of these articles was performed using the VOSviewer and Biblioshiny software tools. The performance analysis reveals the most influential articles, authors, sources, organizations, and countries in this domain. The thematic map and trend topic show the domain's development and relevance. The co-citation network revealed four distinct research clusters, themed (a) Sponsorship in sports marketing, (b) Sports as service, (c) Behavioral intention analysis methods in Sports marketing, and (d) Theories and concepts. Finally, the results are summarized using the Theory, Context, and Methodology (TCM) framework. Along with the TCM framework, cluster analysis will also provide avenues for further studies in the form of research questions pertaining to each research cluster.

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Introduction

Sports marketing is an opportunity for organizations to promote their goods and services in a sports-related context (Ratten & Ratten, 2011; Shekhar & Shah, 2023). The corporate environment recognized sports as a highly lucrative market to attract investments and provide business growth opportunities (Shannon, 1999; Sanchez et al., 2022). A sturdy relationship between sports and revenue generation was one of the initial areas that captivated marketing scholars to study sports through the marketing lens. Mullin (1983) brought sports marketing into the foreground by acknowledging and appreciating the sports fan's passion, interests, engagement, consumption, and experience. It laid the foundation for behavioral intention studies in sports marketing and helped the domain evolve. Thus, understanding sports consumer behavior is highly valuable for sports marketing professionals and researchers (Yim et al., 2020).

Jaccard and King (1977) defined behavioral intention as 'a perceived relationship between oneself and some behavior'. Behavioral intention varies according to spectatorship, game attendance, and purchase decisions. Enhancing the consumer's behavioral intention is pivotal to the long-term benefits of brands. It is also helpful in measuring consumer's attitudes toward the products or services offered by the organizations (Bang & Lee, 2014; Xiao et al., 2019). Increasing comprehension of their consumers helps sports marketers design better products and services according to consumer's needs and effectively carry out marketing activities (Kural & Özbek, 2023; Trenberth & Garland, 2007). Consumer's behavioral intentions

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can be enhanced by using social media (Moatar et al., 2022), interactive environments (Uhm et al., 2022), and visual attention (Wang et al., 2022). Behavioral intention studies in sports marketing largely contribute to the sports brand and sponsorship segments.

Despite its initial studies in the early 80s (e.g. Gardner, 1985), sports marketing is still one of the interesting research areas and different dimensions of sports marketing have been studied over the years (Hill & Vincent, 2006; Jankovic & Jaksic-Stojanovic, 2019; Williams et al., 2012). Studies related to sports organizations, sports celebrities, and sports events are still advancing areas of research after a decade (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Hazari, 2018; Lintumäki & Koll, 2023; Nufer & Bühler, 2010; Roy & Pansari, 2014). Additionally, technological developments over the years have also attracted attention from the sports marketing domain, such as the use of social media (Laurell & Söderman, 2018; Witkemper et al., 2012), eSports (Gandomani & Elahi, 2022; Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011), and other technological adoptions (Lee et al., 2021; Oc & Toker, 2022).

Sports marketing studies have been changing and developing for almost 40 years, much like the sports business (Shekhar & Shah, 2023; Hammerschmidt et al., 2023). International firms consider sports marketing a prominent strategy for the survival and growth of their businesses (Ratten & Ratten, 2011). It is hard to overlook sports marketing research's remarkable transformation from a simple strategic management tool to a more expansive and rapidly developing topic with distinctive features. The awareness of consumer behavior in sports has played an important role in the progress of sports marketing research. Behavioral intention studies are well appreciated and have gained value since they drive consumer behaviors (Hulland & Houston, 2021). Over the years, behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research have attracted significant interest from scholars and managers. However, there needs to be more scientific and extensive reviews of this domain to provide the structure and growth of behavioral intention studies and inform directions for further studies that help in progressing sports marketing research, as suggested by Berg et al. (2022).

Hence, this study seeks to address the following questions (RQs):

RQ1: Who are the highly influential authors, and which are the most influential articles, organizations, journals, and countries conducting behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research?

RQ2: Can sports marketing articles be grouped into different research clusters, and how can these research clusters be developed?

RQ3: What is the direction for future studies in sports marketing research and the opportunities for sports marketing scholars?

This study is structured as follows: The literature review section includes a conceptual background on sports marketing and behavioral intention. Section three explains the methods, and section four discusses the results. Section five discusses the implications and future research direction. The final section includes the conclusion and limitations of this study.

Conceptual background

Sports marketing

Chadwick (2005) defined sports marketing as a 'process through which a contest with an uncertain outcome is staged, creating opportunities for the simultaneous fulfillment of objectives among sports customers, sports businesses, participants, and other related individuals, groups, and organizations'. Further, Ratten and Ratten (2011) defined it as 'an opportunity for a corporation or an organization to advertise their services in a sports-related context'. However, sports marketing is viewed from two different lenses: marketing of sports and marketing with sports (Shannon, 1999). The marketing of sports consists of new sports, events, product introductions, and marketing them to audiences. Marketing with sports promotes non-sporting goods and services (Goldman & Johns, 2009). Sports teams and athletes typically promote the products and services.

Parkhouse and Ulrich (1979) portrayed sports marketing as an attractive sport-focused area that is purely a profitable tool alongside sales and marketing. Their study focused on a potentially engaging

discipline that required scientific investigation, theoretical developments, and experienced practitioners to put their knowledge into practice. Meenaghan (1983) recommended the addition of sports marketing to the marketing communication mix in order to widen it. Sports marketing is then reorganized as an umbrella of promotional tools, including commercial sponsorships, publicity, and advertising, instead of being only a commercial tool. Mullin (1983) firmly brought sports marketing into the foreground by presenting three types of marketing: promoting fans' interests, sports participation, and consumption through sports. For sports marketing to be successful, fan interest promotion needed more focus and a greater awareness of the sport's psychological, sociological, and cultural dimensions (Mullin, 1983). This study was one of the most influential in sports marketing that acknowledged the sports fan's passion, interests, engagement, consumption, and experience. Following these studies, Boone et al. (1995) initiated the investigation of the application of brand equity concepts in sports brands such as the famous Major League Baseball (MLB).

Since then, studies have been conducted in diverse areas of sports marketing, considering multiple contexts and approaches, such as conceptual studies (Fullerton & Merz, 2008; Witkemper et al., 2012), empirical studies (Duan et al., 2020; Hall & O'Mahony, 2006), and experimental studies (Kim & Na, 2007; Yuan et al., 2019). Further, different sports marketing contexts stimulated interest among sports scholars. For example, sports consumer behavior (Kim & Trail, 2010; Liebl et al., 2022), attachment (Ladhari et al., 2022; Welzmueller & Schmidt, 2022), sports analytics (Muniz & Flamand, 2022), sports strategy (Mastromartino & Naraine, 2021), and cause-related marketing (CRM) in sports (Han & Lee, 2021).

Behavioral intention

Spears and Singh (2004) defined behavioral intention as the behavioral tendencies of an individual depending on their feelings, cognition, and assessment of experiences. It might be favorable or unfavorable (Ladhari et al., 2022). The favorable intentions indicate the consumer's loyalty, which includes recommending, repurchasing, and spreading positive word-of-mouth about the product or services (Jin et al., 2013; Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). The theory of reasoned action (TRA) suggests that behavior is the result of behavioral intention. Behavioral intention leads to specific behaviors; these intentions are directed by an individual's attitude regarding the purchase of brands and by subjective norms and normative values (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Behavioral intentions confirm the possibility of implementing a particular behavior (Oliver, 2014). Wilson et al. (1975) also confirmed the findings of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) that intention is genuinely a predecessor of actual behavior. Studies assessing behavioral intentions are among the prominent research areas in sports marketing. Especially studies related to participation (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010), team identification (Lee, 2021; Salari & Mazyari, 2020), and brand image (Lee et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020).

Methods and data

This study has incorporated the recommendations from Donthu et al. (2021) in reviewing the literature. This recommendation consists of a four-step procedure that is discussed below. The procedure helped identify the themes and future directions.

Define the aims and scope of the bibliometric study

The present study aims to impart an understanding of the bibliometric and intellectual structure of behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research. The bibliometric structure provides publication productivity, whereas the intellectual structure provides the major topics and themes of research in this domain (Donthu et al., 2021; Nazari et al., 2024). The scope for the review is relatively large, as behavioral intention studies in sports marketing have a history of over a decade. This study is instrumental in providing the existing state of literature in the domain and suggests direction for further studies by providing diverse research streams and questions (Lorenzo-Lledó et al., 2023).

Choose the techniques for bibliometric analysis

This study uses bibliometric and content analysis techniques to map the development of the domain. Specifically, the study conducts a performance analysis using bibliometric measures such as citations and h-index, as well as trend topic, thematic map, and three-field map analysis to reveal the major topics. Further, co-citation analysis is performed to unpack the themes in the research field, which is carefully read by the authors for the content analysis.

Collect the data for bibliometric analysis

To conduct the bibliometric analysis, a comprehensive search formula is mandatory. To obtain the search formula, a list of keywords was identified using the existing studies. The aim is to find the right terms to gather the pool of published articles. The focus of this article revolves around behavioral intentions, especially in the sports marketing domain. Hence, the terms included '*sports marketing, sport**' since the study required data only from this domain. Further terms such as '*behavioral intention, purchase intention, watching intention, visiting intention, fan behavior, willingness to buy, and revisiting intention*' are also included to gather data that covers behavioral intention studies. The search query included '*sports marketing OR sport**' AND '*behavioral intention OR behavioral intention OR purchase intention OR watching intention OR visiting intention OR fan behavior OR fan behavior OR willingness to buy OR revisiting intention*'. The selected search terms were searched on the Scopus database combined with the Boolean operator 'OR' to obtain a complete set of articles. The Boolean operator 'AND' extracted articles consisting of both sports marketing and behavioral intentions. The primary search provided 622 articles.

This study used the Scopus database to collect the data. Scopus offers comprehensive coverage of the literature. Scopus has over 44000 peer-reviewed journals in its database, over 87 million publications, and over 1.8 billion citations listed on Scopus (Elsevier, 2023). Scopus provides better coverage than other databases, such as the Web of Science (Antwi et al., 2022). This study has used the Scopus database to collect data for analysis, which is consistent with existing studies (Abhishek, 2021).

To extract the right pool of articles that represent the topic this study intends to review, inclusion and exclusion criteria were set. The domain of sports marketing falls under the subject area of management, broadly. Therefore, the subject area is restricted to 'Business, Management, and Accounting', resulting in 417 articles. The search is then limited to published articles. Only articles, reviews, and conference papers were selected for analysis, which resulted in 370 articles. Further, the English-language documents were chosen, and the articles published from 2000 to 2023 (July) were considered for analysis. Finally, the output resulted in 362 articles for analysis (Figure 1). These articles, including information on citations, bibliographic details, keywords, abstracts, and references, were extracted in a comma-separated (.csv) file using Scopus.

Run the bibliometric analysis and report the findings

The data analysis plan broadly explains the tools and analyses that would be carried out to provide the relevant insights. This study used VOSviewer and Biblioshiny software for data analysis. VOSviewer is used for bibliometric network visualization, thematic analysis, cluster analysis, and related analyzes (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014; Nazari et al., 2024). In the current study, VOSviewer is used to identify the top ten most cited authors, journals, articles, organizations, countries, and co-citation networks. Further, Biblioshiny, a graphical interface of 'bibliometrix', an R tool, is an efficient tool for science mapping that provides alternatives for analysis and visualization (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). The tool was developed by Aria and Cuccurullo (2017). Biblioshiny was used to conduct authors' local impact, sources' local impact, trend topic, thematic map, and three field plot analyzes in this study.

Results

Details of publication

Figure 2 represents the annual production of research articles in this domain. It shows that behavioral intention studies in sports marketing are growing with a 9.66% growth rate. The articles have received

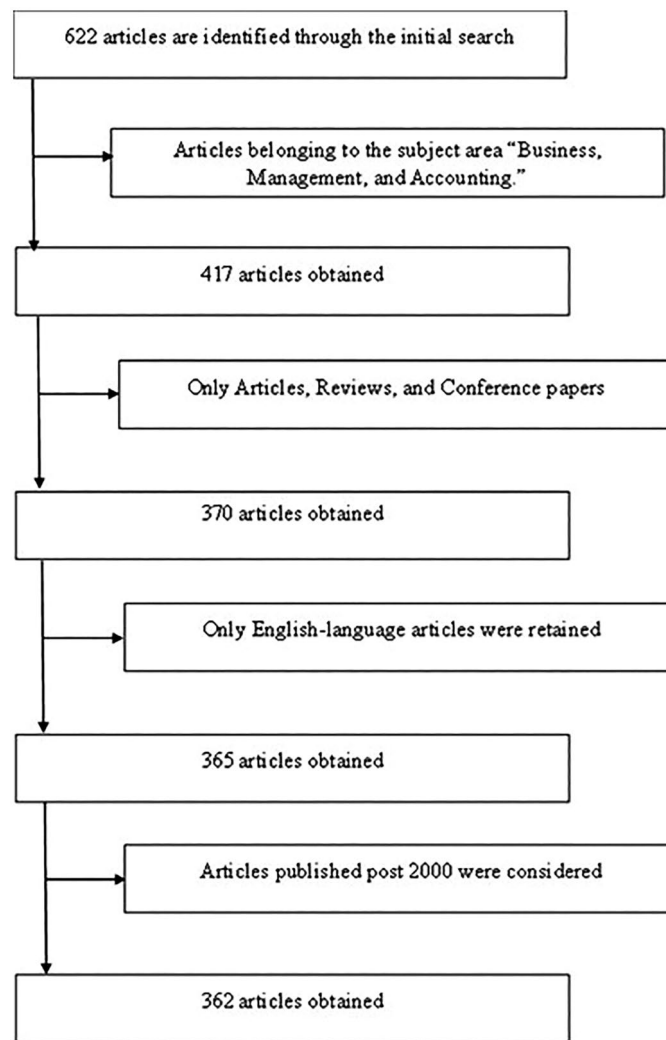


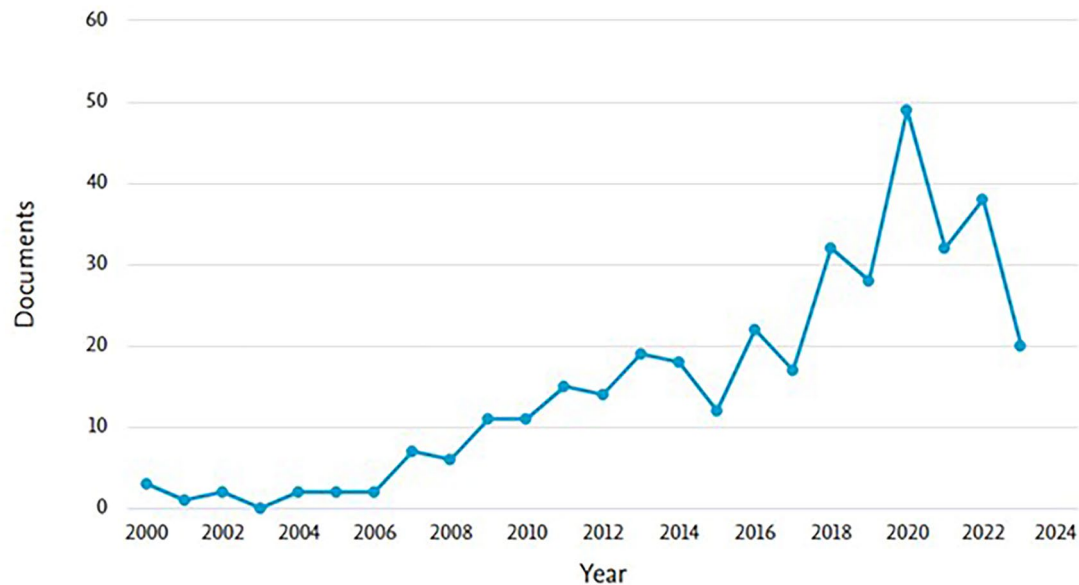
Figure 1. Steps involved in obtaining the articles for review.
Source: Scopus.

an average of 30.07 citations per document, an average of 2.98 coauthors per article, and a total reference of 20757. There were also 17 single-authored articles.

209 (57.7%) articles with more than ten citations per article were found in an article-wise analysis. 'Korea's destination image formed by the 2002 World Cup' by Lee et al. (2005) is the most influential article, with 410 citations. This empirical study provides insights into the impact of destination image dimensions on sports consumers' behavioral intentions. Hightower et al. (2002) received 386 citations. Their study evaluates the relationship between servicescape and service factors influencing consumers' behavioral intentions. The article 'Social identity effects in a belief-attitude-intentions hierarchy: implications for corporate sponsorship' by Madrigal (2001) received 298 citations. This study tested a belief, attitude, and intention hierarchy for corporate sponsorship of the university team. Results indicated the significance of team identification in moderating the sports consumer's purchase intention. Further, Table 1 shows the domain's top ten highly influential articles.

The result of an author-wise analysis indicated that 206 authors have at least one article and a minimum of ten citations per article. Table 2 reveals the top ten highly cited authors in this domain. Yoshida M. is the most influential author, with nine articles and 621 citations. Biscaia R. is the second most influential author with 13 articles and 594 citations, followed by Alexandris K. with eight articles and 439 citations. The 'authors' local impact' analysis performed on biblioshiny indicated that Biscaia R. has the highest h-index of 10, followed by Alexandris K., Kaplanidou K., Ko YJ., and Yoshida M. with an h-index of seven each (Figure 3).

Documents by year

**Figure 2.** Annual scientific production.

Source: Scopus.

Table 1. Top 10 most cited articles in the behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research.

S. No	Author (Year)	Title	Citations
1	Lee et al. (2005)	Korea's destination image formed by the 2002 world cup	410
2	Hightower et al. (2002)	Investigating the role of the physical environment in hedonic service consumption: An exploratory study of sporting events	386
3	Madrigal (2001)	Social identity effects in a belief-attitude-intentions hierarchy: implications for corporate sponsorship	298
4	Madrigal (2001)	The influence of social alliances with sports teams on intentions to purchase corporate sponsors' products	264
5	Murray and Howat (2002)	The relationships among service quality, value, satisfaction, and future intentions of customers at an Australian sports and leisure center	258
6	Bush et al. (2004)	Sports celebrity influence on the behavioral intentions of generation Y	243
7	Tsiotsou (2005)	The role of perceived product quality and overall satisfaction on purchase intentions	238
8	Yoshida and James (2010)	Customer satisfaction with game and service experiences: antecedents and consequences	231
9	Carlson and O'Cass (2010)	Exploring the relationships between e-service quality, satisfaction, attitudes and behaviors in content-driven e-service web sites	215
10	Brown et al. (2016)	Revisiting the host city: an empirical examination of sport involvement, place attachment, event satisfaction and spectator intentions at the London Olympics	185

Source: VOSviewer.

Table 2. Top 10 most cited authors.

S. No	Author	No. of Articles	Citations
1	Yoshida M	9	621
2	Biscaia R	13	594
3	Alexandris K	8	439
4	Kaplanidou K	7	397
5	Ko YJ	8	334
6	Lee S	10	174
7	Chiu W	7	122
8	Cho H	8	115
9	Papadimitriou D	8	98
10	Lee H-W	8	91

Source: VOSviewer.

A source-wise analysis revealed 39 journals. These journals consist of at least one article with at least five citations. The *Journal of Sport Management (JSM)* is the most influential peer-reviewed journal, with 28 articles and 1699 citations. Initial articles in this domain were published in 2004 in *JSM* by Fink et al. (2004), and the latest article is by Katz et al. (2020). *Sport Management Review (SMR)* is the second-most

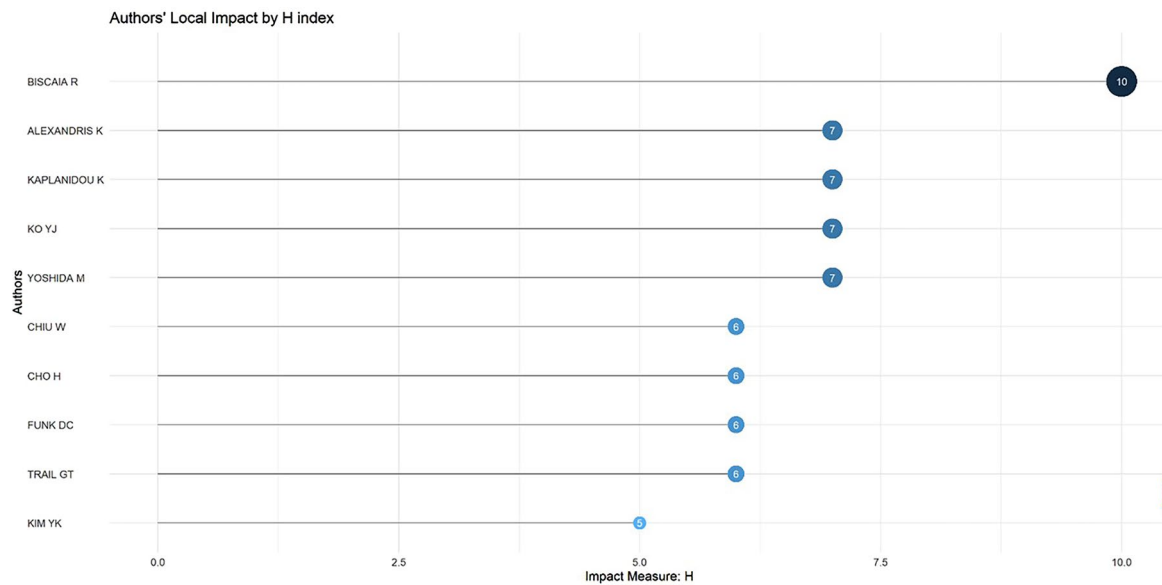


Figure 3. Authors' local impact.

Source: Biblioshiny.

Table 3. Top 10 most cited journals.

S. No	Journal	No. of Articles	Citations
1	<i>Journal of Sport Management</i>	28	1699
2	<i>Sport Management Review</i>	28	1231
3	<i>International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship</i>	48	653
4	<i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i>	23	604
5	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	6	493
6	<i>Journal of Sport and Tourism</i>	11	491
7	<i>Journal of Services Marketing</i>	3	348
8	<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	2	298
9	<i>Tourism Management</i>	2	251
10	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics</i>	6	242

Source: VOSviewer.

influential source with 28 articles and 1231 citations, followed by the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship (IJSMS)*, with 48 articles and 653 citations. Table 3 shows the top ten highly influential sources. 'Sources' local impact' analysis (Figure 4) on biblioshiny also revealed that *JSM* is a highly influential source with an h-index of 20. *SMR* is the second-most influential source with a h-index of 19, followed by *IJSMS* with a h-index of 15.

An organization-wise analysis with a threshold of at least one document and a minimum of 10 citations found 446 organizations. Kyunghee University, Sejong University, and Dongeui University from South Korea are the most cited sources in this domain with 410 citations each. The article by Lee et al. (2005) titled 'Korea's destination image formed by the 2002 World Cup' emerged as a highly influential article, and as a result, the organizations with which these authors affiliated received the highest citations. Boston College, Florida A and M University, and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington from the United States are the second most highly cited sources with 386 citations. The article 'Investigating the role of the physical environment in hedonic service consumption: An exploratory study of sporting events', by Hightower et al. (2002), received 386 citations; similarly, the affiliated organizations received the exact citations. Further, Table 4 shows the top ten organizations conducting behavioral intention research in sports marketing.

Finally, a country-wise analysis recorded 48 countries that received at least ten citations and had a minimum of one article. Table 5 indicates that the United States is the most influential country, receiving 5971 citations. Most of the highly cited articles and authors belong to the United States. Since American authors have authored seminal articles in sports marketing, interest in exploring this domain is higher among authors from the United States. With each article receiving an average of 31 citations, 188 articles

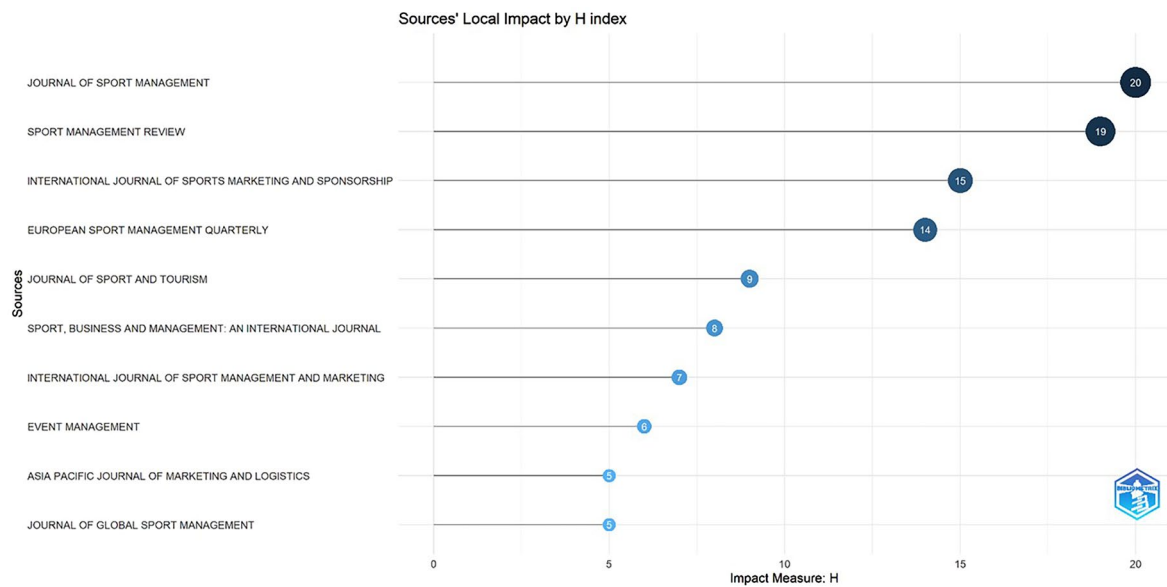


Figure 4. Sources' local impact.
Source: Biblioshiny.

Table 4. Top 10 most cited organizations.

Sl. No	Organization	No. of Articles	Citations
1	Department of Business Administration, Sejong University, Seoul, South Korea	1	410
2	Department of Tourism Management, Donggeui University, Pusan, South Korea	1	410
3	Kyunghee University, College of Hotel and Tourism, Seoul, South Korea	1	410
4	Boston College, Boston, MA, United States	1	386
5	School of Business and Industry, Florida A and M University, Tallahassee, FL 32307, United States	1	386
6	University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC, United States	1	386
7	Biwako Seikei Sport College, Otsu, Shiga, Japan	2	374
8	University of South Australia, Australia	2	363
9	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece	3	311
10	University of Oregon, United States	1	298

Source: VOSviewer.

Table 5. Top 10 most cited countries.

S. No	Country	Documents	Citations
1	United States	188	5971
2	Australia	33	1658
3	South Korea	38	1224
4	Greece	21	917
5	United Kingdom	24	691
6	Japan	18	684
7	Portugal	12	541
8	Germany	19	476
9	Canada	10	381
10	China	18	316

Source: VOSviewer.

were presented from 2000 to 2023 by authors from the United States. Australia is the second most highly cited country with 33 articles and 1658 citations, followed by South Korea with 38 articles and 1224 citations. Table 5 reveals the top 10 highly cited countries in this domain.

Trend topic analysis

A trend topic analysis was conducted to understand this domain's trending keywords for the past ten years. This study considered 'abstract' as a field of analysis with a minimum ten-word frequency. The growing popularity of electronic sports in recent years has attracted the interest of researchers; as a result, 'esports' is one of the trending keywords. The fan's interest in live games and game attendance, especially post-pandemic, has increased significantly, which led to the increased use of the term 'ticket'

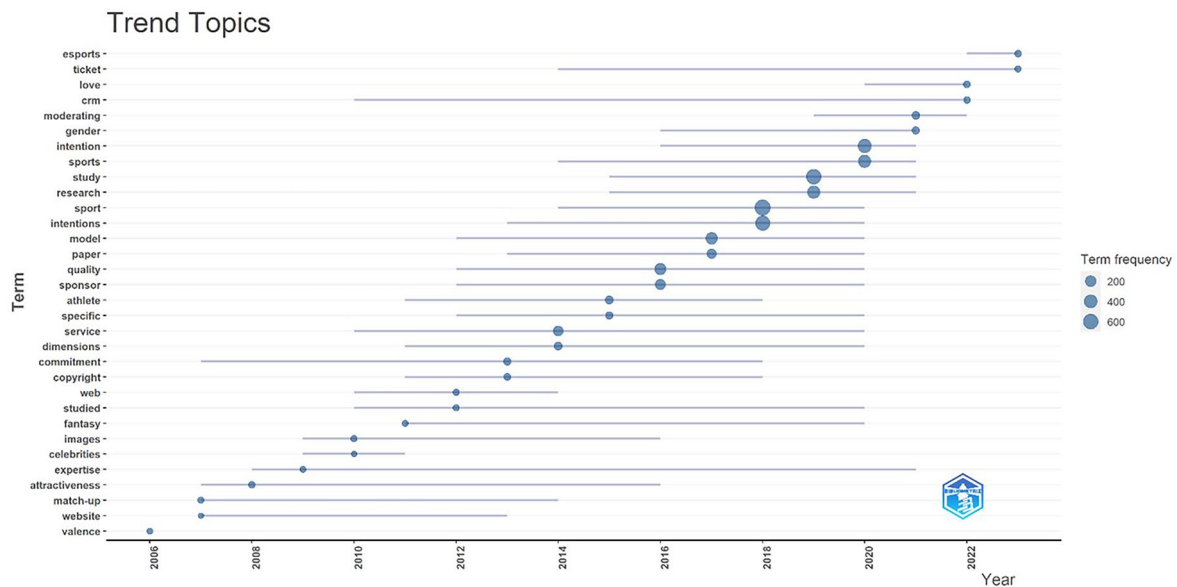


Figure 5. Trend topics.
Source: Biblioshiny.

recently. Sports fan's belongingness to the sport and the team resulted in studies related to 'love'. Figure 5 reveals that the top two keywords differed for all the years, indicating the evolving nature of this domain.

Thematic map

To identify the evolution of themes in this domain, a thematic map analysis (Figure 6) is conducted using biblioshiny. The analysis was performed using 200 author keywords with a minimum of ten cluster frequencies (per thousand documents). The analysis resulted in ten clusters. The size of the bubbles is proportional to the number of keyword occurrences in that particular cluster (Cobo et al., 2011; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2022). From the thematic map, it is understood that the map has two dimensions: density (Y-axis) and centrality (X-axis). A cluster's centrality calculates 'the intensity of the links with other clusters' (Callon et al., 1991). A theme's significance in developing a specific domain is measured using centrality (Cobo et al., 2011). The density of a cluster means 'the strength of links that bind the words making the cluster together' (Callon et al., 1991). It reveals the ability of a theme to maintain and grow by itself over time in a domain (Callon et al., 1991; Aria et al., 2024).

The cluster, named 'purchase intention', has 24 different author keywords with 199 occurrences together, making it a significant cluster. This is followed by the cluster 'satisfaction' with 21 author keywords and 168 occurrences and 'behavioral intention' with ten author keywords and 62 occurrences. The thematic map analysis indicates that 'purchase intention' has the highest linkages with other clusters and the highest centrality. The cluster 'fans' obtained lower centrality and had lower linkages with other clusters. The thematic analysis map indicates that the cluster with a higher density is the 'Olympic games'. The keywords in this cluster are tied closely and linked together. The cluster 'sports' has a lower density, which shows the ability of this theme to maintain and develop over time is less and probably vanishes soon.

To sum up, centrality shows the importance of the theme, whereas density shows the development of the theme. Figure 6 indicates that the cluster 'customer engagement' is specialized and superficial and falls under the niche theme quadrant. The cluster 'trust' is an emerging theme that might develop a new trend in this field. Finally, the cluster 'satisfaction' belongs to the basic theme quadrant, indicating the central and undeveloped themes (Knani et al., 2022).

Three-field plot

The three-field plot using biblioshiny is created for the countries, keywords, and source (Figure 7). The figure is created based on the Sankey diagrams; the box size is proportional to the occurrence

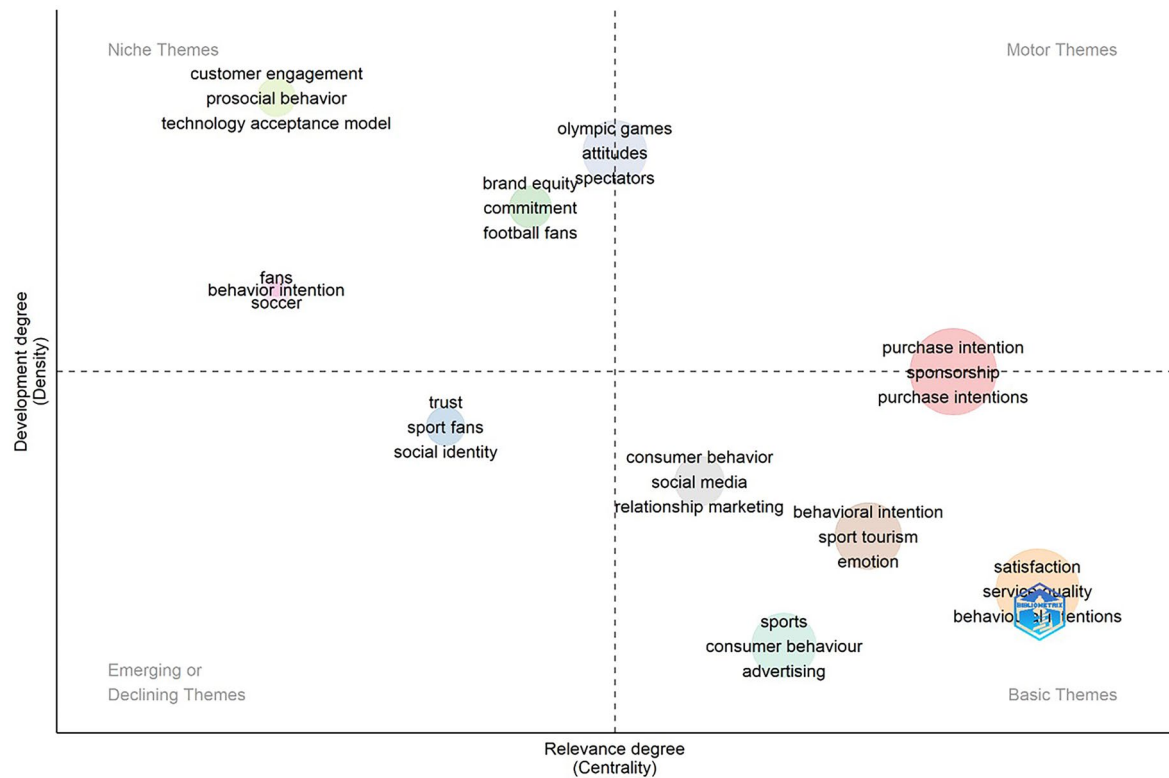


Figure 6. Thematic map.
Source: Biblioshiny.

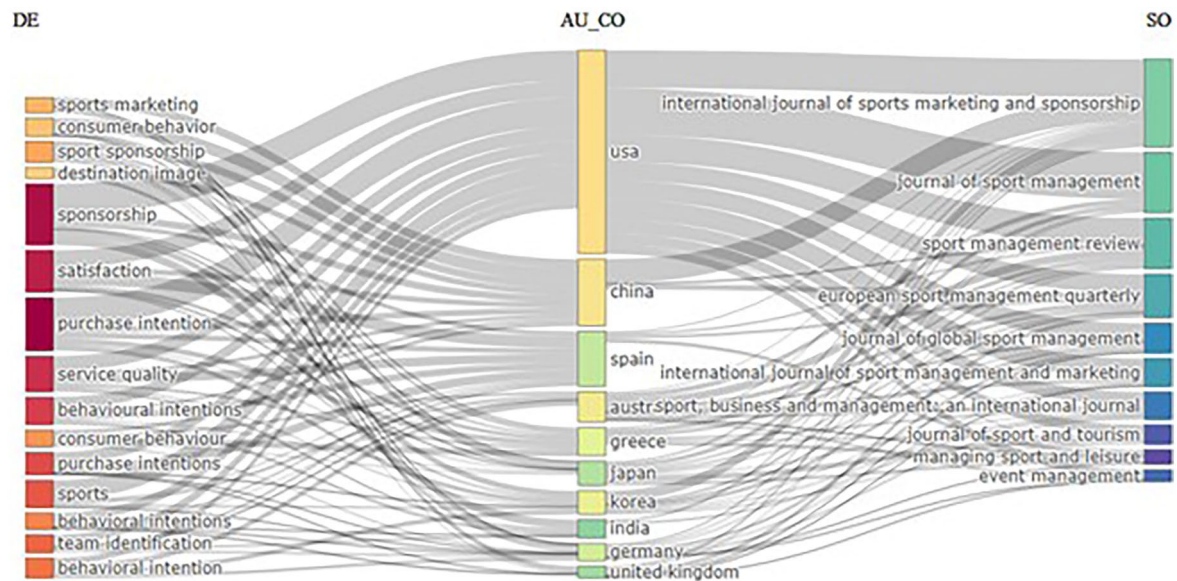


Figure 7. Three field plot.
Source: Biblioshiny.

frequencies (Riehmman et al., 2005). The three-field plot diagram shows that the United States has the highest number of articles in this domain. Scholars from the United States are interested in 'sponsorship', 'purchase intention', and 'sports'. Scholars from China look at 'consumer behavior', 'sports marketing', and 'sport sponsorship'. In Spain, the interests lie in 'satisfaction', 'service quality', and 'behavioral intention'. Further, Australian scholars publish in 'sports' and 'consumer behavior'. The keywords 'sponsorship', 'team identification', and 'purchase intention' are accepted by the *IJSM*. 'Sport' and 'sport sponsorship'

are well accepted by the *JSM*. 'Service quality' and 'behavioral intentions' are popular *European Sport Management Quarterly* keywords.

Co-citation analysis

Co-citation analysis provides the research domain's intellectual structure (Kaur et al., 2022). It is the rate at which another article iterates a pair of extant literature. To be strongly co-cited, a significant number of authors must cite the two earlier studies (Phan Tan, 2022). Hence, it indicates the relationship that the citing authors establish. The pattern changes with the intellectual scheme and interests of the field since the strength of co-citation is a function of the authors who cite those studies (Small, 1973).

Using between-centrality index computation, the domain is categorized as clusters. The co-citation network analysis is presented in Figure 8. Each cluster emerged based on the strong relationship among the articles in it. Further, a thorough content analysis of each cluster was conducted to understand the themes and topics, broadly covered in the clusters. Hence, each cluster is themed after careful content analysis of each article in the respective clusters.

Cluster 1: Sponsorship in sports marketing

The cluster includes 13 articles. The seminal articles that discussed customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993), involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985), and attitude toward the brand (Spears & Singh, 2004) are listed under this cluster. The articles in this cluster discuss the sponsorship aspect over the years. Gwinner (1997) presented a framework to explain a mechanism by which brand image is impacted through sponsorship. The article suggested that brand and event similarities are one of the important aspects that need to be considered to transfer the benefits of brand image. Gwinner and Eaton (1999) also investigated building a brand image through sponsorship. The article discussed the transfer of images in event sponsorships and the event and brand match-up impacting the image transfers. Meenaghan (2001) offered a model that helps in understanding how consumers are affected by commercial sponsorships.

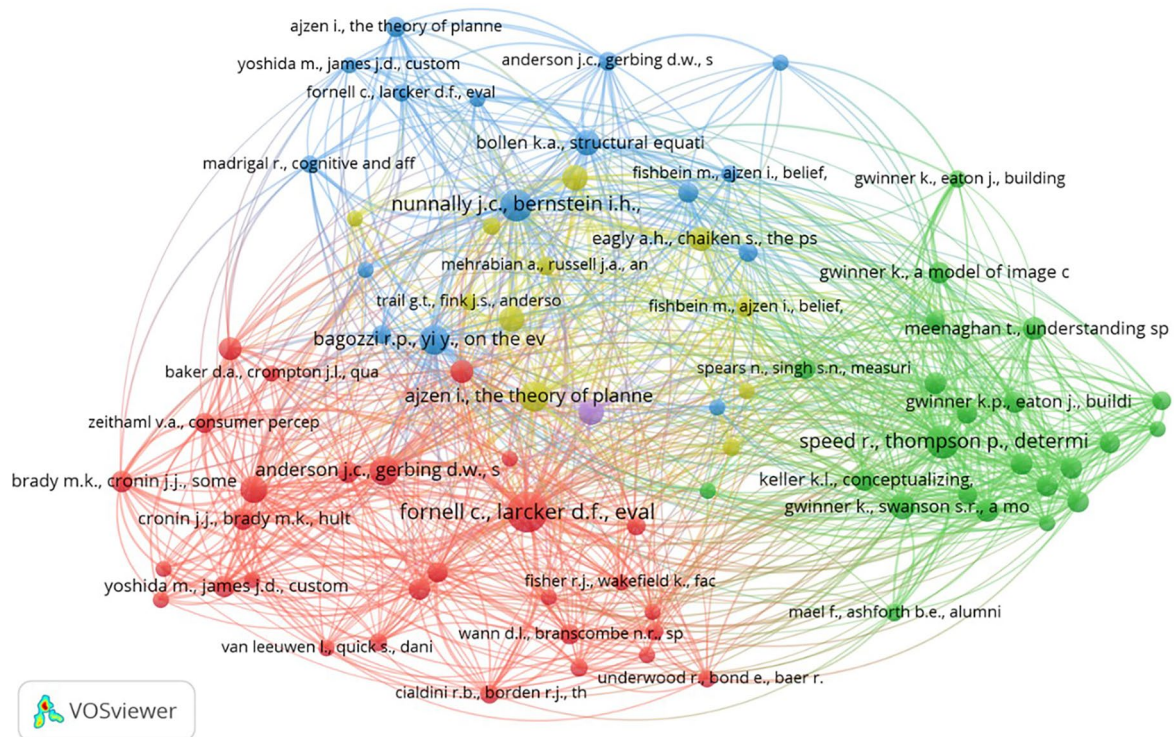


Figure 8. Co-citation network.
Source: VOSviewer.

Despite the growing popularity of sponsorship in the early 2000s, the impact of relationships and effects between consumers and sponsorships were not focused. Therefore, the study by Meenaghan (2001) focused on filling the void by implementing marketing theory and presenting a theoretical framework to understand commercial sponsorship.

Further, Cornwell et al. (2005) studied the impact of marketing through sponsorship. Even though investigations into sponsorship are performed over time, how consumers perceive the sponsorship must be investigated. The study presented a framework that included market factors, individual and group factors, and management factors that influence the processing mechanics to provide the outcome. Mazodier and Merunka (2011) studied achieving loyalty through sponsorships. The articles discuss the event and the sponsor's congruence of the customer with the event as determinants of the customer's brand loyalty. This cluster covers a wide range of concepts in marketing from the sponsorship perspective and provides an overview of the evolving sponsorship domain of sports.

Cluster 2: Sports as service

This cluster includes 26 articles broadly discussing the sports service quality, consumer behavior, and satisfaction of sports consumers. Cialdini et al. (1976) conducted a three-field experimental study to investigate the tendency of an individual to bask in the glory of a successful team. They developed a model that claims the 'bask in reflected glory' reaction is an effort to improve one's reputation. The study identified that an individual claims a connection with a successful source when their societal image is endangered. Wann and Branscombe (1993) reported that when an individual highly identifies with a sports team, they tend to be involved more with that team, which results in increased ego about the team's success, increased performance expectations, increased purchase intention, and a belief in having unique qualities. Madrigal (1995) investigated the sports fan's satisfaction with attending a sports event. With a series of hierarchical framework comparisons, they suggested a model that supported the hierarchy of disconfirmation, affect, and satisfaction. The outcome of the study stated that team identification has a significant influence on affect, and enjoyment has a significant impact on satisfaction.

Cronin et al. (2000) present an empirical evaluation of a service interaction model that also considers the immediate effects of quality, satisfaction, and value on consumers' behavioral intentions. The findings of this study revealed that service quality, value, and satisfaction impact behavioral intention when considered together. Greenwell et al. (2002) provided insights on how sports facilities impact consumer satisfaction and service quality. The result of this study indicated that the physical facility contributed more to consumer satisfaction than the perception of the core product. They suggested that managers need to consider physical facilities along with other indicators of quality to improve consumer satisfaction. Byon et al. (2013) examined the relationship of core and peripheral service quality factors in the consumption of team sports. They proposed a structural and measurement model using a two-step structural equation modeling approach and found that it possesses psychometric properties. The outcomes of this study indicated that behavioral intention could be predicted through the home and opponent teams, game promotion, venue quality, and perceived value. Further, Yoshida et al. (2015) predicted the sports fan's loyalty using a longitudinal study. Their study suggests that team identification, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions are not the significant factors that predict game attendance over time. However, they reveal that the community attachment of the fans is the only factor that can predict game attendance significantly over time. Finally, this cluster also included studies that evaluated sports consumer behavior as a result of service quality, value, satisfaction, and experiences (Funk & James, 2006; Hedlund, 2016; Tsuji et al., 2007).

Cluster 3: Behavioral intention analysis methods in sports marketing

The eight articles in this cluster discussed analyzes used in measuring behavioral intentions in sports marketing studies. The article by Fornell and Larcker (1981) evaluated the unobservable variables and measurement errors with structural equation modeling (SEM). The risk of committing a type 2 error when the sample size is large, and the disadvantage of the chi-square test led to the adoption of SEM with unobservable variables and measurement errors. The study claimed that the method would be helpful in theory testing and model building due to its flexibility and the ability to bring psychometric and

econometric theories together. Cohen (2013) provided three updates to the existing work on statistical power analysis for behavioral sciences. The new edition included a new chapter that discusses the major characteristics, a detailed power analysis treatment, and the sample size determination. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) guided the scholars on SEM. They presented a thorough, two-step modeling strategy that uses several hierarchical models and sequential chi-square difference testing. The fairness of the conventional criteria for cutoffs and the new alternatives for fit indices to analyze a model is measured by Hu and Bentler (1999).

Further, Podsakoff et al. (2003) reviewed method biases in behavioral sciences studies. They investigated the probable sources of these biases, their ability to influence the outcome, and the different statistical methods that can control the biases. The study also suggested an appropriate statistical remedy to manage these biases in different research settings. Additionally, the studies that have measured the model using SEM were included in this cluster (MacKenzie et al., 1986; Trail et al., 2003). Thus, it is seen that SEM is a recurring method in sports marketing studies.

Cluster 4: Theories and concepts

Cluster four consisted of 13 articles that theoretically supported various concepts in the domain. The seminal articles by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) introduced psychological aspects such as belief, intention, attitude, and behavior in theory and research. Further, understanding the individual's attitude predicts their social behavior (Ajzen, 1980). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) investigated the psychology of attitudes, and Ajzen (1991) gave the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which proved that intention is a good proxy to measure the actions of individuals. These studies theoretically support and confirm any behavioral intention-related studies. The cluster includes psychometric theory (Nunnally, 1978), which discusses designing, administering, and interpreting quantitative tests to calculate psychological aspects such as aptitude, intelligence, and personality. The pitfalls of the classical method are improved in the third edition of psychometric theory (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Further, this cluster also included studies using the psychological continuum model (Funk et al., 2007) and SEM model evaluation (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

These clusters may consist of several milestone articles that were not originally from the sports marketing research field. However, these articles have significantly contributed to this domain conceptually, theoretically, and methodologically. Articles such as Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), Ajzen (1991), and Ajzen (1980) that provide insights into the psychological aspects of an individual are important research areas in sports marketing. Despite not being part of it directly, all the articles have supported the growth of sports marketing research.

Discussion

The current study provides an understanding of the behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research. Annual scientific production indicates that there is a continued interest among sports marketing scholars toward behavioral intention. It is also a clear indicator of the steady growth of the sports marketing domain. Though there is increasing interest in this domain, there is limited gratification for the works that are carried out. As a result, most of the highly cited articles were at least ten years old. With growing interest, the citations might also get increased over a period and authors might receive instant gratification for their work.

Firstly, the performance analysis provides descriptive insights into the performance of the article, author, organization, journal, and countries in terms of citations they received. The highly cited articles indicate the diverse areas of sports marketing. These articles cover the broad areas of tourism (Lee et al., 2005), service quality (Byon et al., 2013), leisure (Murray & Howat, 2002), social identification (Madrigal, 2001), and technology adoption (Carlson & O'Cass, 2010) in the sports marketing domain. It clearly indicates the potential of the domain to adapt to different subject areas and continue to grow further. It is also interesting to observe the positive correlation between the most cited articles and the most cited organizations. The article coauthored by Lee et al. (2005) received the highest citations. As a result, the organization where the authors are affiliated emerged as a highly cited organization. Similarly, the result

indicates the same pattern for the article coauthored by Hightower et al. (2002) and their affiliated organization.

Key researchers in the sports marketing area are found to be Masayuki Yoshida, Rui Biscaia, and others. It is interesting to note the geographical diversities among the authors, ranging from Japan, Greece, the United Kingdom, etc. Their keen interest in sports marketing research is instrumental in progressing this domain. Different perspectives from multiple geographies have contributed to the diversity of topics and the way sport is viewed (Lee et al., 2005; Murray & Howat, 2002; Brown et al., 2016). It is expected that the *JSM*, *SMR*, and *IJSMS* will appear as highly cited journals in this domain since these journals are core sport management journals. Interestingly, journals such as *Psychology and Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* are also supporting sports marketing studies. It is also important to note that one of the oldest sports marketing journals, *Sport Marketing Quarterly (SMQ)*, was not featured in the highly cited journal.

Further, countries such as the United States and Australia are highly cited countries. This is the result of the early adoption of the exploration of sports in these countries (Schlossberg, 1992; Burnett et al., 1993). In general, it is also known that these countries are highly sports-oriented and have made their mark on big stages. Therefore, it is evident that conducting research related to sports was appreciated in these countries in the early days (Shannon, 1999).

Secondly, the outcome of scientific mapping has provided interesting insights into the emerging topics in sports marketing research. The trend topic analysis has indicated a few terms that scholars are currently interested in. 'Esport' is one such keyword, which has been trending in recent years. The growing interest in gamification, game studies, and microtransactions are some of the contributors to the popularity of this term. Though new terms are being added to the domain, terms such as 'sport', 'intention', and 'research' are some of the keywords that are being used continuously over a period. It also indicates that the crux of sports marketing lies in consumer behavior, even with the advent of new research avenues.

The thematic map analysis plays an important role in understanding the evolution of the research domain. The analysis indicates diverse areas of behavioral intentions at large, it clearly shows studies related to purchase intentions are highly valued in sports marketing studies, but now they are in a decline. However, studies surrounding 'trust' hold the potential to create a new trend in this domain, and 'customer engagement' is still in its infancy and can be an interesting stream to explore further. The topics investigating customer loyalty, value, and co-creation can be explored as a part of the trust. Similarly, studies related to engagement, disengagement, and negative engagement can be further explored to understand customer engagement in sports marketing.

Additionally, the three-field plot is instrumental in understanding the combination of keywords, the author's country, and the journal where the studies are published. As indicated in highly cited countries, the USA accounts for the largest share of the authors. It can be seen that consumer behavior in sports is the key theme being assessed by most countries and journals. It is interesting to note that India, which did not appear as one of the highly cited countries, is part of the author's country. It indicates that a greater number of studies can be expected from India soon. It can also be assumed that developing countries hold greater potential in this domain, as these countries are witnessing their presence in the global sports arena (Ratten & Ratten, 2011).

The co-citation analysis helped to form multiple clusters in this domain. All the articles belonging to each cluster were carefully read and analyzed. The first cluster, named sponsorship in sports marketing, represents one of the pivotal aspects of this domain. Sponsorship is an integral part of sports marketing, especially when the marketing of non-sports goods through sports events is considered (Cornwell et al., 2005). This cluster covers some of the key concepts such as customer attitude, involvement, brand image, and brand equity, to name a few. These studies have contributed to the sports marketing literature considerably through the development of frameworks, novel concepts, implementing theories, and mainly identifying the relevance of sponsorship in the sports domain. Though these studies provide a theoretical basis for further studies, scholars in the future can challenge them as the sports landscape is rapidly changing, especially in developing economies. Further, the sports scholars can also focus on the sponsorship effectiveness in sports when marketing of sports is concerned than the product.

The second cluster, sports as a service, houses large numbers of articles among all clusters. The primary focus of this cluster is service quality and consumer behavior toward sports events and facilities. Sport can be attributed to a service because of its overlapping characteristics (Tsitskari et al., 2006). A thorough analysis of this cluster indicates that service quality (ranging from the sports team's performance to the venue's quality) and satisfaction are the key concepts covered by these articles. The emergence of this research stream, i.e. sports as a service, will encourage both sports and service management scholars to explore the domain further.

The next cluster, behavioral intention analysis methods in sports marketing, as the theme suggests, broadly characterizes different methods used in this domain. An overview of this domain clearly outlines most of the sports marketing studies have incorporated quantitative approaches in conducting studies. SEM is the preferred data analysis method among scholars. It also shows that different aspects of data analysis contribute to the robustness of this method (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Though there are a few studies that have incorporated different approaches and methods, such as qualitative, experimental, and longitudinal studies, the numbers are limited. Therefore, scholars can conduct studies using these approaches and provide valuable insights, especially context-specific insights.

The last cluster, themed theories and concepts, outlines the prominent theories used in sports marketing studies. Since the focus of this study is on behavioral intentions, it is clear that TPB (Ajzen, 1991) is used in most of the studies. Also, theories and concepts related to psychology, such as psychometric theory (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), psychological continuum model (Funk et al., 2007), and psychology of attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) are also featured in this cluster. Since most of the studies in sports marketing focus on individual perceptions and their views, these concepts related to psychology might have featured in this domain. These theories may not have developed in the sports context itself, but they have provided valuable contributions to the sports marketing domain. Hence, developing a theory that is specific to the sports management subject area could be one of the novel research avenues for scholars in this area.

Further, the present study provides implications for both scholars and practitioners.

Scholarly implication

Sports marketing researchers can find important information on potential collaborations, country-specific outputs, and publication-related input in this domain. Scholars can also cognize emerging and trending topics, growing popular keywords, and the evolution of themes in sports marketing research. These details would help the scholars organize their future studies in the sports marketing domain, and the research clusters discussed in this study can act as a foundation for future research in this domain.

Firstly, social media is one of the most important tools in today's time, especially in sports. Consumers have a reduced attention span in this developing digital era (Taylor, 2019). Instagram is a useful social media platform to target younger audiences and strategically leverage the benefits associated with sports events even without official sponsorship (Lin et al., 2020). Further, social networks play a critical role in the interaction between individuals, sports companies, and brands (Areiza-Padilla et al., 2021). However, audience engagement varies according to the platform, sport, and situation (Steiner et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding the effectiveness of social media across several sports may imply developing strategies.

Secondly, empirical evidence must be examined to develop a stronger bond between individuals and sports brand communication. How individuals respond to different brands and perceive the brand's authenticity can help understand the awareness of sports brands and consumers' willingness to buy the brands. Sponsored brands are always interested in enhancing their brand image. Therefore, it is important to investigate the self-congruence between the participant and the event attachment and their influence on forming an attitude toward the brand and purchase intention (Moharana et al., 2023a). Experimental studies can be implemented to understand the effectiveness of sponsorship communications. Individuals may have different responses to the communications, which may also impact the sponsorship by covering different types of content and styles. Experimental studies can provide insights related to varying levels of identification among members of the brand community and how they evaluate the brands (Moharana et al., 2023b).

Thirdly, Abbasi et al. (2023) investigated the engagement and consumption behavior of gamers aged 18 to 24 years. However, the data were related to emerging countries, which limited the generalizability of the study to developed economies. The level of engagement and consumption behavior may vary vastly in different economies. Therefore, a comparative study of different developed and developing economies may provide an overview of this emerging area. Further, interviews or other qualitative methods can be incorporated instead of close-ended structured questionnaires (Abbasi et al., 2023). Unlike traditional sports, where fans only watch the game, Esports allows fans to engage in gameplay. A study by Macey et al. (2020) provided insights into how watching intention, especially spectating, is related to increased gameplay. The study observed that increased motivation for watching Esports and gaming were correlated. However, the relationship is not tested. Hence, future studies can also explore and explain the relationship between motivation to watch and play (Macey et al., 2020).

Finally, Yu (2020) studied the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the decision-making process for sports consumption. The model of goal-directed behavior (MGB) in sports management and the application of MGB to predict behavioral intention can provide an interesting avenue for sports marketing researchers. Further, research using extended MGB (EMGB) can be helpful for researchers looking at diverse contexts of study in sports.

Managerial implications

Since the sports marketing research field is evolving, the focus on technology is increasing regularly. Managers need to concentrate on the quality of the product to guarantee that the consumer's expectations of its usefulness and needs are met (Kunz & Santomier, 2019). The use of social networking sites has become more prominent in marketing products and services. Social media networks have become more visual-centric due to the evolution of these platforms, and the application of effective strategies is crucial. Social media and social networking sites are becoming more prominent in socially influencing quality perception and willingness to buy when consumers are less involved in the purchase situation (Seng & Keat, 2014; Teo et al., 2019).

Firstly, instead of using sports to promote products and services, promoting the sports events themselves is also useful to gather a large audience and attract brands to promote them at those events. Focusing on sports celebrities is an important aspect that induces purchase intention among sports fans. The popularity of these celebrities will transfer their image to the product and enhance its value. However, choosing the right athletes is essential to transferring the brand's personality.

Secondly, the growth of Esports provides platforms for brands to promote them. Several brands use these avenues to promote their products and enhance their brand image and awareness. Esports are prominent platforms where the players and the sponsors are recognized, and it improves the sponsorship image effectively (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). It will influence the players and the viewers and draw their attention to the game. Its ability to immerse consumers will help them purchase the sponsor's products and services.

The managers can use this study to get an overview of sports consumers' behavioral intentions in sports marketing contexts and gain further insights by looking into trend topics and clusters to understand the domain.

Future research directions

To address RQ3, the current study focuses on indicating the avenues for further studies, that are identified in this review. Based on the results, this study summarizes the outcomes using the TCM framework (Paul et al., 2017) with a particular focus on suggesting directions for further studies. It provides a bird-eye view of the existing literature and a way forward in behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research.

- A. Theory: The study domain, behavioral intentions in sports marketing has received significant interest from scholars in recent years, but it still holds the potential to gain deeper insights. As mentioned earlier, most of the theories used in this domain are adopted from diverse areas of marketing and consumer behavior. A few of the highly used theories in this domain are TPB (Ajzen, 1991), TRA

Table 6. Future research questions.

Clusters	Sample research Questions	Authors
Cluster 1: Sponsorship in sports marketing	1. How does the customer's attitudinal rating towards sponsor evaluation vary with respect to event sponsor fit?	Cornwell et al. (2005)
	2. How can consumers' information processing enhance brand differentiation in sponsorship-linked marketing strategies?	
	3. Exploring sponsor activation methods to enhance brand awareness and perceptions of event sponsorship fit	Gwinner and Bennett (2008)
	4. Does sponsorship effectiveness vary with the mode of sports spectatorship?	Biscaia et al. (2013)
Cluster 2: Sports as service	1. How does the perception of sports events vary across different generations of consumers, and how does it impact the sports industry members?	Tsuji et al. (2007)
	2. How does consumption of service attributes fluctuate from die-hard fans to fair-weather fans, and what are the determinants influencing these variations?	Byon et al. (2013)
	3. How can social media develop an attachment to a sports club over time and influence fans' loyalty to the community and sports?	Yoshida et al. (2015)
	4. How does the relationship between team tradition, rivalry, fans' enthusiasm, and game atmosphere change in different modes of sports spectatorship?	Yoshida and James (2010)
Cluster 3: Behavioral intention analysis methods in Sports marketing	1. Does the changing nature of growing economies impact sports and event tourism development concerning their culture?	Funk et al. (2007)
Cluster 4: Theories and concepts	1. What environmental factors influence spectators' game attendance, and how do they control their motives for being spectators?	Trail et al. (2003)

(Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion theories (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Though these theories are widely accepted and provide an excellent basis for the study, opportunities also exist in exploring inter-disciplinary theoretical bases. Theories such as chaos theory (Levy, 1994), network theory (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011), and social representation theory (Moscovici, 1972) to understand consumer behavior in different contexts and situations. Similarly, while focusing on communications, theories such as narrative paradigm theory (Fisher, 1984) and narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000) theories can provide interesting insights.

- B. Context: The study's outcomes clearly indicate that most of the studies are performed in Western contexts, especially USA and Australia. These are the results of the early adoption of sports-related studies and exploration by these countries. It provides a clear path for developing countries, especially countries like India, Brazil, Mexico, and a few of the African countries where sports are most popular. Exploring diverse areas such as cultural influence, sponsorship effectiveness, the role of sports in promoting health, and sports consumer behavior would provide context-specific insights.
- C. Methodology: The cluster analysis, particularly cluster 3, indicated that most of the articles in this domain adopted quantitative techniques, especially structural equation modeling. It is also an indicator for future researchers to carry out studies using qualitative, conceptual, and mixed-method studies. Also, the need for longitudinal studies is suggested since cross-sectional studies are mostly used in this domain. Additionally, empirical studies can be conducted to validate the existing models in the non-Western contexts that are developed in Western countries.

In addition to a few research avenues indicated in the TCM framework, this study also recommends directions for further studies in the form of research questions that emerged in the cluster analysis. Articles from each cluster were carefully read, including their suggestions for future research. This led to the creation of a list of potential research questions based on the recommendations provided in the articles that had already been published. The questions for future studies are indicated in Table 6.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the evolving nature of behavioral intention in the sports marketing domain and to suggest potential research areas. This study answers three research questions. RQ1 was to identify the most relative influences in this research area. The study identified that the article titled 'Korea's Destination Image Formed by the 2002 World Cup' by Lee et al. (2005) is a highly cited article with 410 citations; Yoshida

M. is the most cited author; the Journal of Sport Management is a highly influential journal; Department of Business Administration, Sejong University, Seoul, South Korea is the most influential organization; and the United States is the most influential country. RQ2 organizes several articles into distinct streams of research. The study shows that articles are categorized into four clusters, namely (a) sponsorship in sports marketing, (b) sports as a service, (c) behavioral intention analysis methods in sports marketing, and (d) theories and concepts related to behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research. Lastly, RQ3 discussed the directions for future studies in the sports marketing field.

The discussions regarding the emerging themes will help sports marketing scholars plan their future studies in this field. However, this study also has limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, this study gathered data using the Scopus database, which might not have included articles from other databases. Future studies can include articles from multiple databases (e.g. Web of Science) to reduce this bias. This study provides an understanding of behavioral intention studies. However, future researchers can carry out similar studies on the evolving nature of sports marketing from an individual and an organizational perspective. Despite the limitations, a holistic view of behavioral intention studies in sports marketing research is provided, offering potential approaches for further exploring the domain.

Author contribution

Chethan Kumar – Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Software, Methodology, Original draft writing.
Tijo George – Validation, Methodology, Reviewing & Editing.

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Data availability statement

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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