

Mapping Key Concepts and Thematic Development in Sport Management: A Scientometric Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose: This study provides a scientometric overview of Sport Management research, with particular emphasis on the thematic structure and keyword dynamics of the field.

Methodology: A keyword-based strategy was employed for data collection using the terms “sport management” and “sports management” within the titles or keywords of publications. A total of 5,743 English-language articles were retrieved from the Scopus database. Following data cleaning and normalization, the dataset was analyzed using advanced scientometric tools. The study examines the overall scientometric profile of the field, including temporal trends, citation patterns, and domain distribution, as well as thematic development within sport management literature. VOSviewer and the Bibliometrix R package were used to perform keyword analysis, co-occurrence mapping, and thematic clustering.

Findings: The results identify eight major thematic domains within sport management research: Organizational Strategy and Technological Integration; Athlete Health and Injury Management; Athlete Performance and Sport Psychology; Governance, Safety, and Health Policy; Sustainable Sport Event Management; Social Equity and Inclusion in Sport; Sport Tourism and Environmental Sustainability; and Participant Motivation and Volunteerism. Several of these domains exhibit notable thematic overlap, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field.

Conclusion: The findings indicate a gradual shift in sport management research from traditional foundational themes toward technology-oriented topics, including the use of big data and machine learning in sport management contexts.

Value: These findings provide insights for future research while expanding the understanding of sport management. By offering an evidence-based overview of thematic developments, the study provides academics, practitioners, and policymakers with a foundation to guide future developments and strategic decision-making.

Keywords: *Sport Management, Sports Management, Scientometric Analysis, Thematic Evolution, Keyword Trends, Concept Mapping*

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Extended Abstract

Introduction: The field of sport management has experienced substantial disciplinary growth in recent years (Funk, 2019), evolving from a predominantly practice-oriented domain into a multifaceted academic discipline. This transformation is also reflected in ongoing theoretical discussions within the field, such as the distinction between *sport management* and the *management of sport* (Lachance et al., 2024). As a consequence of this rapid expansion, it has become increasingly difficult to clearly identify the current structure of this dynamic research area and the factors influencing its development (Hammerschmidt, 2024). Understanding the evolution of such disciplines requires systematic analytical approaches, including bibliometric and scientometric methods.

Scientometric methodologies provide a structured framework for mapping the intellectual landscape of evolving research fields. As defined by Weingart (2015), scientometrics refers to the quantitative analysis and study of patterns in scholarly activity. These analyses can be conducted at multiple levels—individual, institutional, or national—each offering insights into the dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination (Sooryamoorthy, 2020).

Scientometric investigations focusing on sport management literature have emerged relatively recently, with most comprehensive studies appearing within the past decade. Existing research in this area has often examined relatively narrow temporal windows or focused on patterns within specific journals (Ciomaga, 2013). Other studies have primarily emphasized bibliometric indicators such as publication productivity and citation impact (Elahi et al., 2019; Gholampour et al., 2019).

Purpose: The present study addresses existing limitations in the literature by examining the intellectual and thematic structure of sport management research through six interconnected research questions:

1. What are the most frequently occurring keywords within the field of sport management research?
2. What relationships exist among author-indexed keywords within the network of keyword co-occurrence?
3. How have thematic priorities within sport management research evolved over time, and what patterns of thematic emergence or decline can be identified?
4. Which thematic domains demonstrate the highest scholarly impact based on citation metrics, and how does this distribution of impact distinguish core from peripheral knowledge areas within the field?
5. What thematic domains emerge from the co-occurrence network of author-indexed keywords, and what core themes characterize each domain?
6. How are the most prominent themes distributed across the broader landscape of Sport Management research?

Methodology: This study adopts a keyword-based scientometric approach to analyze the knowledge structure and keyword relationships within sport management research. A longitudinal research design was employed, covering the period from 1948 to 2024. The Scopus database was selected as the primary data source due to its extensive coverage of scholarly publications in the field.

Data extraction was conducted on July 1, 2025, using a systematic keyword-based search strategy consistent with established scientometric procedures. The search was performed using the terms “sport management” and “sports management” within the titles or author-indexed keywords of documents. A temporal



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Vol 5

Issue 1

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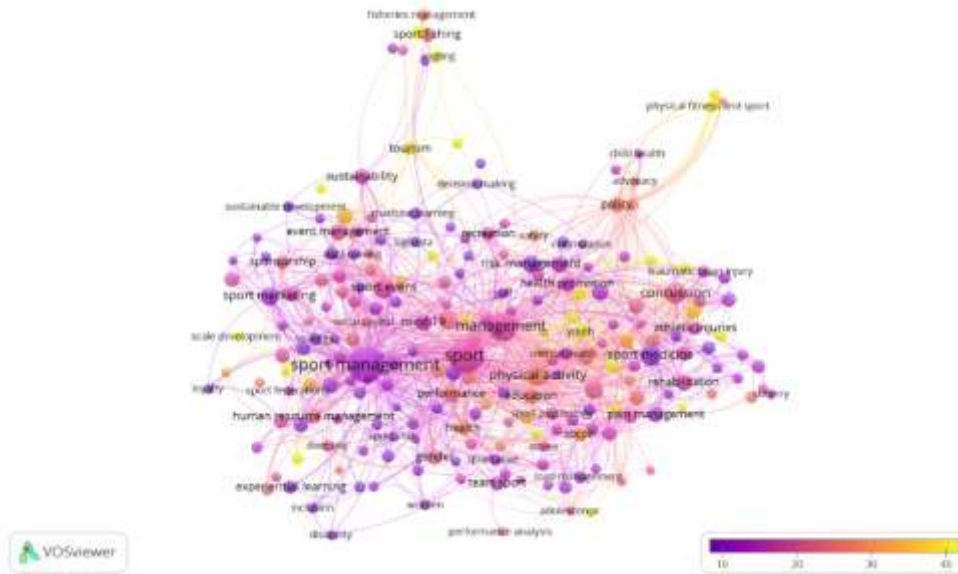


Figure 2. Average Citation of Keywords

Vol 5

Issue 1

Serial Number 15

Conclusion: The temporal analysis illustrates the chronological development of thematic trends within the sport management literature. A closer examination of the temporal map indicates a clear shift from foundational concepts toward technology-oriented and sustainability-focused themes. The transition from earlier emphases on topics such as “recreational fishing,” “physical fitness and sport,” “fisheries management,” and “policy” to more recent themes including “sustainable development,” “sustainability,” and “machine learning” reflects broader sociocultural transformations and advances in technology that have reshaped the field.

Citation analysis further reveals notable variation across thematic domains. Medical- and health-oriented keywords demonstrate higher average citation counts compared to organizational and managerial terms. These differences likely stem from structural characteristics of publication and citation practices, as biomedical and physical science fields typically generate higher citation volumes than social science disciplines. Keywords with above-average citation impact—such as “physical fitness and sport,” “tourism,” and “policy”—appear to function as conceptual bridges, linking specialized research clusters to more foundational and widely recognized themes within the field. In contrast, emerging topics such as “big data” and “machine learning” have not yet accumulated high citation counts, largely due to citation time-lag effects. Nevertheless, given their growing prominence and centrality within the keyword network, these themes are likely to become highly cited and influential areas of inquiry in the near future.

Value: These findings provide valuable insights for future research while enhancing the overall understanding of the sport management field. By offering an evidence-based overview of thematic developments and research trends, the study equips academics, practitioners, and policymakers with a clearer foundation to inform future research directions, policy formulation, and strategic decision-making within the discipline.

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Vol 5

Issue 1

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